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Go8 Submission to the Inquiry into the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education

The Group of Eight (Go8) is pleased to make a submission to this Inquiry. Please note that this submission represents the views of the Go8 network and member universities may also make their own, more detailed submissions.

Also note that we are happy for this submission to be published and have no wish for any of it to be treated as confidential

The Go8 represents Australia's world-leading, research-intensive universities. Collectively, we:

- are consistently Australia's highest ranked institutions in the major international ranking systems, with seven of our members in the Top 100 in the world according to the Aggregate Ranking of Top Universities (ARTU), and the eighth member ranked at 102;¹
- educate over 150,000 international students on and offshore;
- attract one in three international students who choose to come to Australia for higher education;
- enrol over one third of all post-graduate students, and almost half of all students in higher degrees by research;
- educate more than half of Australia's medical, dentistry and veterinary students; and
- produce more than half of Australia's science graduates and more than 40% of engineering graduates.²

The Go8's commitment to excellence means we welcome high achieving students from all backgrounds who become quality graduates, and in turn become an integral part of Australia's vitally important highly-skilled professional workforce, and the international leaders of the future.

¹ <https://research.unsw.edu.au/artu/artu-results>

² Go8 Facts of Distinction 2020, https://go8.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Go8-Facts-of-Distinction_web.pdf



The Go8 strongly recommends Australia ratify the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education (the Global Convention). While Australia is already Party to three regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications (Bangkok Convention, Tokyo Convention and the Lisbon Recognition Convention), this Convention is the world's first in higher education with a global scope. It commits signatories to an international framework for cooperation based on best principles and practices in qualifications recognition, to support global mobility.

In an increasingly competitive global skills marketplace, Australia's ratification of the Global Convention should be viewed as an important opportunity to build on a suite of measures focussed on attracting highly-skilled qualified professionals to both study and work onshore filling skills shortages in Australian industry, as well ensuring that prospective international students can have confidence that their Australian qualifications will be readily accepted world-wide.

Recognition of overseas qualifications supports skilled migration and employment in Australia

Australia is experiencing a critical skills shortage at a time when our nation needs more than ever before to build our economy, secure our sovereign capability and protect the health of our community. There is an insufficient pipeline in key areas, including engineers and doctors/medical graduates. Not only must we retain these professionals, but more must be done to attract increased numbers, particularly to our regional and remote areas. Currently, 30% of our medical workforce is trained overseas. All streams of engineering from environmental to civil, and now nuclear, in light of the AUKUS agreement, are critical to our nation's post COVID economic recovery. The National Skills Commission (NSC) in its *2021 Skills Priority List* listed 13 engineering occupations in its highest priority list of *Occupations in current national shortage, with strong future demand*.³ The NSC *Labour Market Information Portal (LMIP)* models that by 2025 there will be a need for over 40,000 additional engineering professionals, not including software engineers.⁴

Pre-COVID, an estimated 16,000 – 20,000 engineers came to Australia annually through temporary or permanent migration pathways. In addition, international students comprised over half (56%) of Australia's higher education engineering graduates. These facts alone highlight the urgent need for Australia to strengthen its sovereign capacity to build a sustainable engineering workforce. The Go8 recently hosted the *Go8 Industry Summit – Securing the future of Australia's Engineering Workforce* to provide the Government with solutions to the critical shortages we are experiencing that will hamper Australia's economic recovery. The Go8 is responsible for educating almost half the nation's engineering graduates. While this is an important input, clearly other inputs are also required to address our nation's shortfall.

The global environment has changed significantly as result of the COVID pandemic. Countries around the world are increasingly aware of the importance of technology in meeting the demands of the future and this has

³ <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/2021-skills-priority-list>

⁴ <https://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/EmploymentProjections>



spurred fierce global competition for talent. This was recognised in the Government’s *Blueprint for Critical Technologies*,⁵ released on the 17 November 2021:

Critical technology advancements over the last few decades... drive our economic prosperity by creating new jobs, securing competitive manufacturing, improving our health and vaccination outcomes, increasing agricultural productivity, modernising our infrastructure and communications, enabling our energy transition, strengthening our defence forces, and most fundamental of all, preserv[e] our democracy.

In order for Australia to prosper in the future, we need capacity to meet the demand for skills in new and emerging industries such as AI, quantum computing, and advanced manufacturing. Our success will be dependent on having an available workforce with the right skills sets and knowledge.

There is no doubt that Australia houses considerable talent already. However, as recognised in Pillar 1 of the Government’s *Blueprint*, domestic supply will not be enough. Australia will need to recruit additional expertise by attracting international talent through targeting high achieving students and researchers.

Australia is not the only country seeking to build its skilled workforce capacity. Other, much larger economies, such as the United States and China, as well as the United Kingdom and Canada, are also putting measures in place to attract international talent to their shores. Canada, for example, is aiming to attract 351,000 migrants in 2021, and another 361,000 in 2022. To put this in context, 300,000 or more migrants have come to Canada only five times since 1867.⁶

As the Go8 recently outlined in its submission to Planning Australia’s 2022-23 Migration Program, this increasingly competitive environment will require a “Team Australia” approach, in which Governments – at Federal and State/Territory levels – industry and universities must work together to address the challenges in a consistent, cohesive way. There is a global war for talent, most prominently in engineering, accounting and medicine. In Australia the impact is significant.

