INQAAHE 2011:
Quality Assurance:
'Foundations for the
Future'

Retrospective
or
Prospective?
Regulation &
QA in Australia

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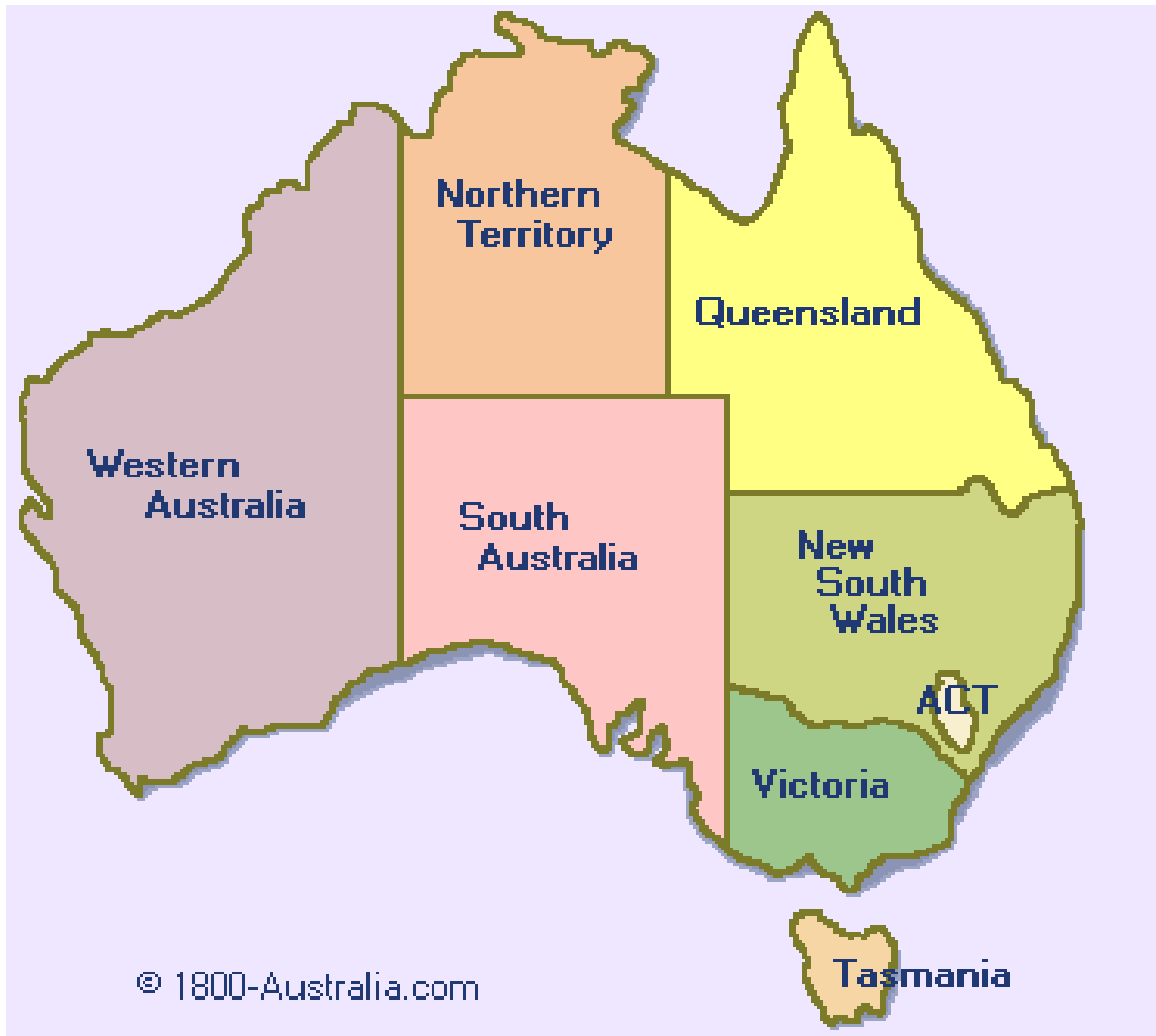
Presentation Outline

- Foreword

- Journey's start

- The Journey - and major signposts along the way

- Journey's end – and a new beginning

- An Afterword

Foreword:

- This presentation will explore the conference theme: 'Quality Assurance: Foundations for the Future' by examining recent developments in the regulation and quality assurance of higher education in Australia, and through the visual metaphor of a 'quality journey'

- All of us (inc. QA agencies) are on a 'quality journey' – i.e. trying to make sense of our experience of moving through time and space.

Regulation & Quality Assurance in Australia*

State & Territory GAAs + DEEWR & AUQA

NSWDET
VRQA (Victoria)
QOHE (Qld.)
DFEEST (SA)
WADES (WA)
TQA (Tas.)
ACTARC (ACT)
NTDET (NT)

Plus DEEWR (Cw. govt) and AUQA as the national QA agency.

