VRQA Annual Client and Stakeholder Research 2016
Executive Summary
(EY Sweeney Ref No. 26368/9) - 31 January 2017
31 January 2017
Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority
Attention: Louise Mitchell, Senior Communications Officer
Level 4 Casselden, 2 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne VIC 3000

VRQA ANNUAL CLIENT AND STAKEHOLDER RESEARCH 2016

Dear Louise,

Enclosed is executive summary relating to the VRQA Annual Client and Stakeholder Research 2016.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the terms and conditions of the proposal accepted on/or dated 5 October 2016.

We acknowledge and appreciate the assistance provided by Louise Mitchell in the performance of our work with regards to this project.

Please contact Dr Adeline Ong on 03 8650 7829 or David Armstrong on 03 8650 7851 if you have any questions regarding this report.

We look forward to discussing this summary report with you in due course.

Yours sincerely

Lewis Jones
Managing Director - Melbourne
EY Sweeney

Dr Adeline Ong
Head of Education
EY Sweeney
Publically available disclaimer

The summary of findings contained in this executive summary are based on the findings of the report prepared at the request of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) solely for the purposes of the VRQA, and is not appropriate for use for other purposes. This summary is provided for information purposes only in order to provide longitudinal and representative insights into clients’ and stakeholders’ working relationship with the VRQA and should not be taken as providing specific advice on any issue, nor may this summary be relied upon by any party other than the VRQA. In carrying out our work and preparing this executive summary Ernst & Young has worked solely on the instructions and information of the VRQA, and has not taken into account the interests or individual circumstances of any party other than the VRQA. Ernst & Young does not accept any responsibility for use of the information contained in this summary and makes no guarantee nor accept any legal liability whatsoever arising from or connected to the accuracy, reliability, currency or completeness of any material contained herein. Ernst & Young expressly disclaims all liability for any costs, loss, damage, injury or other consequence which may arise directly or indirectly form use of, or reliance on, this executive summary.
Background and methodology

Established under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, the role of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) is to regulate education and training providers in Victoria.

The VRQA was established under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (ETRA). Ministerial responsibility for the VRQA rests with the Minister for Education for school education and with the Minister for Training and Skills for VET providers and apprenticeships and traineeships.

The VRQA registers:

▲ VET providers that deliver accredited training to domestic students in Victoria only or Victoria and Western Australia only

▲ School education providers including approval for registration on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) for courses delivered by schools

▲ Senior secondary education providers (both school and non-school providers) including approval for registration on CRICOS for courses delivered by schools

▲ Children for home schooling in Victoria.

The VRQA also:

▲ Regulates apprenticeships and traineeships in Victoria

▲ Approves school and non-school providers as overseas secondary student exchange organisations

▲ Accredits courses and registers qualifications for VRQA-registered providers and senior secondary courses and qualifications in Victoria

▲ Investigates complaints against providers registered in Victoria by the VRQA

▲ Maintains a register of all education and training organisations registered by the VRQA and the accredited courses they deliver.

The VRQA is committed to quality relationships with stakeholders as a strategic priority and has identified annual client and stakeholder research as an important feedback mechanism which has been conducted since 2008. EY Sweeney has conducted the annual research on behalf of the VRQA since 2011.

Feedback was sought from six key audience groups in the 2016 annual client and stakeholder research:

▲ Education and training providers including independent schools, VET and RTOs, non-school secondary education and training providers and overseas student exchange organisations

▲ Education and training provider stakeholders

▲ Apprenticeships and Traineeships (A&T) stakeholders

▲ Apprenticeships and Traineeships (A&T) apprentices and trainees

▲ Apprenticeships and Traineeships (A&T) employers

▲ Apprenticeships and Traineeships (A&T) Group Training Organisations (GTOs)\(^1\).

\(^1\) New audience group for 2016
The final 2016 research program comprised a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods involving:

- 331 internet surveys with education and training providers (with a 65% completion rate; a total of 506 invitations were sent out. This is considered a very good completion rate for an online stakeholder survey)
- 10 phone interviews with education and training provider stakeholders
- 5 phone interviews with A&T stakeholders
- 8 phone interviews with A&T apprentices and trainees
- 8 phone interviews with A&T employers
- 5 phone interviews with A&T GTOs.

All respondents for both the qualitative and quantitative research were provided by the VRQA. Fieldwork took place between 2nd November 2016 and 14th December 2016.