The success of a number of recent Government initiatives will rely heavily on the availability of expert research and highly skilled talent in areas of global demand. These include:

- The landmark statement of intent with the United States on Cooperation in Quantum Science and Technology to exchange quantum knowledge and skills (announced on the 19 November 2021);
- Pillar 1 of the *Blueprint for Critical Technologies*, which acknowledges the importance of researchers, including international researchers, to ensure that as a nation we have the right knowledge and skills to take advantage of, and contribute to, critical technologies (Blueprint released on the 17 November 2021);

⁵ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/ctpc-blueprint-critical-technology.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.cicnews.com/2020/03/canada-to-welcome-up-to-390000-immigrants-in-2022-0313872.html#gs.gqccae>



- The acknowledgement that technology is at the forefront of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with India, including the need to share expertise on cyber, quantum computing, AI, space science, technology and research (Prime Minister Morrison’s speech to the Bengaluru Tech Summit, 17 November 2021); and
- The agreement to strengthen Science and Technology cooperation in the areas of clinical trials and genomic surveillance amongst Quad countries of Australia, India, the United States and Japan (Quad Leaders’ Summit Communique, 24 September 2021).

These initiatives also serve a dual purpose – of both increasing Australia’s capacity in a number of technologically driven areas, but also in deepening our relationships with key international partners, to national and regional benefit.

The Go8’s submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration noted that international engagement – ensuring an ongoing supply of talent comprising the world’s best and brightest – is critical to ensure our new and emerging domestic industries remain at the cutting edge. Australia cannot afford to become an economic and research island and nor can our research-intensive universities, if we are to contribute the Government’s economic goals and boost productivity.

Early ratification of the Global Convention will place Australia ahead of many of our global competitors. It will send a clear signal to tertiary-qualified prospective migrants that their qualifications will be considered within UNESCO’s internationally recognised best practice framework. Attracting sufficient talent to our shores however will require more than ensuring that our overseas qualifications recognition system is world leading. The challenges existing in the broader context must also be addressed if we are to thrive in a new post-COVID environment.

It is also important to recognise that pandemic-related factors, including Australia’s international border closure, may have shifted community sentiment towards incoming migrants and students. Negative sentiment towards immigration in some sectors of the community had been identified prior to the outbreak of the pandemic and before Australia’s borders closed in March 2020. It will be important to assess and address any concerns within the general community through the provision of information and education campaigns, in order to ensure migrants are welcomed and valued by the community. A failure to address this issue could result in the loss of much needed skills and talent.

Supporting diversification in international education

In the highly competitive international education market, where the Go8’s international student market contributes \$17.98 billion each year to the nation’s education export,⁷ it is important for our nation to implement strategies that will keep us competitive. The international recognition of Australian qualifications will aid in attracting the best and brightest international students and also support sustainable growth and diversification of our international education industry.

⁷ https://www.go8.edu.au/Go8_London-Economics-Report.pdf



The Go8 already educates international students from 200 countries, but we believe becoming a Party to the Global Convention will boost Australia's international appeal and lead to greater diversification of our student base, supporting sustainable growth in this economically important sector.

The Go8 is proud of the strong and lasting relationships we have forged with countries whose students receive a world-class education at our institutions. We are aware of the important contribution we make to the nation's soft power, which contributes, among other things, to Australia's standing in negotiating Free Trade Agreements and our attractiveness as a partner of choice for internationally significant strategic agreements. Ratification of the Global Convention will further strengthen our capacity to foster these important bonds with other like-minded countries.

In order to achieve Australia's economic goals, the Government must consider measures to support and encourage highly skilled international students to remain and fill the gaps in our critical workforce. It is important to note that, pre-COVID, 56% of engineers who graduated from our universities were international students. Most of these students left Australia, either returning to their home country or to one of our global competitors. Australia must introduce appropriate policy levers to retain those international students who are integral to our economic recovery and prosperity.

As we noted in our submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration in 2021, it will be important to support social cohesion by ensuring we address some of the false narratives that exist. For example, there is a perception that the majority of international students who come to study in Australia do so with the intention of becoming citizens. In fact, while many students do take advantage of post study work rights (which can extend up to four years), a 2018 Federal Treasury paper found that in reality, only around 16 per cent of international students remain in the longer term.⁸

This suggests that international graduates are a significant untapped resource upon which Australia should seek to capitalise. These graduates are already onshore in Australia; have already invested significant time and experience within their community; and – as graduates – have skills and capabilities that have been verified to Australian standards. Retaining graduates also helps to ensure a workforce pipeline of talent for the future, as graduates become more experienced, eventually moving through to mid and senior career levels and addressing workforce shortages in critical industries.

Concluding Statement

Global recognition of Australian qualifications is critical to facilitating student, academic, education provider and labour mobility, and underpins the success of Australia's international education sector. Early ratification of the Global Convention will demonstrate Australia's continued international leadership in this strategically important policy area, and its commitment to fair and transparent recognition of qualifications. It will also support Australia in its efforts to attract highly skilled and qualified professionals in an increasingly mobile world.

⁸ <https://research.treasury.gov.au/sites/research.treasury.gov.au/files/2019-08/Shaping-a-Nation-1.pdf>, p21



If you have questions regarding this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

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