



## Response to the Foundation Program Standards consultation

The Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) on its discussion paper to support redeveloping and enhancing the Foundation Program Standards for introduction from 1 October 2021.

TEQSA is an independent statutory authority established by the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (TEQSA Act). TEQSA is Australia's independent national quality assurance and regulatory agency for higher education. All providers that offer higher education qualifications in or from Australia must be registered by TEQSA. Providers that have not been granted self-accrediting authority must also have their courses of study accredited by TEQSA. TEQSA's guiding legislation is the TEQSA Act.

TEQSA also has responsibility, as an ESOS agency under the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (ESOS Act), for regulating all providers delivering higher education to overseas students studying in Australia, providers delivering English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) where they have an entry arrangement with a registered higher education provider, and providers delivering Foundation programs. Providers in all categories that wish to offer these courses to overseas students must be registered on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS).

Given TEQSA's responsibility for regulating the delivery of Foundation programs, we would welcome the opportunity for further consultation prior to finalisation of the revised instrument.

### Foundation Program consultation—Discussion questions

#### **What are your overall comments on the paper, including the possible amendments?**

TEQSA welcomes the redevelopment and enhancement of the Foundation Program Standards and appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to the published consultation paper. TEQSA supports the overall structure of the current Standards. In addition to the responses provided against the discussion questions below, TEQSA recommends the following:

1. Extending the Foundation Program accreditation to seven years, for assessment alongside institutional CRICOS re-registration, would enhance the efficiency of these processes for both providers and TEQSA. Currently, providers that deliver Foundation Program courses are required to renew their CRICOS registration for a Foundation Program every five years (Standard 1.4), in addition to the provider CRICOS registration which is typically for a seven year period.
2. The exception period specified in the Explanatory Guide for Standard 2.5 should be aligned with a provider's CRICOS registration period (consistent with point one above).
3. Establish formal measures to ensure that academic English program assessment outcomes are comparable to other criteria used for tertiary education admission, or



for admission to other similar courses of study. Such measure could replicate the recent amendments to the ELICOS National Standards, Standard P4.

4. To ensure the safety and welfare of younger students, TEQSA supports the suggestion presented in the consultation paper to align the Foundation Program Standards Child Safety Framework with the revised 2018 ELICOS Standards and the 2019 Commonwealth Child Safe Framework.
5. The addition of a safety and welfare standard presents an opportunity for students to receive training in topics such as acceptable behaviour, consent, and cultural safety. This will assist students to participate in Australian social and educational spaces safely and confidently.
6. TEQSA supports the proposal that Foundation Programs should require a minimum of 20 hours of tuition per week.

**Is the minimum age requirement of 17 years of age to commence a Foundation Program, or 16 years of age with prior approval by TEQSA, appropriate?**

Yes

**Is there a need for 'extended' Foundation Programs? If so, how should the Standards apply to them?**

No comment

**Should the Foundation Program Standards also regulate courses under 26 weeks?**

TEQSA is open to further discussion regarding the suggestion in the consultation paper that TEQSA consider applications for shorter, preparatory programs and register these as non-award tertiary preparation courses. These courses are currently regulated by the ESOS Act and the National Code, but TEQSA agrees that there could be value in the additional quality requirements contained within the Foundation Program Standards and ELICOS Standards being extended to further enhance the quality of these shorter courses.

**Should online learning be a part of Foundation Programs?**

To support student preparedness, TEQSA supports the inclusion of a limited use of blended online delivery which integrates face to face activities with online participation. As many providers are increasingly using blended online learning it is important that students are equipped with study skills for this educational mode.

There should be a limit to the use of online content to avoid overuse of online delivery and ensure students have an immersive English language experience that aligns with Standards 5.1 and 5.2. Any limit on the ratio for international students regarding face to face and online delivery should be informed by relevant research.

**Is the distinction between streamlined and general programs required?**

The distinction is helpful as it allows students to choose the most effective course type for their English language requirements.