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# Deregistration of Williams Business College the 'tip of the iceberg'

**ANDREW TROUNSON** THE AUSTRALIAN JULY 30, 2014 12:00AM

**THE looming deregistration of Williams Business College is only the tip of the "iceberg", a seminar on higher education policy has heard.**

"I don't think the university sector really appreciates how deep the bottom of the ocean is," said Stephen Nagle, director of the Holmes Institute private college, noting that many private colleges that had been accredited by the NSW government had yet to go through the reregistration process with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.

Mr Nagle praised TEQSA's success against Williams earlier this month. But he said it was the vocational regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, that had its "work cut out for it".

Mr Nagle's comments come as the federal government plans to open government-funded bachelor degree places to non-university providers and uncap the supply of sub-degree places come 2016.

At the same time it is planning to deregulate higher education fees, raising concerns that students need to be better informed about what it is they are paying for.

Earlier this month the Administrative Appeals Tribunal upheld TEQSA's decision to deny William Business College reregistration on the grounds its finances were too risky. It had been registered by the NSW government in December 2011 just a month before TEQSA took over as national regulation.

Labor higher education spokesman Kim Carr has warned of "bodgy providers" being let through by state authorities potentially qualifying for government subsidies once deregulation takes effect from 2016. However, many will have to face TEQSA ahead of 2016.

Also speaking at the seminar last week, Standards Panel chairman Alan Robson praised TEQSA for "standing its ground" in the Williams case and said its role would be critical as the sector was deregulated.

"We keep forgetting that we did have a period when we had some pretty dodgy providers," Professor Robson said.

"And not just in the private sector; in the public sector there was a bit of dodgy work going on. I have no doubt that there is less now and that is showing that TEQSA is fulfilling an important role and will continue to fulfil an important and distinctive role as the system becomes more deregulated."

Also speaking at the seminar, TEQSA commissioner Michael Wells said TEQSA was monitoring drop out rates.

He compared the need for greater information for students to that of the financial markets were politicians have been strong in pressing for tougher disclosure rules to protect investors such as retirees.

Such transparency was also needed in higher education, he said, while also recognising that students are also responsible for how effective their education is.

“Higher education has a real difficulty because it is a co-produced service, and the risk is partly driven by the student’s behaviour and engagement and partly by the provider and institutional context,” he said.

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