



Regulatory ‘turf war’ prospect

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Australia’s higher education sector is facing growing regulatory complexity, with an increasing risk of confusion, duplication and inconsistent regulatory expectations arising from overlapping responsibilities between multiple regulators.

AHEIA Chief Executive Officer, Craig Laughton, said the Association supports appropriate regulation and strong accountability frameworks, but there is an increasing need for greater coordination, clarity and consistency across the regulatory system.

“Universities recognise the importance of regulation and work constructively with regulators.

However, the pace and volume of new regulatory requirements introduced in recent years has created an increasingly complex compliance environment,” Mr Laughton said.

“Many regulators have been established or had their responsibilities expanded independently of one another, often with limited apparent consideration of how their requirements interact with existing regulatory frameworks.”

“The result is a system in which universities can be subject to multiple regulators examining similar issues through different legislative frameworks, reporting requirements and compliance processes. This creates uncertainty about regulatory responsibilities and increases the risk of overlap, duplication and inconsistent expectations.”

Mr Laughton said the issue was not the existence of regulation itself, but the cumulative impact of multiple regulatory regimes operating simultaneously.

“Universities are now navigating an environment characterised by overlapping obligations, complex reporting requirements and a growing number of regulatory touchpoints. Compliance has become increasingly resource-intensive and difficult to manage efficiently.”

“Significant time, expertise and financial resources are being directed towards meeting regulatory requirements. Every additional hour spent managing duplicative or unclear compliance obligations is an hour that cannot be directed towards teaching, research, student support or other core university functions.”

Mr Laughton said there was a strong case for state and federal governments to undertake a comprehensive review of the higher education regulatory landscape.

“We need greater clarity about the remit of each regulator, clearer guidance on areas of shared responsibility and a deliberate effort to eliminate unnecessary overlap.”

“Better coordination between regulators would reduce compliance costs, improve regulatory effectiveness and allow universities to focus more of their resources on delivering high-quality education and research outcomes.”



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Mr Laughton added that more frequent regulatory impact assessments would assist governments in understanding the cumulative burden of regulation and identifying opportunities to streamline compliance obligations across the sector.

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