

# AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of  
Tasmanian Qualifications Authority

June 2007

AUQA Audit Report Number 54

ISBN 978 1 877090 73 8

© Australian Universities Quality Agency 2007

Level 10, 123 Lonsdale Street  
Melbourne, VIC 3000  
Ph 03 9664 1000  
Fax 03 9639 7377

[admin@auqa.edu.au](mailto:admin@auqa.edu.au)

<http://www.auqa.edu.au>

*The Australian Universities Quality Agency receives funding from the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments of Australia.*

*The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government.*

## CONTENTS

<b>OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background .....	1
The Audit Process .....	1
<b>CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Introduction to Findings.....	3
Commendations.....	4
Affirmations .....	4
Recommendations .....	5
<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 Purpose of the Portfolio .....	6
<b>2 APPROVAL ROLES AND FUNCTIONS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Overview of Higher Education Provision in Tasmania .....	8
2.2 History of Approvals Processes and Establishment of the TQA .....	9
2.3 Legislative Framework .....	10
2.4 Elements and Functional Relationships for Implementation of National Protocols in Tasmania - Roles and Various Bodies .....	10
<b>3 QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM.....</b>	<b>14</b>
3.1 Approach.....	14
3.2 Deployment.....	15
3.3 Results.....	15
3.4 Improvement .....	16
<b>4 IMPLEMENTATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION APPROVAL PROCESSES.....</b>	<b>18</b>
4.1 National Protocol 1 .....	18
4.2 National Protocol 2 .....	18
4.3 National Protocol 3 .....	19
4.4 National Protocol 4 .....	21
4.5 National Protocol 5 .....	21
4.6 Preparedness for Enactment of the New National Protocols .....	22
<b>5 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: TASMANIAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: AUQA’S MISSION, OBJECTIVES, VALUES AND VISION .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>APPENDIX E: NATIONAL PROTOCOLS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION APPROVAL     PROCESSES.....</b>	<b>30</b>



## OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

### *Background*

In June 2006, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an Audit Panel to undertake a quality audit of the higher education quality and regulatory functions in Tasmania, which are under the responsibility of the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority.

This Report of the audit provides an overview, and then details the Audit Panel's findings, commendations affirmations and recommendations. A brief introduction to the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority (hereinafter 'TQA' or 'the Authority') is given, and this is expanded in Appendix A; the mission, objectives, vision and values of AUQA are shown in Appendix B; membership of the Audit Panel is provided in Appendix C and Appendix D defines abbreviations and technical terms used in this Report.

### *The Audit Process*

AUQA bases its audits on each organisation's own objectives, together with the five MCEETYA *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* ('National Protocols' or 'Protocols') and legislation within the jurisdiction designed to give effect to the National Protocols. The major aim of the audit is to consider and review the procedures an organisation has in place to monitor and achieve its legislative and related objectives and to implement the National Protocols. Appendix E provides brief information about the National Protocols. Further details are available at <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/>. Full details of the AUQA audit process are contained in the AUQA Audit Manual available at <http://www.auqa.edu.au/qualityaudit/auditmanuals/index.shtml>.

In addition, as the AUQA audit of TQA took place in the same year as the start of the new National Protocols approved by MCEETYA in July 2006, the audit scope included consideration of the preparedness of the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority for this important development. This was not considered to be an additional impost on TQA as the Authority had in fact addressed this as a key issue in its self-review.

Early in December 2006 the TQA presented its submission ('Performance Portfolio' or 'Portfolio') to AUQA, along with 14 Appendices and 22 Supporting Materials. The Audit Panel met on 22 January 2007 to consider these documents, after which additional information and documents were sought from the Authority.

The Performance Portfolio itself was 31 pages and just over the recommended word length for a state accreditation agency audit. It consisted of the following sections: Glossary of Terms; Introduction; Approval Role and Functions; Quality Management System; Implementation of the National Protocols; and a Conclusion.

The Audit Panel Chair and the AUQA Audit Director undertook a Preparatory Visit to TQA on 9 March 2007 to clarify the Panel's request for further information and to review arrangements for the Audit Visit. In order to reduce the burden of documentation required to be copied and distributed, the Audit Panel also reviewed a number of TQA files at this time, and requested that copies only be made of selected sample documents, with the original files to be available for review on-site during the Audit Visit, if required. In all a total of 79 Supporting Materials were provided.

The Audit Panel acknowledges the open and constructive approach taken to the audit by the Authority and, in particular, the cooperation of the Coordinator Quality. The Panel appreciated the thoroughly professional and helpful manner in which the TQA team coordinated the provision of information and arrangements for the Audit Visit. However, there were a few problems in organising some interview

sessions because of a misunderstanding about the division of responsibilities in preparing for the Audit Visit, and the unavailability of some individuals at particular times, but through the cooperation of all involved, appropriate alternative interview arrangements were made. In general, the TQA documentation examined by the Panel was of a high standard, especially documents pertaining to the meetings of the TQA Board.

The Audit Panel also undertook three confidential surveys. The first was of higher education providers subject to TQA approval processes. A total of eight responses were received from the eight providers surveyed, a response rate of 100 per cent. The second survey was of course assessment panel members from a sample of panels convened since 2004. A total of three responses were received from an invitation list of seven, a response rate of 43 per cent. A third survey was sent to self-accrediting institutions and non self-accrediting institutions (NSAIs) subject to registration in Tasmania on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS). A total of three responses were received from an invitation list of three, a response rate of 100 per cent. In addition a survey was undertaken of existing and newly-appointed members of the Higher Education Expert Group (HEEG). The results of all these surveys were used as additional contributing information to the Audit Panel's overall deliberations, along with the submitted materials, document trails for several accredited courses, and audit interviews.

The Audit Visit took place in the TQA offices in Hobart on 29 and 30 March 2007. In all, the Audit Panel spoke with 36 people during the Audit Visit, including a Senior Advisor to the Tasmanian Minister for Education (in lieu of the Minister who was unavailable at the scheduled time due to unanticipated business requiring his direct attention), and several senior officers from the Tasmanian Department of Education. The Panel also interviewed members of the TQA Board and HEEG, course assessment panel members and chairs, and Tasmanian higher education providers. In addition, because NSAIs are mostly based in other jurisdictions outside Tasmania, the Audit Panel held sessions with representatives of these institutions, and the accreditation agencies in these 'primary' jurisdictions. Sessions were also set aside for any persons involved in or affected by the TQA's higher education approval processes to meet the Audit Panel. There were no requests for such a meeting.

This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit, which ended on 30 March 2007, and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently. It records the conclusions reached by the Audit Panel based on the documentation provided by TQA, as well as the surveys and other information available to the Panel. While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of the TQA's higher education approvals activities encompassed by the audit, the Report does not identify every aspect of quality assurance and its effectiveness or shortcomings.

The Report contains a summary of findings together with lists of commendations, affirmations and recommendations. A commendation refers to the achievement of a stated goal, or to some plan or activity that has led to, or appears likely to lead to, the achievement of a stated goal, and which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. A recommendation refers to an area in need of attention, whether in respect of approach, deployment or results, which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. Where there is evidence that similar matters have already been identified by the auditee, they are termed 'affirmations'. It is acknowledged that recommendations in AUQA audit reports may have resource implications, and that this can pose difficulties for organisations. Accordingly, AUQA does not prioritise these recommendations, and recognises that it is the responsibility of the TQA to respond in a manner consistent with its local context.

This Audit Report largely follows the structure of the TQA Performance Portfolio but, as indicated above, contains an additional section relating to the Authority's preparedness for enactment of the new National Protocols by December 2007.

## CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings and lists the commendations, affirmations and recommendations. Other favourable comments and suggestions are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

### *Introduction to Findings*

The audit took place at a time when the TQA was preparing for the enactment of the new *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* from 31 December 2007. This coincided with the review by the Tasmanian Government of two key pieces of legislation for post-compulsory education and training: *Tasmanian Qualifications Authority Act 2003* (TQA Act); and the *Education Providers Registration (Overseas Students) Act 1991*.

In this context, the Audit Panel saw the audit as an opportunity not only to test TQA's compliance with the existing National Protocols, but also to arrive at findings that would assist the Authority in its preparation for enactment of the new ones.

An important consideration at a macro level was recognition of the organisational nature of the Authority itself in both the Tasmanian and national contexts, in which TQA is somewhat unusual by dint of being an independent statutory authority with responsibilities for quality assurance and regulation across the three sectors of post-compulsory education and training: senior secondary schooling; vocational education and training; and higher education.

To service this breadth of provision, the Authority had adopted a particular form of governance, and what it termed an 'integrated service model' whereby resources are spread across all three sectors. The Audit Panel was mindful of the possibility of the comparatively very small non self-accrediting higher education sector in Tasmania being marginalised by these organisational arrangements.

After considering a wide-range of evidence, the Panel's initial misgivings gave way to giving positive endorsement to the Authority for its overall approach to quality assurance, as being appropriate in the particular Tasmanian context. Distinctive aspects of this overall approach are: successful adoption of risk management in key decision-making processes; and a client-focused orientation to service provision.

With respect to the Authority's quality management system (QMS), the Audit Panel noted that TQA was again in transition, moving from an initial focus in its first years of operation on the development of quality assurance policies and procedure, to now 'closing the quality loop' through an acknowledgement of the need to pay increased attention to the implementation of actions resulting from continuous improvement processes. To assist the Authority with this transition, the Audit Panel made a number of affirmations and recommendations designed to improve specific aspects of the operation of the QMS, and in particular to ensure that a balance between change and stability of the key approval processes is maintained during this period of transition.

These improvement oriented audit findings include: the need to update various information management systems; staff handbooks and briefing kits for members of the Higher Education Expert Group; the need to ensure that accreditation and registration processes are sufficiently flexible to fully implement the national agreement on mutual recognition including making appropriate provision for courses to be delivered in Tasmania fully by distance education; and generally, for the Authority to use the review of the TQA Act and its preparations for the enactment of the new National Protocols as opportunities to take stock of current practices, and introduce any necessary process improvements.

With respect to TQA's compliance with the existing National Protocols, the Audit Panel was satisfied overall that these Protocols are being appropriately implemented in Tasmania. The Panel did note

however, several issues in relation to the existing Protocols and that some aspects had not actually been tested within the Authority's jurisdiction. In these respects, the Panel urges TQA to address any remaining areas of uncertainty in the current review of its Act, the legislation covering requirements for CRICOS registration, and in the Authority's preparations for the enactment of the new National Protocols from 31 December 2007.

The Audit Panel concludes the Report by commending the TQA for establishing and sustaining positive, collaborative relationships with its clients and key stakeholders, including: NSAI higher education providers in Tasmania; with the University of Tasmania; and with institutions and agencies in other state jurisdictions.

A summary of commendations, affirmations and recommendations follows. These are not prioritised by the Audit Panel but are listed in the order in which they appear in the Report.

### ***Commendations***

1. AUQA commends the CEO and Board of TQA for gaining broad acceptance in the community of the Authority's regulatory functions for higher education; and the support of the Tasmanian Government education and training authorities, for TQA's role as a change agent, in contributing to the government's goal of increasing participation in lifelong education and training .....13
2. AUQA commends TQA for implementing an effective multi-sectoral continuous improvement approach to quality assurance, in the context of the public sector management practices prevailing in Tasmania, which is appropriate for the Authority's higher education responsibilities.....14
3. AUQA commends TQA for successfully adopting an embedded risk-management approach to quality assurance and regulation in higher education in Tasmania.....15
4. AUQA commends TQA for maintaining a strong client-focused approach to the provision of services for higher education accreditation and registration, and in particular for the responsiveness and availability of TQA staff, and the transparency, fairness and timeliness of its processes.....15
5. AUQA commends TQA for the adoption of a model of governance that is fit for purpose and works well in practice for higher education, as is in evidence through the efficient decision-making processes and the operation of the TQA Board.....24
6. AUQA commends TQA for establishing and sustaining positive, collaborative relationships with its clients and key stakeholders, including: non self-accrediting higher education providers in Tasmania; with the University of Tasmania; and with institutions and agencies in other state jurisdictions. ....24

### ***Affirmations***

1. AUQA affirms TQA's recognition of the need to focus the TQA quality management system on ensuring that action is taken where improvements and/or remedial action is required, and that processes for sharing the learning across the organisation arising from continuous improvement are strengthened and linked to professional development plans.....16

2. AUQA affirms the decision by TQA to implement the TRIM electronic record-keeping and document management system with the facility for document scanning and searching, and recommends that the new system have the technical capability for electronic document signature. ....17
3. AUQA affirms TQA’s decision to widen the membership of the Higher Education Expert Group to include interstate academics; and that recruiting experts from other constituencies will provide the opportunity to benchmark with other state and territory authorities.....19
4. AUQA affirms the well advanced plans by TQA to revise the Authority’s Act and related Regulations and guidelines to incorporate the requirements of the new higher education National Protocols, and to streamline Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students/Education Services for Overseas Students Act matters. ....22

### ***Recommendations***

1. AUQA recommends that TQA develop specific customer service standards for higher education that align wherever appropriate with the Authority’s meta-level generic customer service standards. ....15
2. AUQA recommends that TQA revise the Authority’s Staff Handbook to incorporate guidelines for staff concerning the nature of the TQA quality management system and their responsibilities for continuous improvement. ....17
3. AUQA recommends that TQA widen the pool of academic specialist experts who participate in assessment panels; which will also provide further opportunities for benchmarking with other states and territories. ....19
4. AUQA recommends that in preparing for the implementation of the new higher education National Protocols, TQA review its accreditation/registration guidelines, amend the TQA Act, and Regulations as required, and in so doing specifically consider the situation of providers wishing to deliver accredited higher education courses in Tasmania by distance education only. ....21
5. AUQA recommends that in revising the Higher Education Expert Group (HEEG) induction kit to accommodate the new higher education National Protocols, TQA ensure that clear advice is provided to HEEG members and experts appointed to assessment panels regarding: the decision-making processes to determine the appropriate pathway in line with risk management principles; their responsibilities for maintaining confidentiality and declaring conflicts of interest; and their role as ‘experts’ rather than as ‘representatives’ .....23
6. In light of the need to implement changes to accommodate the new higher education National Protocols, AUQA recommends that TQA ensure that there is an appropriate balance between attention paid to both efficiency and effectiveness of the strategic objectives and performance measures.....23
7. AUQA recommends that in refining its continuous improvement and risk management strategies in the context of the new higher education National Protocols, TQA pay particular attention to ensuring stability and clarity for higher education approval processes for registration and accreditation. ....23

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this section of the Report is to provide an outline of the regulatory and operational context within which TQA's management of its higher education approvals functions has been considered.

The TQA differs from the majority of other state and territory accreditation agencies in Australia in that it was established in 2003 as an independent statutory authority that is separate from the state education and training bureaucracy, with certification, quality assurance, and regulatory responsibilities across all three sectors of post-compulsory education and training in Tasmania: senior secondary; vocational education and training; and, higher education. Indeed the most similar organisational arrangement to this elsewhere in Australia will be in Victoria, with the establishment of the new Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, operational from July 2007.

