

educator news june 2012

AMT assists ASQA in Administrative Appeals Tribunal Case

Over the past few months, AMT has established a stronger working relationship with the national VET sector regulator, ASQA, cooperating in the prosecution of one of their first major cases against an RTO. We made contact with ASQA at the beginning of March to register our concerns about Nobel College, an RTO operating in Sydney. The college had not been on AMT's radar until mid-January this year when we started receiving a large number of applications from their graduates. We were informed at this initial contact that the college had lodged an appeal with the Administrative Appeals Tribunal but, due to privacy obligations, we could not be given details of their case or the nature of the appeal.

ASQA's legal counsel made contact with AMT in mid-April to establish whether we were willing to cooperate with the tribunal hearing in connection with the College. We were informed at this time that Nobel's registration was cancelled on 28 June 2011 and that the college had immediately lodged an appeal against the decision with the AAT. However, any qualifications issued by Nobel College after 28 June were in breach of the conditions of their deregistration. Essentially, the qualifications were, at best, worthless and, at worst, fraudulent.

The evidence that AMT supplied to ASQA essentially buried the College's appeal. AMT Secretary, Rebecca Barnett, was on hand at the resumption of the tribunal hearing on April 26 in case she was needed to give oral evidence. However, the documentary evidence supplied by AMT was sufficient to kill the case. The College withdrew its appeal the next morning and ASQA's decision to deregister the college was convincingly upheld.

On the balance of evidence, it seems likely that Nobel College has acted in breach of both the old Vocational Education and Training Act 2005 and the new National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011. Given that the college website continued to promote nationally accredited massage therapy training for 10 months after their registration was revoked (quoting their RTO registration number and CRICOS number), it also appears likely that the College was in breach of the Competition and Consumer Act 2010.

AMT has maintained a close dialogue with ASQA to monitor their intentions in relation to pursuing criminal or civil charges against the principal of the college. In the meantime, we embarked on a huge clean up operation, revoking any AMT memberships that had been granted on the basis of bogus qualifications, and notifying health funds and insurance companies of our actions. We will continue to cooperate with ASQA in any intended action and have also made contact with the NSW Police to establish whether we can lodge a fraud complaint against the college.

At this stage, it is unclear whether ASQA intends to lodge further proceedings against the College so AMT has also taken the step of writing to the ASQA Commissioners to urge them to take further action. This letter was cc'ed to the Minister for Health, the Minister for Skills, the Minister for Immigration and the Secretary of DEEWR.

AMT has also lodged two formal complaints with ASQA against two non-registered training organisations offering massage therapy training.



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Budget announcement regarding private health fund rebates for natural therapies

The Federal Government announced a planned review of private health fund rebates for natural therapies as part of a suite of budget reforms in the health arena. In the days following the announcement, the media reports started to feature a 'hit list' of modalities that this proposed review would supposedly be targeting. One report, written by founding members of the Friends of Science in Medicine, declared quite explicitly and specifically that homeopathy, Reiki, aromatherapy, iridology, ear candling, crystal therapy, flower essences, kinesiology and Rolfing were on a target list of therapies that would no longer attract health insurance rebates. On even the most cursory inspection, this list seems a little bizarre since many of the services on it do not currently attract health fund rebates anyway.

Not surprisingly, there has been substantial misreporting of the budget announcement. The actual wording from the budget reads as follows:

"The Government will undertake a review of the private health insurance rebate for natural therapies. The review, which will be overseen by the Chief Medical Officer, will examine the evidence of clinical efficacy, cost effectiveness and safety and quality of these natural therapies.

Following the completion of the review, the Government will introduce, through regulation, a list of natural therapies that will continue to receive the private health insurance rebate. Natural therapy treatments not included on this list will no longer be eligible for the rebate.

Funding of \$1.0 million will be provided to the Department of Health and Ageing in 2012-13 to undertake the review. The savings for this measure are not for publication until the completion of the review."

A media release, available on the Federal Health Minister's website, further states that:

"...the Government will better target the Private Health Insurance Rebate so that it is paid for insurance products that cover 'natural therapy' services only where it is deemed they are clinically effective. The Government's view is that there must be credible evidence that medicines and treatments are effective."

AMT welcomes this budget announcement. Given the strong clinical evidence base for the efficacy of massage therapy in treating a range of conditions, we are extremely confident that health fund benefits for remedial massage therapy will be preserved. We have written to the Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Baggoley, to indicate our support for the review process and will be submitting evidence that demonstrates the clinical efficacy of remedial massage.

Research literacy for massage therapy educators workshop with Professor Jon Adams

AMT is now in the final stages of planning for the research literacy workshop with Professor Jon Adams. The workshop will be held in central Melbourne on Wednesday 22 August. Full details will be sent around with the registration forms soon.

Health Training Package Review

The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council has embarked on the review of qualifications within the Complementary and Alternative Health sector. An initial Industry Reference Group meeting was held on May 1 in the CSHISC offices in Sydney to give an overview of the review process and proposed streamlining of qualifications within the Health Training Package. A subject matter expert group will soon be convened to guide the review of HLT40307 and HLT50307.

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Minutes of the May 1 meeting and other relevant documents are available for download from the CSHISC website:

https://www.cshisc.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=971&Itemid=1000&limit=1&limitstart=2

National Educators' Forum

AMT's National Educators' Forum will be held on Friday 19 October at the Twin Waters Resort, Sunshine Coast. In the morning session, Professor Michael Weir will be talking about AMT's Code of Practice, followed by Peter Johnstone from Queensland's Health Quality Complaints Commission. Other proposed speakers include a follow up session with ASQA's industry engagement manager and Bronwyn Walker from the Industry Skills Council to talk about the Health Training Package review. We will be announcing the full program soon.