



Thumbs up for tertiary quality assurance trial

POORLY PERFORMING TERTIARY education providers are likely to struggle with the new quality assurance system for the tertiary education sector, as are those not already involved in self-review, an evaluation of a trial run of the system has concluded.

The evaluation said the new system should be rolled out progressively with support that will help education providers come to grips with it, and recommended that external assessment go further than simply checking up on the self-assessment.

The Qualifications Authority last year trialled the new system, which is based on self-evaluation by tertiary education providers followed by external assessments, among eight providers. The authority (NZQA) this week published an independent evaluation of that trial.

It said trial participants saw the new approach to quality assurance as a step in the right direction. They found that it focused their institution more on outputs and on quality and value in education provision. It also highlighted gaps and areas for improvement and led to changes within institutions.

The trial also highlighted awareness of data issues in participating providers, including use of multiple sources of data, using multiple perspectives to inform data analysis and better use of existing data.

The evaluation warned that the guidelines and the tools for self-evaluation were useful, but were likely to pose challenges, "particularly for poorly performing providers and those that aren't 'already doing it'".

"Given that providers are at a range of starting points, it is imperative that a range of support be available to facilitate effective transition from the current quality assurance environment. These point to the need for effective preparation and communication of key messages to the sector to build a shared understanding of the philosophy behind the evaluative approach and to allow providers an opportunity to reflect on what the changes will mean for them in an informed way."

That support could include "preparing and socialising" education providers to the idea of evaluation and how to use evaluative interpretations and principles to determine the quality and value of educational delivery. It could also include workshops and meetings to share the experiences of trial participants as well as case studies of good practice.

The evaluation also recommended training for the evaluators who would check providers' self-assessments and suggested the evaluators be able to request evidence that changes had been made.

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a range of starting points, it is imperative that a range of support be available to facilitate effective transition from the current quality assurance environment."

"We also believe that expanding the EER [external review] process beyond validating the self-assessment to include gathering evidence of changes in institutional policies and practices, data management and analysis systems and approaches and tailored programme design and delivery would strengthen statements of confidence regarding educational performance."

Overall, the report said the new system of quality assurance was likely to see tertiary education providers improve their data management systems, their alignment between organisational policy and practice and their programme design and delivery.

"Changes in these areas will contribute to increased confidence in TEOs capability to deliver which in turn would lead to informed decision-making regarding quality and value of education provision by all partners including TEC."