Reviewing the Tasmanian multi-sector Authority's responsibilities for quality assurance in fact became a distinctive feature of this particular audit. In its Performance Portfolio, TQA claimed that this aspect of its organisation held certain advantages over having multiple, sector-specific quality assurance arrangements:

“A key strength is the integrated service provided across the three sectors of senior secondary, vocational education and training and higher education, achieving harmonisation of processes where appropriate and maintaining uniqueness where necessary. One particular advantage of the integrated nature of the agency is that relatively small functions, such as higher education registration and accreditation, have access to the full resources of the office.” (PF p31)

These claims were tested by the Audit Panel to ensure that the specific approval processes and organisational arrangements for higher education in Tasmania were sufficiently robust.

### 1.1 *Purpose of the Portfolio*

The Authority described the preparation of its Portfolio as “a significant action in the development, consolidation and improvement of the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority's recognition of higher education courses and providers.” (PF p4)

The Portfolio itself was based on a series of self-review activities undertaken during 2006, including:

- a self-assessment of how the organisation meets the requirements of the relevant Act
- a self-assessment of how the organisation is implementing the National Protocols
- an analysis of the organisation's higher education functions by an outside expert ‘critical friend’
- an internal audit of registration/accreditation processes
- an analysis and review of findings from a client satisfaction survey
- an analysis and review of practices as part of the expansion of the expertise within the organisation.

It was stated in the Portfolio that “these self-review activities have been undertaken as part of the Authority's on-going quality management system as well as contributing to preparation of this

portfolio” and it was suggested that they had been “timely in consolidating processes and expanding the understanding of higher education functions in the office.” (PF p4)

## 2 APPROVAL ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

The TQA vision statement *inter alia* states:

*The TQA is seen as a contributor to significant educational improvement, supporting social and economic development with education and training in Tasmania recognised as world-class...The work of the TQA directly contributes to increasing Tasmanians' participation and achievement in life-long education and training. (TQA Strategic Plan p1)*

The TQA mission statement has this to say about the Authority's roles and functions:

*The TQA mission is to take the Tasmanian qualification and recognition system to new levels of excellence through innovation, research, monitoring, development, inclusivity and enhancement. (TQA Strategic Plan p1)*

From these strategic statements it should be noted that TQA has responsibilities for quality assurance and regulation functions across the senior secondary and vocational education and training sectors, as well as higher education.

The following goals contain specific references to the Authority's involvement, and stated achievements, in higher education, including performance indicators:

*Goal 1.1 – Ensure effective communication with all stakeholders: Reference groups in each sector, records of meeting go to Authority. (TQA Strategic Plan p2)*

*Goal 1.2 – Achieve productive partnerships with stakeholders: Agreement with UTas August 2005. (TQA Strategic Plan p2)*

*Goal 2.1 – Achieve required performance indicators for key reporting outputs: The community has easy access to an accurate list of organisations and courses providing quality higher education. (TQA Strategic Plan p3)*

*Goal 3.3 – Implement higher education course accreditation model: Higher Education course accreditation:*

- *meets requirements of national protocols and standards*
- *matches streamlining of processes with risk assessment. (TQA Strategic Plan p4)*

### 2.1 Overview of Higher Education Provision in Tasmania

The provision of higher education in Tasmania is dominated by the University of Tasmania, which effectively functions as a single state-wide university. As the university is a self-accrediting institution it is not included within the scope of this audit, but was itself subject to audit by AUQA in 2005, and one of the positive findings of that audit was to commend the university for the “strong partnership” it had established with the state government, which *inter alia* involved the development of an agreement with the TQA.

The other substantial provider of specialist higher education in Tasmania is the Australian Maritime College, which was audited by AUQA in 2002. At the time of the TQA audit, the college was deeply involved in merger discussions with the University of Tasmania and is to become an institute within the university. The Australian Maritime College, which was established under federal legislation, applied for university status in its own right in 2002, and there is further comment on this in the section on National Protocol 1.

There are actually only two small non self-accrediting institutions (NSAIs) in Tasmania that are subject to higher education approvals processes for which the TQA is responsible: Tabor College Tasmania (based in Hobart, but with links to Tabor College in Adelaide); and the Worldview Centre for Intercultural Studies (based in St Leonards). Both institutions are colleges of theology, each with fewer than 100 students. TQA's responsibility for higher education in Tasmania as the primary jurisdiction is therefore quite small.

However, there are also six other NSAIs operating out of mainland states, for which Tasmania is a secondary jurisdiction (ie these institutions are headquartered elsewhere, but deliver programs into Tasmania). These institutions are (their primary jurisdiction in brackets): The Australian College of Theology (NSW); The College of Law (NSW); The College of Nursing (NSW); Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia (NSW); Sydney College of Divinity (NSW); and The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (Victoria). All these institutions provide education to a very small number of Tasmanian students via distance delivery mode.

The Audit Panel discovered during the course of the audit that concurrent registration/mutual recognition and accreditation, and provision into Tasmania by pure distance education mode had been the subject of a recent delegation of responsibility from the Authority to its Chief Executive Officer, and this particular issue is dealt with in sections 3.3 and 4.3.

## **2.2 *History of Approvals Processes and Establishment of the TQA***

The *Universities Registration Act 1995* was proclaimed in 1996 with the purpose of registering institutions as universities; it could also register non-university institutions to allow them to confer higher education awards. The Universities Registration Council, which was established under the Act, met on average three times a year to consider applications for registration.

In 2003 the role of the Universities Registration Council was incorporated into the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority. The Portfolio describes the transition in these terms: "All files were transferred and officers of the Authority met frequently with the former executive officer of the Universities Registration Council. Files were scrutinised as part of this transfer of information and entered into a higher education database which assisted the smooth transition from one organisation to the other." (PF p6)

However, the Panel noted some further analysis of this transition process in the Portfolio section on National Protocol 3:

"It has taken the office some time to fully apprise itself of the decisions of the Universities Registration Council. There has been some residual lack of clarity around approval decisions as the previous body did not make a clear distinction between course approval (accreditation) and provider approval (registration). In a few instances the registration date appears to be the date of accreditation of the various courses the provider is approved to deliver. This matter is being addressed by requiring a distinct registration assessment process for the organisation, independent of course accreditation. Having said this, the records from the Universities Registration Council indicate an extremely rigorous assessment process having been undertaken in relation to all applications." (PF p28)

The effectiveness of this requirement and the relationship of the Authority's current course accreditation process to the provider registration process are taken up in section 4.3 on National Protocol 3.

### 2.3 *Legislative Framework*

The establishment of the *Tasmanian Qualifications Authority Act 2003* was initiated by the Tasmanian Government in 2001. The principal objective was to bring together three existing bodies responsible for overseeing qualifications in the state – the Tasmanian Secondary Assessment Board, the Tasmanian Accreditation and Recognition Committee and the Universities Registration Council – under the direction of a single authority.

With respect to higher education, the *Tasmanian Qualifications Authority Act 2003* vests the power to make registration and accreditation (of NSAI) decisions with the TQA; specifically to:

- accredit courses for higher education
- register providers of higher education
- protect the title of ‘university’
- declare an institution to be an ‘overseas university’
- carry out other functions imposed on the Authority by the Minister.

The Authority’s performance with respect to these responsibilities is reviewed in sections 4 and 5.

Unlike the *Universities Registration Act 1995*, the TQA Act does not include a specific provision for the establishment of a new university in Tasmania and comment on this is made in section 4.1 on National Protocol 1.

The provision of higher education courses to overseas students in Tasmania is authorised under the *Education Providers Registration (Overseas Students) Act 1991*. This Act provides for the Minister for Education to register an education provider that proposes to provide an education service (course) for overseas students. The Act provides for authorised officers to carry out investigations. The Education Providers Registration (Overseas Student) Regulations 1992 establishes fees for registration of providers and of services. It was noted by the Audit Panel that this Tasmanian Act and associated Regulations overlap and duplicate responsibilities for CRICOS registration under the Commonwealth’s *Education Services Overseas Students Act 2000* and further comment in relation to this particular aspect is made at section 4.5.