* Current system

Journey's Start:

- "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." (Lao –tzu, Chinese philosopher)

- Conventional thinking about audit and review as fundamentally 'retrospective' (i.e. backward looking) processes

- Roles of AUQA and GAAs in Australian higher education regulation and QA and the Australian Govt. decision to establish TEQSA

- The need for both a retrospective and a 'prospective' (i.e. forward looking) approach

The Journey – and Major Signposts along the way:

"If you don't know where you are going when you set out, then you will probably end up somewhere else, and not know it!"

But that's what Signposts are for, so you know that you are on the right track!

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Major Signposts:

- **Signpost #1** – GAA agreement on the audit/review process

- **Signpost #2** – GAA actions on Cycle 1 audits

- **Signpost #3** – GAA good practices (GP) and priorities for improvement (PFI) in regulation and quality assurance

- **Signpost #4** – GAA additional comments on the National Protocols

Major Signposts on the Way:

Signpost #1: Agreement on Process

- Retrospective reporting on Cycle 1 audit and 'prospective' reporting on Reg & QA practices
- Practices ranked, and written-up in O.A.D.R.I. format
- 3 x Audit Panels and a national Expert Group established
- Meta-analysis to identify key themes and issues
- Public consultation phase, with feedback from NSAIs etc.
- A single public national report

Signpost #2: Actions on Cycle 1 Audits

- Final GAA progress reports
- Preliminary report on each individual GAA (9)
- Requests for clarification/more information
- Decisions about site visits
- Recommendations from Audit Panels to the national Expert Group

Major Signposts on the Way:

Signpost #3: GP and PFI

- 48 practices written up & ranked: 27 GP & 21 PFI
- Major Themes: 'Risk-based and proportionate'; Simplified approaches; Agency governance/ structural issues; Communication, reporting, monitoring, feedback systems; QMS; National consistency

Signpost #4: Additional comments on NPs

- Additional comments on NPs received from 6/9 GAAs
- Number of issues raised in relation to National Protocols C, D and E
- Recommendations on NPs referred to the Ministerial Council for Tertiary education (MCTEE)

Journey's End (and a new beginning)!
The main findings of AUQA's Consolidated National Report

Retrospective:

- Conclusion: AUQA Cycle 1 audit findings had been satisfactorily addressed

Prospective to MCTEE:

- Three recommendations to the Ministerial Council to strengthen and clarify guidelines for the existing National Protocols

Prospective to TEQSA:

- A recommendation to TEQSA referring six 'primary considerations 'for development of a 'risk-based and proportionate' approach to regulation and QA

- Recommendations to TEQSA referring additional important considerations for action

Referral of Issues by AUQA to TEQSA:

'Primary considerations' for a 'risk-based and proportionate' approach to regulation and QA:

- Employment of a systematic risk-rating system
- Individual case-management of institutions
- Risk assessments based on case history, including annual reports
- High threshold for initial registration/accreditations
- Streamlined approvals
- Legislative-based sanctions

'Further considerations' referred to TEQSA:

- Organisational ethos and culture for risk-based approach
- Quality enhancement activities
- Balance between need for central coordination and a local presence
- Management of resources, especially human resources
- Quality Management System
- Quality assurance of technologically mediated and offshore delivered higher ed.
- Foresight & planning for VET

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Response of TEQSA to the Report's Recommendations:

"The advice provided in this publication highlights many good practices for TEQSA to consider as it develops a regulatory framework for higher education and scopes how it will operate…. ….As such, the report provides a valuable guide to this developmental work and will assist TEQSA in building on the experience provided by the GAAs.

The publication of this report is also timely as a number of TEQSA projects are in the initial stages of commencement, and these projects comprise the development of the 'new' business approach of TEQSA to the regulation of higher education."

(Professor Denise Bradley, Interim Chair, TEQSA)

AFTERWORD:

The Ancient Greek view of time!

"They saw the future as something that came upon them from behind their backs with the past receding away before their eyes.*" (Robert Pirsig, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, p413)

* Footnote: A study by Macrae & Miles of the University of Aberdeen (UK) reported in the Feb. 2011 edition of New Scientist found that a pattern of stars receding away from an observer tends to make the observer "think about events from the past". p37

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AFTERWORD (cont.)

When you set out on a quality journey, it is very important to know where you are going, but it is equally important to know where you are (by reading 'the signposts'), and to truly understand this, you must know where you set out from. An alternative phrasing of that old Zen proverb is: "Even the longest journey must begin where you stand."

AFTERWORD (cont.)

Quality Assurance: 'Foundations for the Future'

- What really needs to be changed, and what should be preserved that already exists?

- This so that valuable time and effort is not wasted in trying to reinvent wheels for 'time's winged chariot' as it rolls on by us….(from behind our very backs)

- If TEQSA is to be an improvement over the GAAs and AUQA, then it must build on the quality foundations established by its predecessor organisations while they were on their quality journeys, and then add something new and distinctive while on its own.

But that's another journey, one yet to be taken!
(And now there are some signposts to tell us if we are on the right track!)

Thank you

Questions and/or discussion?