2 A&T apprentices and trainees and A&T employers were previously invited to participate in the study as a survey participant. However in light of the low response rates in 2015, a qualitative approach was used in 2016.
Key findings

Education and Training Providers

Among education and training providers and stakeholders, satisfaction with the VRQA and its products and services has climbed steadily over the last five years

- In the quantitative research, education and training providers’ satisfaction with the VRQA has climbed to the highest level on record, with 85% being ‘very/fairly satisfied’ with the organisation. Staff helpfulness and responsiveness and quality information are key reasons for being satisfied with the VRQA. For the few dissatisfied with the VRQA, communications and perceptions of a lack of support are reasons for discontent.

- From a qualitative perspective, sector stakeholders share a similar positive disposition towards the VRQA. Many praise the VRQA, particularly in terms of responsiveness and the way they conduct themselves. Respondents who enjoyed a healthy level of communication and engagement with the VRQA feel that the organisation understands their needs.

- Utilisation of the VRQA website is high, with 89% of providers accessing the website in the past six months. The website continues to be well received for being comprehensive and up-to-date, with ratings up on last year.

- Nine in ten providers (89%) had made contact with the VRQA within the last 12 months, mainly via telephone or email. Common reasons for contact are general information enquiries, to notify of a change to the organisation or scope, applications, and registration or re-registration.

- Of the providers that had contact with the VRQA, the vast majority (92%) agree that staff demonstrate the RITE values. Staff ratings have marginally improved across all measured service dimensions. This includes helpfulness of information provided, ease of dealing with staff, and promptness of response to requests.

- Attendance at VRQA seminars/workshops has risen since 2015, with 52% of education and training providers attending a VRQA event in the past 12 months. Nine in ten providers who attended a VRQA seminar, briefing or workshop agree that the event kept them up to date with the sector information they need. The seminars continue to be seen as an important source of regulatory information and information presented is widely regarded as relevant and useful. Perceptions of the convenience of attending the meetings/briefing is positively rated, although a high proportion are open to having the information presented as a web based resource.

- More providers (73%) are aware of the e-news this year, and readership remains high (77% read it ‘almost always/often’). Relevance of the e-news content is high, with 80% agreeing that VRQA e-news provides information relevant to operations in their sector. Awareness, readership and content relevance of e-news is the highest on record.
Perceptions of the VRQA’s regulatory processes and its role as a regulator are highly rated by education and training providers and stakeholders

- Education and training providers’ perceptions of the VRQA regulatory procedures continue to improve, with a significant rise in perceptions of the VRQA meeting processing timelines as stipulated on the VRQA website (83%, up 8% points). At least four in five also agree that the VRQA provides clear information relating to requirements, including evidence requirements, provides adequate information in supporting providers’ operations, and provides clear and easy to understand application forms.

- Perceptions of the effectiveness of the VRQA are positive, with 95% of providers rating the VRQA as being ‘highly/fairly effective’. Similar views are shared among education and training provider stakeholders. Of the 10 stakeholders interviewed, all rate the VRQA as ‘highly/fairly’ effective in performing its regulatory function, with equal proportions giving a ‘highly’ and ‘fairly’ effective rating. For some, there is a call for the VRQA to be less ‘process driven’ and to work more closely with clients and stakeholders as sources of intelligence.

- In the quantitative research, education and training providers’ attitudes towards the VRQA’s regulatory performance are positive across all measured dimensions with perceptions steadying after significant increases were observed across a number of measures in the previous year. At least four in five agree that the VRQA is responsive, fair and consistent, supports the interests of consumers of education and training, provides ongoing communication, and is open and transparent.

- From a qualitative perspective, sector stakeholders encourage the VRQA to draw on the support of clients and stakeholders in its regulatory role. As the VRQA considers its objectives for the immediate future, the VRQA could identify specific contributions various stakeholders can make toward the achievement of those goals. Most are well-positioned and informed to act in the best interests of the regulator and the community.
Education and training providers have used a variety of VRQA child safe standards resources and consider them helpful. Similar high regard for the update VET guidelines

- VRQA resources produced for the introduction of child safe standards have been widely used by providers. Resources with the highest awareness include downloadable fact sheets and the VRQA child safe standards website. All resources are regarded to be helpful, particularly the Child Safe Standards Readiness Tool, downloadable fact sheets, SAMPLE child safe standards compliance self-assessment and action plan pro forma, and the VRQA child safe standards website, with at least four in five providers rating each of these to be 'very/mostly helpful'.

- In the qualitative research, the few stakeholders who attended the child safe standards forum consider the event productive and worthwhile. The information and guidance provided by the VRQA in relation to the implementation of the child safe standards represents the kind of consultation and collaboration stakeholders value.

- Awareness of the VRQA resources for the updated VET guidelines is also high. VET providers are most commonly aware of the updated guidelines on the VRQA website, FAQs on the VRQA website, and information provided in the VRQA e-news. All updated VET Guidelines resources have been useful to those that accessed them, with at least three quarters of VET providers finding each of them to be 'very/mostly helpful'.