At the time of the Audit Visit both the *Tasmanian Qualifications Authority Act 2003* and the *Education Providers Registration (Overseas Students) Act 1991* were under review by the Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training (an office within the Tasmanian Department of Education). These reviews were due for completion by the middle of 2007. Given the impending implementation of the new National Protocols, AUQA affirms this development (see finding at section 4.6).

The University of Tasmania and the Australian Maritime College were each established under their own legislation (state and Commonwealth respectively).

### 2.4 *Elements and Functional Relationships for Implementation of National Protocols in Tasmania - Roles and Various Bodies*

The total machinery for higher education approval processes in Tasmania involves the functions of a number of parties that are not strictly part of the actual Authority’s organisational structure.

These comprise the:

- Tasmanian Minister for Education
- Secretary of the Tasmanian Department of Education

- Deputy Secretary of the Department's Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training
- authorised Officers of the TQA who though reporting to the CEO of the Authority, are all employees of the Department of Education.

The TQA itself consists of the following components the:

- nine members of the TQA Board, who are 'the decision makers' and who have been selected for the particular expertise that they bring to the Board
- Chief Executive Officer, as the Authority's single employee, and who may convene 'advisory groups' as needed
- advisory groups established for each sector – in the case of higher education this is the Higher Education Expert Group (HEEG).

Outside of this formal structure there is also a number of registered higher education subject or 'technical' experts who are not members of the HEEG, but who can serve on assessment panels established by the HEEG, when or if required.

In the Portfolio, the relationship between the parts of this apparatus is described in these terms: "As an independent statutory authority, the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority is separate from the Department of Education. It advises the Minister on qualifications matters and provides an annual report to the Minister on its activities for the year." (PF p11)

It must also be recognised that TQA has quality assurance responsibilities across all three sectors and because of this it has adopted an 'integrated service model', described in the Portfolio in these terms:

"The office of the Authority provides an integrated service of quality assurance across senior secondary education, vocational education and training, higher education, education for overseas students and recognition of overseas qualifications. Its officers have specialist expertise in the various regulatory functions it provides, as well as corporate responsibilities. *All* of its resources are available to support *all* of its functions. Its regulatory and quality assurance functions include support for:

- registration of registered training organisations
- assessment of senior secondary subjects
- development of senior secondary courses
- registration of higher education providers
- accreditation of higher education courses
- registration of providers to overseas students
- assessment of overseas qualifications." (PF p11)

Furthermore, with respect to the Authority's decision making in higher education, as a purely advisory body, the HEEG can *recommend* applications to the Authority via a variety of paths:

- forward the application directly to the Authority for a decision; or
- include it in a scheduled meeting of the HEEG (ie HEEG goes into 'assessment panel' mode); or

- deal with it at a separate time by establishing an assessment panel and conducting a site visit.

The TQA's higher education approvals processes are based on a risk assessment system, where applications are scrutinised and assessed in order to decide which decision-making path should be followed, and therefore to make a judgement on the effectiveness of the decision-making process, is to judge the effectiveness of the approvals processes. There is comment on the efficacy of this risk managed approach at section 4.3.

Clearly then, being an independent body with multi-sectoral quality assurance responsibilities, such complex organisational and operational arrangements are dependent upon there being effective functional relationships between the various parties, and this requires both goodwill and active collaboration between the parties towards the achievement of shared objectives.

From the description given in the Portfolio, the Audit Panel decided to check the effectiveness of these somewhat complex arrangements, and the potential for things to go wrong.

A case in point relates to the Panel's investigation of the role of the CEO in TQA governance as the Authority's 'single employee'.

In the Portfolio, the Panel noted the following statement with respect to delegations: "There are no delegations in place relevant to higher education recognition functions." (PF p11) This statement was further amplified in a key supporting document: "The Authority has a **single point of delegation**, the Chief Executive Officer, and acts as though it has a single employee and does not act directly with other staff of the Office of the Authority...The registration of Higher Education courses and institutions other than for self-accrediting universities is not delegated." (SM3 TQA Governance pp1&3 – text in bold is TQA's, the underlined is AUQA's.)

In addition, the Panel noted that the section on the TQA quality management system (section 3), reported that there was a stated commitment to avoid 'single-person dependency' within the Authority.

On examining additional material provided by the TQA, the Audit Panel learned of a delegation to the CEO relating to the accreditation and registration of non self-accrediting higher education institutions operating in Tasmania had in fact been approved by the TQA Board in December 2006. The Panel decided to investigate the delegation in further detail.

When the Panel examined this discrepancy it learned that the delegation was limited to cases of "mutual recognition involving distance education only" (Minutes of the TQA Board 06/12/07); was a temporary solution introduced for pragmatic reasons and to resolve an anomaly that had arisen in the TQA fees and charges regime; and that the cause of this situation would be addressed in the revision of the TQA Act and associated Regulations (this issue is taken up again at sections 4.3 and 4.4).

After clarifying this discrepancy and examining the risk assessment process and related documents in detail, including the records of the Authority's decisions; and after interviewing a variety of key TQA stakeholders, including from within the education and training bureaucracy, the University of Tasmania, and from client non self-accrediting higher education providers, the Panel was satisfied that the core regulatory and quality assurance methodology for higher education is sound, and the role of TQA well regarded in Tasmania.

### **Commendation 1**

**AUQA commends the CEO and Board of TQA for gaining broad acceptance in the community of the Authority's regulatory functions for higher education; and the support of the Tasmanian Government education and training authorities, for TQA's role as a change agent, in contributing to the government's goal of increasing participation in lifelong education and training.**

Notwithstanding this overall commendatory finding, there are further audit findings that relate to the improvement of various aspects of the Authority's core decision making and approval processes for higher education through the body of this Report.

### 3 QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The office of the Authority states that it has adopted a quality management system (QMS) “to ensure that it is accountable and transparent, effective and responsive to its stakeholders”. (PF p13) The key components of the Authority’s QMS are:

- management commitment and leadership
- qualified staff
- documented policies, plans and procedures
- risk management
- internal and external audits
- client feedback
- continuous improvement.

In the Portfolio the QMS is described according to the ‘Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement’ model set out below.

#### 3.1 *Approach*

In the Portfolio, the Approach section is paraphrased as follows: “How objectives are developed and communicated – strategic plan, operations plan, external requirements, risk management, internal communication”. (PF p13)

At the strategic level, the link with risk management is described in these terms: “The strategic plan is accompanied by a risk management register...which was developed and is overseen by the Risk Management Committee consisting of the Chair, the Chief Executive Officer and an outside expert. The committee meets at least twice yearly and monitors the management of risks.” (PF pp13-14)

In considering the effectiveness of the overall approach of the QMS, the Audit Panel reviewed not only the risk management process and documentation, but also the internal audit and continuous improvement processes. The Panel noted that these aspects had been combined into a documented quality system based on the underpinning philosophy of continuous improvement, and that the QMS is multi-sectoral in its scope. Given the multi-sectoral nature of the TQA’s organisational arrangements, the Panel considered that the overall approach is also appropriate for the discharge of the Authority’s higher education quality assurance responsibilities.

#### **Commendation 2**

**AUQA commends TQA for implementing an effective multi-sectoral continuous improvement approach to quality assurance, in the context of the public sector management practices prevailing in Tasmania, which is appropriate for the Authority’s higher education responsibilities.**

The Panel also found that risk management and risk assessment processes have been very effectively embedded within the Authority’s overall approach to managing quality (section 3.2).

