

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
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*Submission regarding the Inquiry into the
Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications
concerning Higher Education*

Dear Secretary,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to make a submission to this Parliamentary Inquiry.

I note that this inquiry will inquire into and report on the *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* (Paris, 25 November 2021).

In the interests of time and brevity, I will keep this submission short.

As someone who has undertaken tertiary education in a number of disciplines, and has extensive experience as a tertiary educator, I believe this is an important issue which is worthy of a treaty-level formal agreement.

For Australians, and for overseas students seeking to study in Australia, cost is often a significant barrier, and for many, an ultimate disincentive to pursue higher degrees, even if particular degrees are not available in your own country, or may only be available in one or two locations internationally. A lot more could be done to provide financial support, both for Australians wishing to study overseas, for instance in the UK or USA, or for students from developing countries to come here.

I also note that many scholarship programs are only aimed at young people, but it is important to remember that people of all ages may wish to engage in higher education, and once people are grappling with issues such as paying a mortgage and raising a family, their financial resources may be highly constrained. For people already in the workforce, they will often have to forego a large amount of income in order to return to studies, and to study overseas, this loss of income can be compounded by high course costs and high travel and living expenses. As referred to below, for many professions, the option of part-time work may simply not exist overseas. Both lack of access to accreditation and language can be barriers here.

To follow on, the other issue I would like to comment on is that the lack of recognition of professional qualifications is a significant barrier to international mobility.

After graduation, I hoped to spend time working as a doctor in a Scandinavian country, but in the end, due to all the bureaucratic hoops to jump through, it became an impossible dream.

Later on, I was keen to go to the UK to broaden my experience. Once again, as “foreign doctors”, even from an equivalent and highly respected medical training system, had to sit various exams in order to get past ‘first base’, I had to give up on this as well as I had too many other demands on my time and was not in a position to add studying for overseas exams.

The main training route for my preferred medical discipline lies in the USA. Apart from the parallel issue of many positions in this industry generally being restricted to US citizens and permanent residents for security reasons, Australian doctors are not automatically recognised as “ready to practise” in the USA, and must first pass exams such as the USLME before being eligible to apply for

a training program or Fellowship. Since there is at least one US medical school that has an agreement with the University of Queensland for students to do part of their medical course here in Australia, it seems that the quality of our medical training system is recognised, but despite that, Australian-trained doctors must still 'jump through hoops' in order to access even entry-level training in the USA. All this means that there is currently no route for Australians to train in this particular area.

As mentioned above, the combined effect of cost and lack of practising rights becomes a 'double-jeopardy', as the costs of living and studying in the UK and US are so high that it is necessary to have some form of employment to help offset those costs, particularly as you will be foregoing your normal income at home. However, if you can't practise your profession, then you are very limited in your work opportunities and earning potential. Some US Fellowships also have a substantial cost to them – I have heard mentioned a figure of US\$100,000 for 12 months for one in Disaster Medicine.

I appreciate that both the issues I have mentioned are ancillary to the core subject matter of the proposed Treaty, but its power, reach, and benefits would be far greater if consideration was given to the barriers which exist apart from degree recognition *per se*. As a result, I would argue for a more holistic approach.

We are all together on the one planet, and it would be good to see barriers increasingly being broken down in order to help us take the best possible care of the 'one health' that binds together the Earth, humans, and animals. Education and training is key to this. As Nelson Mandela once said, it is the most powerful weapon with which to change the world.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry and would be very happy to provide any further information which would be helpful or to appear before the Inquiry in person.

Thanking you for your consideration,

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