



21 January 2022

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

Email: jsct@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Re: Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education

The University of Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties inquiry into the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education. The UNESCO Convention has the potential to promote greater student and graduate mobility, and to enable to better information-sharing between countries relating to qualifications. We commend the Committee for inquiring into the implications of Australia ratifying the Convention, and for releasing the National Interest Analysis as part of this inquiry.

The University supports Australia ratifying the Convention. We note that while the Convention is the first of its kind that is global in scope, Australia is already a signatory to three regional Conventions on the recognition of qualifications. The expectation is that joining the proposed Convention will add to the benefits already delivered by these regional conventions. It will help to improve the recognition of Australian qualifications internationally, thereby enhancing the value and utility of those qualifications, and will provide a forum through which Australia can influence standards around recognition internationally.

Notwithstanding the reputation that Australia's education system enjoys internationally, the Convention represents an opportunity to address areas where the understanding of Australian qualifications could be improved. There is still, for example, confusion concerning the number of years that students spend in school in Australia, with some countries and foreign institutions mistakenly taking the view that students attend for only 12 (rather than 13) years. This confusion acts as a barrier to having secondary and post-secondary qualifications properly recognised. More generally, the Convention should encourage

Professor Michael Wesley
Deputy Vice Chancellor International

Chancellery International
The University of Melbourne
Raymond Priestley Building
The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010 Australia
T: +61 3 8344 0352 E: dvc-international@unimelb.edu.au

streamlining recognition practices, reducing the time and effort required of outbound students seeking recognition for Australian qualifications, and adding to the portability of these qualifications.

The Convention will also make available better information on international qualifications held by those looking to work or study in Australia. This will assist in attracting overseas talent to address skills shortages as well as supporting university admissions practices relating to applications from international students. As noted in the National Interest Analysis, becoming a signatory will allow Australia a dedicated platform to help shape a shared “understanding of what is fair and reasonable in the recognition of overseas qualifications”.

The issue of institutional autonomy concerning admissions remains highly important. The National Interest Analysis emphasises that, under the Convention, higher education institutions remain “fully autonomous in their decisions and in determining standards/requirements” for the purpose of admissions. While the Convention imposes obligations on higher education institutions relating to recognising and assessing overseas qualifications, the University of Melbourne’s admissions framework already meets these, partly due to our observing the requirements of the existing regional conventions. We support institutions being obligated to maintain consistency and transparency in their admissions practices, and to explain decisions to not recognise overseas qualifications. However, it is crucial that these obligations not impinge upon the autonomy of universities and other providers in making these decisions.

Finally, the University encourages the Government to commit to continue to adopt a consultative approach through the implementation of the Convention post-ratification, with a particular view to ensuring that the associated administrative costs are minimised. While acknowledging the sector consultation undertaken last year to aid the development of the *Australian strategy for international education 2021-2030*, we encourage the Government to continue to work with the sector on the administrative changes that will be made as part of the implementation process.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Michael Wesley
Deputy Vice-Chancellor International
The University of Melbourne

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