### 3.2 *Deployment*

Deployment is characterised in the Portfolio as “How the approach is being put into effect – staffing and resources, expert advice, documented procedures, communication, risk management”. (PF p15)

Again, a distinguishing characteristic of this dimension of the QMS is the attention given to risk management: “Each operations unit has identified specific risks associated with its activities and every significant project has a risk identification and management strategy.” (PF p17) The Audit Panel considered that the risk management and assessment documents and records it had reviewed were consistent with this attention.

#### **Commendation 3**

**AUQA commends TQA for successfully adopting an embedded risk-management approach to quality assurance and regulation in higher education in Tasmania.**

The other critical aspect of quality function deployment is the role played by staff in appropriately implementing quality-related policies and procedures at the operational level. Feedback from interviewees and the client feedback data from surveys conducted by AUQA and by an independent consultant contracted by TQA, all point to a high degree of client satisfaction with the level and quality of service provided.

#### **Commendation 4**

**AUQA commends TQA for maintaining a strong client-focused approach to the provision of services for higher education accreditation and registration, and in particular for the responsiveness and availability of TQA staff, and the transparency, fairness and timeliness of its processes.**

Notwithstanding the general endorsements above of the integrated service model, the Panel, mindful of the very small number of non self-accrediting higher education institutions based in, or delivering into Tasmania, believes there is a need to ensure that particular needs of these small-scale, specialist higher education providers are identified and communicated. This is so they are not marginalised because of the far greater scale of TQA operations in vocational education and training, and senior secondary education.

#### **Recommendation 1**

**AUQA recommends that TQA develop specific customer service standards for higher education that align wherever appropriate with the Authority’s meta-level generic customer service standards.**

### 3.3 *Results*

In the Portfolio, this dimension of the QMS is described as: “Data for measurement and evaluations – data management and reporting, performance objectives, client feedback, self assessment, internal audits”. (PF p17)

In reviewing the Authority’s data for measurement and the management of that data, the Audit Panel noted some room for improvements and these are listed below in the “Improvements” section.

During interviews with TQA staff and other stakeholders it became clear to the Audit Panel that the Authority’s QMS is now at a transition point. In the first two-and-a-half years of TQA’s existence the focus of the QMS has been primarily on establishment and roll-out of appropriate

policies and procedures across the sectors, and that as a result of undertaking its higher education self-assessment, the Authority has become aware of the need for some process improvements.

In the “Improvement” section of the Portfolio this realisation is described by TQA in the following terms: “To a large extent the Authority is still refining and reviewing its practices. A range of significant initiatives have been undertaken since its inception such as the restructuring of roles and lines of reporting in the office and development and implementation of major information and communications technology capability.” (PF pp19-20)

The Audit Panel agrees with the views expressed by key TQA staff that it is now appropriate to focus on ensuring that identified deficiencies are acted upon in order to ‘close the quality loop’, and in order to fully embed the culture of continuous quality improvement during a time of significant change in the sector, with the implementation of the new National Protocols.

#### **Affirmation 1**

**AUQA affirms TQA’s recognition of the need to focus the TQA quality management system on ensuring that action is taken where improvements and/or remedial action is required, and that processes for sharing the learning across the organisation arising from continuous improvement are strengthened and linked to professional development plans.**

As stated elsewhere in this Report, the Panel believes, in the context of the introduction of the new higher education National Protocols, that this transition needs to be carefully managed to ensure stability and clarity of the key higher education approval processes (see especially Recommendation 7).

### **3.4 Improvement**

In the Portfolio, this dimension of the QMS is devoted to listing the improvements already identified by the Authority through its existing self-review and continuous improvement processes, these include:

- establishment of the HEEG
- benchmarking
- avoidance of single-person dependency (a risk management issue)
- revised web
- information communications technology
- development of higher education database
- review of communications
- development of processes, procedures and guidelines
- review of Regulations
- enhanced monitoring of provider financial arrangements
- implementation of new national protocols.

Apart from these ‘self-identified improvements’, the Audit Panel noted a small number of areas where it believes the Authority should now focus its future improvement efforts, and there are relevant audit findings in relation to these areas listed below.

For example, when the Panel examined the information communications technology and higher education database, it found that the TQA's records management system for higher education was in transition from hard copy files to storage in electronic format. The TQA acknowledge that the electronic filing system was still in the implementation phase and indicated that as part of the 'continuous improvement' phase of operations, electronic business processes such as management sign-off will be incorporated.

#### **Affirmation 2**

**AUQA affirms the decision by TQA to implement the TRIM electronic record-keeping and document management system with the facility for document scanning and searching, and recommends that the new system have the technical capability for electronic document signature.**

Another deficiency in deployment noted was the absence of any reference to the QMS in the induction type briefing of TQA staff about the Authority's operations and their responsibilities therein. It will be necessary to correct this omission if a culture of continuous quality improvement is to be successfully embedded.

#### **Recommendation 2**

**AUQA recommends that TQA revise the Authority's Staff Handbook to incorporate guidelines for staff concerning the nature of the TQA quality management system and their responsibilities for continuous improvement.**

Similar attention will need to be given to the briefing and training of HEEG members and subject or technical experts serving on assessment panels, and this aspect is addressed in section 4.

## 4 IMPLEMENTATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION APPROVAL PROCESSES

The Audit Panel investigated the extent to which the Authority has put in place arrangements for effective management of its responsibilities for each of the National Protocols, taking into account the Tasmanian legislative framework discussed in section 2. Some issues raised under one Protocol may have implications for the management of other Protocols. This section concludes with an evaluation of the preparedness of TQA for the enactment of the new higher education National Protocols.

### 4.1 *National Protocol 1*

National Protocol 1 concerns criteria for the recognition of universities and protection of the title 'university'.

With respect to matters covered by National Protocol 1, the Audit Panel noted that there had been no implementation cases in Tasmania, except for the establishment of the University of Tasmania, which well predates enactment of the Protocols. This is also despite the fact that the Australian Maritime College, a self-accrediting institution, applied to be granted university status in 2002. However, as the Australian Maritime College was established under federal rather than Tasmanian legislation, neither the Universities Registration Council nor TQA had any jurisdictional involvement in that particular application. However, it is worth noting that the then Secretary of the Tasmanian Department of Education, Dr Martyn Forrest, was a member of the Review Panel which considered the application.

The Audit Panel had already noted that the TQA Act did not include specific provision for the establishment of a new university in Tasmania. However, the Panel also noted that Ministerial Guidelines for Approval of a University in Tasmania have been developed by TQA and were approved by the Tasmanian Minister in July 2005.

The Audit Panel also noted an intention to resolve the anomaly at the time of the revision of the TQA Act, and that Regulations consistent with the new higher education National Protocols would fully address the situation.

With respect to the protection of the title 'university' the Panel noted that use of the title was covered under section 54 of the TQA Act, and an examination of files indicated monitoring of compliance.

The Audit Panel was satisfied that National Protocol 1 is being appropriately implemented.

### 4.2 *National Protocol 2*

This Protocol addresses criteria for the approval of an overseas university or higher education provider to operate in Australia.

Similar to National Protocol 1, the Audit Panel noted that:

- there had not been any implementation cases in Tasmania
- section 54(1)(c) of the TQA Act provides TQA with the authority to declare an institution an 'overseas university'
- Ministerial Guidelines for the Approval of an Overseas University to Operate in Tasmania (approved May 2005) describe the relevant process and criteria
- Regulations consistent with the new higher education National Protocols are to be drafted.

The Audit Panel was satisfied that National Protocol 2 is being appropriately implemented.

### 4.3 *National Protocol 3*

This Protocol sets out requirements for the accreditation of higher education courses offered by NSAI's.

