



Australian Government
Department of Education

Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education

**Submission to the Joint Standing Committee
on Treaties**

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Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education

Introduction

The Australian Government Department of Education (the department) welcomes the opportunity to update the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties on its inquiry into the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* (the 'Convention'). The department notes the Committee's decision that previous evidence provided under the 46th Parliament is sufficient to proceed with its inquiry.

The department seeks to update the Committee on key developments relating to the Convention, Australia's proposal to ratify in 2022, and the opportunity for a leadership role in the Convention, which will advance Australia's commercial, strategic and foreign policy objectives.

The Global Convention

The Global Convention was adopted in November 2019 and is the world's first international treaty in higher education with global scope. It commits Parties to co-operate through qualifications recognition best practices to encourage access to higher education. Fundamentally, it underpins Australia's international education sector, as recognising overseas qualifications allows the international mobility of students, graduates, academics, researchers and education providers.

Adopting the Global Convention is the culmination of a substantial body of work for the department. Australia, through the department, played a leading role in the development and adoption of the Convention including as Chair of the Drafting Committee in 2017, and provided expert advice during the UNESCO consultation phase between 2017 and 2019. We helped other countries understand the significant benefits that can be realised from the Convention, including improved access and participation to higher education, and supporting higher education quality standards.

Ratifying the Global Convention in 2022

The department sees great benefit in Australia ratifying the Convention in 2022:

- It will deliver tangible assistance to the recovery, growth and diversification of Australia's international education sector, which almost halved in export value, down to \$22 billion, through the global pandemic.
- It will help to create market access and growth opportunities for Australian education providers, as the Convention commits countries to recognise qualifications using diverse forms of delivery, including quality online learning, offshore campus delivery, joint degrees and microcredentials. This gives providers confidence to expand into new and emerging markets, such as online and offshore markets, vital to the sustainability of Australia's international education sector.
- It complements Australia's trade in education services agenda which is being negotiated through some free trade agreements.

- It will boost Australia’s ability to encourage education partners to implement qualifications recognition best principles and practices promoted by the Convention. The Convention provides a dedicated platform for international cooperation in accessing higher education, and to minimise barriers to recognising students and graduates of the Australian education system.
- It will bolster our bilateral and regional education partnerships, sending a strong signal globally that Australia is committed to delivering high quality education, including through diverse and innovative forms of learning.
- Recognising overseas qualifications in Australia, and Australian qualifications overseas, is fundamental to enabling student and graduate mobility, underpinning Australia’s international education sector.

Convention implementation – a strategic opportunity

Becoming an early Party will afford Australia the opportunity to shape the strategic directions and priorities of the Global Convention, including developing a shared global understanding of what is fair and reasonable in the recognition of overseas qualifications.

Current number of State Parties

The Global Convention will enter into force three months after 20 State Parties have been reached. As at 23 September 2022, there are 17 State Parties, with 12 ratifying in the last 12 months. The department understands another eight countries are close to finalising their ratification processes. This makes it likely that the Convention will enter into force early in 2023.

Japan is the most recent country to ratify (13 September 2022), making it the first State Party from the Asia-Pacific region. Other Parties include Norway, Nicaragua, Estonia, France, Romania, Tunisia, Croatia, Holy See, Lithuania, Armenia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Palestine, Sweden, and Slovakia.

Stakeholder and domestic law implications

The international education sector strongly supports the Global Convention. Education peak bodies, skilled migration assessing authorities - many of whom have dual responsibilities as peak professional/occupational bodies, and state and territory governments, provided positive support for the Global Convention.

No changes to domestic law or policy are required to implement the Global Convention. It respects all domestic laws and regulations, and the autonomy of the Australian recognition authorities. Once it enters into force, no legislative changes are necessary, and any administrative changes will be managed by the department.

The Global Convention builds on and fully complements the regional qualifications recognition conventions which Australia has already ratified. These include the *Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education 2011*, and the *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region 1997*. As such, Australia already meets the Global Convention’s substantial obligations.

Conclusion

Ratifying the Global Convention in 2022 will support the recovery and sustainable growth of Australia's international education sector by creating market access opportunities for Australian education providers, and fully complement Australia's trade and services sectors. Importantly, ratifying this year will send a signal globally, that Australia is committed to high quality and innovative education to improve access and participation, as well as qualifications recognition best practice. The department remains at the Committee's disposal to respond to any questions pertaining to the information contained in this submission or any specific provisions of the Global Convention text.