Apprenticeships and Traineeships

Generally promising feedback from apprenticeship and traineeship stakeholders about their interactions with the VRQA. Low awareness and understanding among apprentices and trainees and their employers of the VRQA’s role

- Most apprenticeship and traineeship stakeholders find their dealings with the VRQA to be responsive and well informed. The VRQA is seen to have a depth of understanding, which makes for straightforward dealings. Stakeholders believe that the VRQA understands their priorities and needs, and that this is enhanced with stronger engagements over time. However, similar to the requests of the education and training provider sector, stakeholders encourage more communication, consultation and collaboration from the VRQA.

- Among apprentices and trainees and their employers, there is low awareness and understanding of the VRQA’s role, and for this reason, a lack of a view on how satisfied they are with the VRQA. With a couple of exceptions, the VRQA is largely an unknown to them, including their communication and events such as the VRQA website, e-news, and the stakeholder breakfast.

- There is a sense that the VRQA should be visible at the outset, particularly in the first year of a new apprentice and trainee’s time when support is needed the most. Most are unsure which organisations involved with apprenticeships can resolve their issues, and are not truly aware of the VRQA’s role. The topics of great interest include health and safety matters, sources of available support, the apprenticeship and traineeship process, concerns about trade school, and how to deal with employers.

- Employers also appreciate contact from the VRQA early on with clear information about apprenticeship and traineeship rules. Employers all liked the simplicity of the VRQA’s employer checklist, although awareness of this list could be improved. A similar list of apprentices and trainees’ responsibilities would also help, when the two documents are combined, they would clarify the expectations of each party.
Favorable ratings of the effectiveness of the VRQA in performing its regulatory role are provided by apprenticeship and traineeship stakeholders

- Of the 10 interviews conducted with stakeholders and Group Training Organisations, all rate the VRQA as ‘highly/fairly’ effective in performing its regulatory function with fairly equal proportions giving a rating of ‘highly’ and ‘fairly’ effective.

- Like the education and training provider sector, stakeholders in the apprenticeship and traineeship sector also welcome the opportunity to work more closely with the VRQA in carrying out its regulatory role. Notwithstanding that VRQA does not regulate all RTOs, it is still seen as a vital component of the network that works to keep apprentices and trainees and employers in check in meeting minimum standards. Opportunity exists to connect with stakeholders as well as apprentices and employers on a more regular basis. This will reflect a listening, street wise and informed regulator.

- Among the few GTOs interviewed, there is strong support on how effective the VRQA had been in its communication of the changes to regulation of GTOs. All GTOs consider the transition to be well managed, the consultative approach highly valued, and the self-assessment as being very useful.

Summary

Perceptions of the VRQA’s performance is strong with satisfaction levels trending upwards over time.

By and large, perceptions of the VRQA’s regulatory performance have steadied after significant increases across a number of measures in the last year. Some marked improvements are noted across a number of aspects, particularly in the VRQA’s responsiveness, consistency, and ‘high quality’ conduct. This includes:

- Improved perceptions of the VRQAs regulatory processes across all measures since 2015, with a significant increase in the ability of the VRQA to meet processing timelines for applications for education and training providers

- The consistency in the organisation’s responsiveness and forthrightness

- Good communication and consultation in relation to the implementation of the child safe standards and the collaborative approach adopted by the VRQA with regards to the changes to the regulation of GTOs.

The role of the VRQA in its regulation of different sectors is seen to be complex and evolving, of which engagement is pivotal in keeping clients and stakeholders satisfied. While staff customer service is commended, there is room for improvement on how the VRQA consults and engages with its clients and stakeholders.

There is a desire for the VRQA to regulate ‘with’ sectors rather than ‘to’ them. Both sectors appreciate more sector involvement from the VRQA, particularly when introducing change, by seeking their participation in co-design, getting their feedback to concepts, and asking for advice. Both sectors want to work collaboratively with a regulator that is seen to be supportive, knowing of what actually happens on-the-ground, and who is well informed to facilitate high quality training and development.

While the VRQA is perceived to have improved on regulating the poor practices of private RTOs, there is still work to be done in this area. Among education and training providers, there is a call for better regulatory services that lead to better training practices and governance, and that support providers. There is also an appreciation for simplified guidelines, better training, and personalised assistance to help deliver better outcomes for the sector.

Opportunities also exist to improve the knowledge of the VRQA’s position across the apprenticeship and traineeship sector. In line with previous years’ results, there is low awareness and understanding of the VRQA among apprentices and trainees and their employers, and a few would regard the VRQA as a main source of information. Many do not know who to turn to, to resolve common issues and neither is truly aware of the VRQA’s role. A clear role exists for the VRQA to improve its position and to support to the sector.
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