In contrast to the minimum levels of activity encountered under National Protocols 1 and 2, and despite the small number of providers involved, this Protocol covers the major areas of TQA's responsibility for higher education approvals in Tasmania, and therefore became a prime area for the Audit Panel's investigations.

Given the relatively small size of the Tasmanian higher education constituency, the Panel investigated the sufficiency of appropriately profiled and senior academics available to carry out its assessments of program and provider quality. In this regard the Panel noted that the membership of HEEG had recently been supplemented, by including the appointment of non-Tasmania resident members.

#### **Affirmation 3**

**AUQA affirms TQA's decision to widen the membership of the Higher Education Expert Group to include interstate academics; and that recruiting experts from other constituencies will provide the opportunity to benchmark with other state and territory authorities.**

The Panel was also aware that a "register of all panel members and potential panel members is maintained..." (PF p27) The Panel examined the register in question and believes that under the new higher education National Protocols the number of active assessors currently registered by the TQA will be insufficient for future needs. The Panel recommends that TQA address this need by recruiting additional assessors from interstate.

#### **Recommendation 3**

**AUQA recommends that TQA widen the pool of academic specialist experts who participate in assessment panels; which will also provide further opportunities for benchmarking with other states and territories.**

In relation to following up on opportunities for systematic benchmarking with authorities in other jurisdictions, the Panel was of the view that there would be some value in TQA formally approaching the similarly multi-sectoral constituted Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority after it is fully established in July this year.

With respect to the relationship between the accreditation of courses of study and the registration of course providers, the Panel had also noted the following statements in the Guidelines for Registration as a Higher Education Provider (non self-accrediting) in Tasmania:

"An organisation may apply separately to have a course accredited and to be a registered higher education provider or they can apply to have both approval processes to be carried out together. An individual or organisation may apply to have a course accredited as a higher education course without seeking approval to deliver it. However, an organisation cannot apply to be a registered higher education provider in isolation to the particular course/s proposing to be delivered. The course/s has to be accredited already or accreditation is being sought at the same time as registration." (SM15 p7, the underlined text is AUQA emphasis)

While the Panel agrees that accreditation/registration processes should be either able to be taken concurrently or that registration be undertaken as a separate process in various circumstances it was interested to know what particular circumstances in Tasmania required a provision for the accreditation of a course without approval (registration) to deliver that course.

When asked to clarify the text underlined above, the Authority reiterated that: “Theoretically (there has not been a request to date) an individual/organization could apply to have a course accredited as a higher education course without seeking approval to deliver it.” (SM23 – Response to questions asked by auditors, p1)

The reason for this particular provision was not further explored during the audit process. However the Panel noted that accreditation/registration guidelines currently differ between individual states/territories, and these would now be replaced by National Guidelines associated with the revised National Protocols which are intended to promote greater national consistency in the accreditation/registration approval processes.

As highlighted in section 2.4, the issue of delivery into Tasmania by distance education only, by providers that are already registered in other jurisdictions was cause for the TQA Board making a delegation to the CEO in order to resolve an anomaly that had arisen in the TQA fees and charges regime.

This particular anomaly appears to stem from the way the current TQA Act and Regulations are structured. The TQA indicated that a provider must be registered to deliver courses in Tasmania by distance education and that the subsequent registration process requires fees to be set according to a schedule of fees defined in the Regulations. In this respect, the current legislative provisions and associated higher education guidelines do not appear to be sufficiently flexible to allow fully for the implementation of the national agreement on mutual recognition, in general, or in the specific instance of providers seeking permission to offer courses by distance education in Tasmania.

In discussion with providers during the audit process, the Panel noted the concerns of a national higher education provider that was asked to apply for registration because several affiliated colleges were delivering units into Tasmania by distance education. Although there was no face-to-face delivery the fact that several students were taking units offered by the provider triggered the requirement, under the *Tasmanian Qualifications Act 2003*, for the provider to be registered and the courses in which the students were enrolled to be accredited. The provider was issued with an invoice for the approval processes which at the time of the audit was in dispute, with the provider arguing that the courses have already been accredited in their home jurisdiction and so a separate levy by the TQA contravenes the national agreement on mutual recognition.

It should be noted here that the new National Protocols significantly clarify the definition of ‘to operate’ to the agreement of all jurisdictions and this new definition explicitly addresses the issue of distance education. The definition of ‘to operate’ or ‘purporting to operate’ in the new National Protocols specifically states that ‘electronic or distance education delivery of a higher education course/s in or from a jurisdiction is included in the definition of operating in Australia’, and the Panel advises that the revised TQA Act and Regulations should reflect these changes.

The Panel was confident that in the short term the TQA would resolve, in terms of the requirement for mutual recognition, the issue of how to appropriately set fees for distance education delivery into Tasmania. For the longer term the Panel noted that under the revised National Protocols, where a course is accredited in one jurisdiction for delivery purely in distance mode, it will be accepted as accredited in all other jurisdictions.

Given the possibility of more applications for recognition and delivery by distance education only under the new higher education National Protocols, the Panel urges TQA to ensure that this

particular situation is taken into account in the review of accreditation and registration processes prior to finalising the necessary amendments to the TQA Act and makes the following recommendation.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**AUQA recommends that in preparing for the implementation of the new higher education National Protocols, TQA review its accreditation/registration guidelines, amend the TQA Act, and Regulations as required, and in so doing specifically consider the situation of providers wishing to deliver accredited higher education courses in Tasmania by distance education only.**

With the provisos noted in the audit findings above, the Audit Panel was satisfied that National Protocol 3 is being appropriately implemented.

#### **4.4 National Protocol 4**

This Protocol broadly addresses delivery arrangements for universities and other self-accrediting higher education institutions operating in distant locations, either in their own right or through an agency arrangement with another organisation. The 2006 review of the National Protocols indicated that this Protocol is now regarded as being wholly redundant, in that delivery by NSAI is not specified (but this is covered by Protocol 3), and delivery involving SAIs is covered by AUQA in their audit processes.

The TQA Portfolio contains the following evaluative comment on the Authority's compliance with National Protocol 4: The TQA Act "does not apply to Australian universities or self-accrediting higher education providers. If matters of concern were to arise in Tasmania, the Minister would request department officers to carry out an investigation and provide the Minister with advice." (PF p29) In effect the current TQA Act does not appear to specifically address Protocol 4 and this was noted by TQA in their self-assessment.

Given that this Protocol is now considered to be redundant, the Panel is of the view that the TQA response is understandable though perhaps not technically sufficient.

The Audit Panel notes that the enactment of processes under National Protocol 4 has not been required in Tasmania to date, but that in any case, the Protocol will disappear under the new revised National Protocols.

#### **4.5 National Protocol 5**

This Protocol addresses the processes for endorsing courses as suitable for overseas students on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS).

The Audit Panel noted that Tasmania had well and truly anticipated the Commonwealth's *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (ESOS) by implementing the Tasmanian Education Providers Registration (Overseas Students) Act as early as 1991 – state legislation which the Authority states "complies with the requirements of the National Protocol." (PF p29) There are currently only three (soon to be only two) Tasmanian institutions approved to be listed on CRICOS: University of Tasmania; Australian Maritime College; and Worldview Centre for Intercultural Studies. These providers are currently subject to two overlapping or duplicating pieces of legislation (one state, the other federal) and their associated auditing and reporting processes.

In the Portfolio, resolution of this matter was dealt with as follows: “The review of the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority Act will consider the amalgamation of the two pieces of legislation.” (PF p30 – the text underlined is AUQA added emphasis)

The Audit Panel confirms that the forthcoming revision of the TQA Act provides a perfect opportunity to mainstream the current duplication of the Tasmanian and Commonwealth ESOS legislation for purposes of CRICOS registration (see Affirmation 4).

The Audit Panel was satisfied that National Protocol 5 is being appropriately implemented.

