



4 May 2017

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

### **Inquiry into agreement to amend the Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement**

Swinburne University of Technology welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the agreement to amend the Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA).

Swinburne commends the Australian Government for referring this important matter to a parliamentary inquiry, given the significant opportunity to expand upon existing relationships and arrangements with Singapore and to forge entirely new ties.

#### ***An opportunity for Australia***

Singapore and Australia currently enjoy a substantial trade and investment relationship. Singapore is Australia's fifth largest trading partner, and the total trade between both nations totalled \$25.7 billion in 2015. The SAFTA is the second longest standing bilateral free trade agreement to which Australia is a party, preceded only by our agreement with New Zealand.

However, certain roadblocks to Australian suppliers of services in Singapore remain despite the SAFTA, including lack of recognition of qualifications, lack of guaranteed access to Singapore's market and restrictions on the entry of temporary staff to Singapore. These and other matters have been addressed in amendments to Singapore's trade agreements with other nations, including the United States and Japan.

Swinburne therefore recognises the importance of amending the SAFTA, in order to ensure that Australia is not at a competitive disadvantage to other nations which Singapore trades with.



***Expansion of qualification recognition***

Swinburne understands that the recently completed Third SAFTA Review and its adopted recommendations will increase opportunities for higher education exports through greater recognition of Australian qualifications in law (Juris Doctor), medicine and allied health at a number of universities. While we are supportive of this increased recognition, we believe reciprocal recognition could and should be expanded further.

While we understand the Singapore drivers to focus on individual institutions and particular degrees, this is contrary to Australia's domestic legislation ensuring competitive trade practices. While there may be policy merit in singling out individual qualifications to further Government skills policy objectives, this does not extend to individual institutions.

Pursuing the recognition of Australia's qualification framework in free trade agreements is consistent with Australia's international leadership in quality assurance of its higher education qualifications. It would recognise the quality assurance frameworks across agreed disciplines in both jurisdictions and would further expand trade and employment opportunities between both nations.

**Recommendation 1**

That the Commonwealth Government give consideration to seeking the further expansion of reciprocal recognition of qualifications in future amendments to the SAFTA, with a particular emphasis on broader recognition of Australia's qualification frameworks, so that SAFTA can move away from naming individual institutions.

Thank you for taking the time to consider Swinburne's submission.

Yours sincerely,

**Professor Duncan Bentley**  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)  
Swinburne University of Technology