



25 January 2022

Mr Dave Sharma MP
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Mr Sharma,

Re: UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education

I write in support of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education (the Global Convention). As the peak body for Australia's comprehensive university sector, Universities Australia supports the ratification of the Global Convention and looks forward to constructive discussions about the implementation process.

Together with Government, our universities have worked hard to develop and promote Australia's reputation as a world class education destination of choice. Existing policies and procedures of qualification recognition are important to maintaining this reputation with current and potential international students and their families, as well as other key international education partners. Ratifying the Global Convention will broaden this capacity for reputation management with stakeholders worldwide.

As outlined in the National Interest Analysis, the Global Convention is based on several existing regional conventions and is the first UN treaty on higher education with a global scope based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Unlike the five regional recognition conventions, which support qualifications recognition only within a specific region, the Global Convention will support inter-regional mobility through a common legal and contractual frame of reference. It also facilitates inclusion - as well as recognition - of refugees' qualifications, and offers increased protection for students accessing Australian universities' digital offerings. Universities Australia welcomes the broad and inclusive scope of this Convention.

Australia's reputation on the world stage is buttressed by the strong relationships we develop with countries in our own region and beyond. The ability to recognise quality-assured learning outcomes from higher education institutions outside of Australia contributes to building mutual trust between domestic and foreign higher education institutions. Signing the Global Convention will help facilitate and encourage relationships with more institutions than the regional conventions currently enable, which will in turn contribute to positive international relationship-building.

The Global Convention will contribute to enhanced communication between higher education institutions at the global level, with university members learning more about the actual obstacles to internationalisation faced by their partner institutions abroad. Fair and transparent recognition processes enable greater access to international academic mobility for both students and university staff, and this access would be significantly enhanced for Australian students and staff should Australia become a State Party to the Global Convention.

As the Global Convention is ratified by more State Parties worldwide, it will become a welcome mechanism to reduce obstacles faced by international students who have studied in Australia and wish to use their Australian degree in their home country, or indeed any other international location. This would be particularly pertinent for students from nations such as India, should those nations become party to the Convention. In India, Australian qualifications must undergo an approval process and be granted an equivalence certificate to determine comparability with Indian education standards. For Australian degrees that have not yet undergone this equivalence process, degree holders have experienced difficulty when applying for a range of professional roles in India. Broad sign up to the Global Convention would attenuate these challenges, ensuring a degree of transparency in decision-making about qualification recognition.

Similarly, in an increasingly globalised world, our domestic students and graduates will benefit from knowing that their Australian degree will be recognised abroad. This has been a concern for some Australians with three-year Bachelor degrees seeking employment or post-graduate study in countries where undergraduates traditionally study for four years. Australia becoming a Party to the Global Convention may help to mitigate these concerns and should pave a smoother path for Australians seeking to work or study beyond our borders.

The Global Convention signals a shift from an equivalence-based approach – determining whether a foreign qualification is similar to a domestic qualification – to assessment of ‘substantial difference’ that would prevent an applicant from succeeding in further study, research or employment in that area. This shift requires differences in evidence-gathering and assessment processes compared to existing conventions. Universities Australia believes that Australia’s universities will be a significant asset to the Australian Government in planning the implementation phase of the Global Convention.

Given that our universities are already working within the existing regional conventions, they are well placed to provide Government with a clear understanding of the practical implications and potential additional administrative burdens of complying with the Global Convention. They can offer recommendations on how these burdens can be reasonably overcome. A thorough consultation process will be essential to ensure that Australia’s universities are best prepared to implement these changes consistently and in alignment with a broader strategic approach.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Global Convention.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Chesworth
Deputy Chief Executive