#### **4.6 Preparedness for Enactment of the New National Protocols**

The new higher education National Protocols were approved in July 2006 and are to be enacted from 31 December 2007. To assist the Authority prepare for this important development a series of findings are set out below according to the dimensions of the Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement model adopted by TQA for its QMS.

In terms of Approach, as already noted, the Authority was already committed to a whole-scale review of its own legislation, the timing of which the Panel confirmed would align appropriately with implementation of the new higher education National Protocols, with legislation drafting to occur in July and August 2007. The Panel considered that planning was well advanced at the time of the Audit Visit for approval during the Tasmanian Parliament spring session. As already noted in section 4.3 the Panel urges that this opportunity should be grasped in order to resolve any issues relating to distance education only provision, and in section 4.5, to also resolve the duplication of legislation for CRICOS.

##### **Affirmation 4**

**AUQA affirms the well advanced plans by TQA to revise the Authority’s Act and related Regulations and guidelines to incorporate the requirements of the new higher education National Protocols, and to streamline Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students/Education Services for Overseas Students Act matters.**

Another Deployment issue that will need more attention in the forthcoming period is the preparation of the expanded number of HEEG members, and expert subject assessors, for their particular roles in the higher education approvals processes.

During its audit investigations, the Panel formed the view that there were certain aspects of the Authority’s quality assurance processes that could be further strengthened and clarified. For example, the Panel noted that there were several different types of forms in existence and procedures used for the making of declarations of confidentiality and/or declaring conflicts of interest. The Panel also noted that the current induction kit for HEEG members (which will now need to be revised and updated to accommodate the new higher education National Protocols), did not provide any detailed explanatory commentary for HEEG/assessment panel members on the risk assessment process for determining which decision-making path would be adopted in the higher education registration and accreditation process, nor did it explicitly mention that individuals were selected for their subject/technical expertise and not as ‘representatives’. Given that HEEG currently has one serving member from one of the only two Tasmanian-based NSAs, all these are important quality assurance considerations.

### Recommendation 5

**AUQA recommends that in revising the Higher Education Expert Group (HEEG) induction kit to accommodate the new higher education National Protocols, TQA ensure that clear advice is provided to HEEG members and experts appointed to assessment panels regarding: the decision-making processes to determine the appropriate pathway in line with risk management principles; their responsibilities for maintaining confidentiality and declaring conflicts of interest; and their role as ‘experts’ rather than as ‘representatives’.**

In terms of Results, the Audit Panel noted that though there is provision for a number of ‘Performance Measures’ listed for higher education goals in the current Tasmanian Qualifications Authority Strategic Plan, there are not many specific measures recorded in the adjacent ‘Progress to date’ column. Further, in the Portfolio the Panel noted the following statement: “The development of these [performance] objectives and their measures is a recent initiative and its usability will be tested over the next six months.” (PF p18)

The Panel also found this to be the case in the companion document entitled Higher Education Registration and Accreditation Functions Performance Objectives – based on the TQA Strategic Plan. (SM11) Furthermore, when performance measurement was discussed with the CEO and other senior TQA and Department of Education officers, the examples cited by them were invariably to do with measurement of organisational efficiency rather than organisational effectiveness.

### Recommendation 6

**In light of the need to implement changes to accommodate the new higher education National Protocols, AUQA recommends that TQA ensure that there is an appropriate balance between attention paid to both efficiency and effectiveness of the strategic objectives and performance measures.**

Finally, with respect to improvement, as noted several times elsewhere in this Report, TQA is simultaneously trying to fully embed a culture of continuous quality improvement (Affirmation 1), while preparing for the implementation of the new higher education National Protocols from 31 December 2007.

The Panel is aware of the potential for a tension developing in the change management strategy here. The TQA Portfolio concludes with the following statement: “The adoption of the revised national protocols and the resulting amendments to legislation will provide an opportunity to review practices and to improve client-focused, nationally consistent registration and accreditation approval processes.” (PF p31)

It is important that, in embedding corrective actions and innovations flowing from the continuous quality improvement process (including improvements recommended by AUQA in this Report) and making changes to policies and work practices to accommodate the implementation of the new higher education National Protocols during this period, the stability and clarity of the Authority’s core higher education approval processes are not adversely affected.

### Recommendation 7

**AUQA recommends that in refining its continuous improvement and risk management strategies in the context of the new higher education National Protocols, TQA pay particular attention to ensuring stability and clarity for higher education approval processes for registration and accreditation.**

## 5 CONCLUSION

In the concluding section of its Performance Portfolio TQA summarised its own assessment of its performance in these terms:

“The Tasmanian Qualifications Authority, though only having been in existence for two and a half years, has achieved considerable progress in becoming a sound, comprehensive, credible registration and quality assurance body, making a significant contribution to the standards of education and training in Tasmania. Although processes are still being refined, they have been developed with scalability in mind. The Authority could adequately assess and manage applications from a significantly larger number of higher education providers.” (PF p31)

As noted in the ‘Roles and Functions’ section of this Report, despite the Audit Panel’s initial misgivings, the adoption of the ‘Integrated Service’ model by TQA (a multi-sectoral approach based on an independent statutory authority) was found to be fit-for-purpose and able to cope with the small scale of the non self-accrediting higher education sector in Tasmania.

### Commendation 5

**AUQA commends TQA for the adoption of a model of governance that is fit for purpose and works well in practice for higher education, as is in evidence through the efficient decision-making processes and the operation of the TQA Board.**

In addition, as indicated by the analysis provided in section 4 of this Report, TQA is also found to be generally compliant with the existing National Protocols and it recognises the need to be adequately prepared for enactment of the new higher education National Protocols in December 2007. In this respect, as noted in Recommendation 7, AUQA urges the Authority to ensure that the transition is effectively and efficiently managed to provide stability of TQA’s quality assurance systems and higher education approval processes, as well as demonstrating commitment to continuous improvement.

To conclude, AUQA generally commends TQA for the firm foundations it has established for the proper regulation and quality assurance of non self-accrediting higher education provision within and into Tasmania.

### Commendation 6

**AUQA commends TQA for establishing and sustaining positive, collaborative relationships with its clients and key stakeholders, including: non self-accrediting higher education providers in Tasmania; with the University of Tasmania; and with institutions and agencies in other state jurisdictions.**

## APPENDIX A: TASMANIAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

### History and Location

The Tasmanian Qualifications Authority (TQA or 'the Authority'), established by legislation in November 2003, began operations from the 1 January 2004. It brought together functions previously carried out by three separate bodies operating in each of the sectors of senior secondary schooling, vocational education and training and higher education. The Authority was established under the *Tasmanian Qualifications Authority Act 2003*. Its office is located at 2 Kirksway Place, Hobart.

### Organisational Profile

The TQA is a stand-alone authority, accountable directly to the Tasmanian Minister for Education, with an independent Chair and Board. The Authority advises the Minister about matters relating to qualifications; issues consolidated statements of qualifications, including the Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE); accredits courses for senior secondary education, vocational education and training and higher education; and registers providers of vocational education and training and higher education. The TQA is responsible for assessment and certification in senior secondary TCE syllabuses and TQA accredited courses.

The Authority consists of nine members appointed by the Minister on the basis of the expertise they bring to the Authority. The Authority meets six times per year. It has a strategic plan which drives its decisions. The Authority produces an annual report for the Minister each January.

The Authority has one employee, the Chief Executive Officer, who leads a staff of 23 appointed under the Public Service Act. The Office of the TQA consists of two sections: Operations and Support and Development. The Operations section carries out assessment, accreditation and registration functions across all three sectors of senior secondary schooling, vocational education and training and higher education. The Support and Development section provides services to both internal and external clients through the maintenance of records, information technology, client relations, research and development and quality control.

### Key Statistics (2006)

Number of NSAI higher education providers on the TQA register:		8
Number of accredited higher education courses on NSAI register:		38
Number of self-accrediting institutions operating in Tasmania	Tasmanian	2
	Interstate	6
Number of higher education institutions on CRICOS register delivering courses in Tasmania:	NSAIs	1
TQA staff involved in higher education approval processes (FTE)	Spread across at least 4 staff members	1
Total TQA staff (all sectors)		24
Higher Education Expert Group members		9
Assessors on database	Total	25
Total TQA Operating Revenues (2006)		\$3 201 000
Total TQA Operating Expenses (2006)		\$3 103 000

## **APPENDIX B: AUQA'S MISSION, OBJECTIVES, VALUES AND VISION**

### **Mission**

AUQA is the principal national quality assurance agency in higher education with the responsibility of providing public assurance of the quality of Australia's universities and other institutions of higher education, and assisting in enhancing the academic quality of these institutions.

### **Objectives**

AUQA is established to be the principal national quality assurance agency in higher education, with responsibility for quality audits of higher education institutions and accreditation authorities, reporting on performance and outcomes, assisting in quality enhancement, advising on quality assurance; and liaising internationally with quality agencies in other jurisdictions, for the benefit of Australian higher education.

Specifically, the objectives of AUQA are as follows:

1. Arrange and manage a system of periodic audits of:
  - the quality of the academic activities, including attainment of standards of performance and outcomes of Australian universities and other higher education institutions;
  - the quality assurance arrangements intended to maintain and elevate that quality;
  - compliance with criteria set out in the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes;and monitor, review, analyse and provide public reports on the quality of outcomes in Australian universities and higher education institutions.
2. Arrange and manage a system of periodic audits of the quality assurance processes, procedures, and outcomes of State, Territory and Commonwealth higher education accreditation authorities including their impact on the quality of higher education programs; and monitor, review, analyse and report on the outcomes of those audits.
3. Publicly report periodically on matters relating to quality assurance, including the relative standards and outcomes of the Australian higher education system and its institutions, its processes and its international standing, and the impact of the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes on Australian Higher Education, using information available to AUQA from its audits and other activities carried out under these Objectives, and from other sources.
4. Develop partnerships with other quality agencies in relation to matters directly relating to quality assurance and audit, to facilitate efficient cross-border quality assurance processes and the international transfer of knowledge about those processes.

## Vision

To consolidate AUQA's position as the leading reference point for quality assurance in higher education in and for Australia. Specifically:

- AUQA's judgements will be widely recognised as objective, accurate and useful, based on its effective procedures, including auditor training and thorough investigation.
- AUQA's work will be recognised by institutions and accrediting agencies as adding value to their activities, through the emphasis on autonomy, diversity and self-review.
- Through AUQA's work, there will be an improvement in public knowledge of the relative academic standards of Australian higher education and an increase in public confidence in Australian higher education.
- Through AUQA's work with other quality assurance agencies, the international quality assurance requirements for Australian higher education institutions will be coherent and rigorous, avoiding duplication and inconsistency.
- AUQA's advice will be sought on quality assurance in higher education, through mechanisms including consulting, training and publications.
- AUQA will be recognised among its international peers as a leading quality assurance agency, collaborating with other agencies and providing leadership by example.

## Values

AUQA will be:

- *Rigorous*: AUQA carries out all its audits as rigorously and thoroughly as possible.
- *Supportive*: AUQA recognises institutional autonomy in setting objectives and implementing processes to achieve them, and acts to facilitate and support this.
- *Flexible*: AUQA operates flexibly, in order to acknowledge and reinforce institutional diversity, and is responsive to institution and agency characteristics and needs.
- *Cooperative*: AUQA recognises that the achievement of quality in any organisation depends on a commitment to quality within the organisation itself, and so operates as unobtrusively as is consistent with effectiveness and rigour.
- *Collaborative*: as a quality assurance agency, AUQA works collaboratively with the accrediting agencies (in addition to its audit role with respect to these agencies).
- *Transparent*: AUQA's audit procedures, and its own quality assurance system, are open to public scrutiny.
- *Economical*: AUQA operates cost-effectively and keeps as low as possible the demands it places on institutions and agencies.
- *Open*: AUQA reports publicly and clearly on its findings in relation to institutions, agencies and the sector.

\* AUQA's Mission and Objectives were revised in March 2007, as recommended by MCEETYA. AUQA's Vision and Values have been modified accordingly.

## **APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL**

Mr Rob Carmichael, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency

Dr Susan Holland, Adjunct Professor, School of Education, Edith Cowan University (Chair)

Mr Alan Marshall, Manager, Higher Education Policy and Planning, Department of Education Services, Western Australia

## APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

The following abbreviations, acronyms and definitions are used in this Report. As necessary, they are explained in context.

Accreditation .....	An approval process to ensure that the standards of a course are appropriate for the qualification to which it leads and that the course and methods of delivery are likely to achieve its purpose.
AUQA .....	Australian Universities Quality Agency
Authority, the .....	Tasmanian Qualifications Authority
CRICOS .....	Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students
DEST .....	Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training
ESOS .....	Education Services for Overseas Students
FTE.....	full-time equivalent
HEEG .....	Higher Education Expert Group
MCEETYA.....	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
National Protocols/Protocols .....	<i>National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes</i>
NSAI(s) .....	non self-accrediting institution(s)
QMS .....	quality management system
Provider(s).....	Persons or organisations which provide higher education courses to students
Registration .....	Approval by the TQA of a non self-accrediting institution to operate within Tasmania or deliver programs into Tasmania by distance education only
SAI(s) .....	self-accrediting institution(s)
Supporting Material.....	SM
TCE .....	Tasmanian Certificate of Education
TQA.....	Tasmanian Qualifications Authority
TQA Act.....	<i>Tasmanian Qualifications Authority Act 2003</i>

## **APPENDIX E: NATIONAL PROTOCOLS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION APPROVAL PROCESSES**

These Protocols are a key element of a new national quality assurance framework for Australian higher education:

- Protocol 1: Criteria and processes for recognition of universities
- Protocol 2: Overseas higher education institutions seeking to operate in Australia
- Protocol 3: The accreditation of higher education courses to be offered by non self-accrediting providers
- Protocol 4: Delivery arrangements involving other organisations and,
- Protocol 5: Endorsement of courses for overseas students.

These Protocols provide a set of common principles and a cooperative approach to the quality assurance of all higher education accreditation and registration processes. They were designed to ensure consistent criteria and standards across Australia in such matters. All the Australian states and mainland territories, which have responsibility for managing higher education and approval processes, have agreed to their adoption.

The higher education accreditation and registration processes of the approval bodies of Australian states and territories are subject to audit against these Protocols by AUQA.

The National Protocols are available as a PDF from the MCEETYA website at: <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/pdf/protocols.pdf>. They are also available from the DEST website at: [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher\\_education/policy\\_issues\\_reviews/key\\_issues/MCEETYAS/](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/MCEETYAS/)

A copy of the Guthrie, Johnston, King (2004) report *Further Development of the National Protocols for Higher Education Approvals Processes* is available from the DEST website at:

[http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher\\_education/policy\\_issues\\_reviews/reviews/guthrie\\_review/Further\\_Development\\_of\\_the\\_National\\_Protocols\\_for\\_Higher\\_Edu.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/reviews/guthrie_review/Further_Development_of_the_National_Protocols_for_Higher_Edu.htm)

Bibliographic information about the National Protocols as published in hard copy form is:

National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes  
Canberra, ACT: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 2000  
ISBN 0 642 44908 2  
ISBN 0 642 44909 0 (www)  
DETYA No. 6565.HERC 00B  
ABN: 51 452 193 160



