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**Ninth Session of the Regional Committee Meeting for the
Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and
Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific**

in conjunction with the

**Regional Seminar on Regional Harmonization: Establishing
a Common Higher Education Area**

Seoul, Republic of Korea

22-23 May 2007

Country Report

AUSTRALIA

Country Report - Australia

1. Introduction

This report provides:

- a brief overview of the Australian higher education system and recent government initiatives in higher education
- a situation analysis of its cross-border education
- Australia's policies and practices on quality assurance
- Australia's policies on mutual recognition of qualifications in higher education
- international cooperation, bilateral and multilateral agreements, and
- emergent issues relating to recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education.

The Australian Higher Education System

Higher education in Australia generally refers to those institutions which award degrees, although they may also award sub-degree level qualifications. These institutions are principally universities that are established by or under Australian Government, State or Territory legislation but also include a growing number of private higher education institutions – details of which are provided later.

The main purposes of Australian higher education are:

- to enable individuals to develop their capabilities for effective participation in the workforce, for constructive contributions to society and for personal growth and fulfilment;
- to advance knowledge and understanding;
- to aid the application of knowledge and understanding to the benefit of the economy and society;
- to enable individuals to adapt and learn, consistent with the needs of an adaptable knowledge-based economy at local, regional and national levels; and
- to contribute to a democratic, civilised society.

Access to higher education may be based on completion of the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education (Year 12), with admission to undergraduate study often depending on the level and academic achievement of the Year 12 award. In some fields of study entry for school leavers may be based on additional requirements such as an interview, portfolio of work, and/or a demonstrated interest or aptitude for the study programme. Most institutions make provision for the admission of mature age students, who may be admitted without the Year 12 prerequisite if they meet other criteria such as articulation from the vocational education and training sector, relevant work experience, an entrance examination, a demonstrated aptitude for study and/or completion of appropriate bridging programmes.

Higher Education Providers

The Australian higher education system comprises:

- 39 universities of which 37 are public institutions and 2 are private;
- 1 Australian branch of an overseas university;
- 4 other self-accrediting higher education institutions; and
- non-self-accrediting higher education providers (eg faith-based institutions and small specialist organisations) accredited by State and Territory authorities, numbering more than 150 as listed on State and Territory registers. These include several that are registered in more than one State and Territory.

Australian universities are generally comprehensive institutions offering a wide range of programmes. They vary significantly in size, ranging from the largest with around 40,000 students down to the smallest at around 2,000 students. Most have between 10,000 and 20,000 students. Many universities are located in the major cities but there is a significant

number located in smaller regional centres. The larger universities usually have a number of campuses. Most universities are organised on the basis of faculties or schools, but may also have a number of specialised and/or research centres or institutes. Publicly-funded universities obtain their income from a number of sources: government, course fees, industry investment, bequests and commercial activity.

In 2005, 957,176 students were enrolled in Australia's higher education institutions. Of these 70 per cent (665,526) were undergraduate students, 28 per cent (263,504) were postgraduate students, and the remaining three per cent were enrolled in enabling or non-award courses. Most students were enrolled in Australian universities.

In Australia, the approval of higher education providers takes place within a national framework known as the *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes*. These Protocols are an agreement between Federal and State Governments and they establish a common standard and process for the recognition of universities and higher education institutions across Australia. Under the Protocols, a new institution must be accredited by a government accreditation authority. Accreditation involves a process of independent review.

The National Protocols currently recognise two distinct types of Australian higher education institutions – universities and non self-accrediting providers, i.e. institutions which do not have the authority to accredit their own courses.

Universities:

- Protocol 1 specifies the criteria and processes for recognition of Australian universities which, once approved, are not subject to re-accreditation, but are subject to audit by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). Universities are authorised by governments to accredit their own courses.

Non self-accrediting providers:

- Protocol 3 specifies the criteria which cover the accreditation of higher education courses to be offered by non self-accrediting providers. Every course is individually approved and re-approved on a five year basis by a State Government accreditation authority and the provider is also approved to deliver the course. Non self-accrediting institutions generally provide courses within a limited range of fields of study.

The Protocols also cover overseas higher education institutions seeking to operate in Australia (Protocol 2); delivery arrangements involving other organisations (Protocol 4) and the endorsement of courses for overseas students (Protocol 5).

In July 2006 federal and state governments agreed on a revised set of National Protocols which will come into effect from the beginning of 2008. These Protocols will foster diversity in the types of higher education institutions in Australia by allowing for specialist universities, new "university colleges" which are on a pathway towards full university status and the granting of self-accrediting authority to institutions other than universities.

Recent Government Initiatives in Higher Education

Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future

Following an extensive review of Australia's higher education system, the Australian Government released a package of higher education reforms in 2003, entitled *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future*. The reforms provide an increased Australian Government investment of \$A11 billion over ten years. For further information, see http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/policy_paper/contents.htm.

The reforms are enabling universities and students to make informed choices, supported by revised co-financing arrangements underpinned by public financing, increased funding,

subsidised loans and scholarships for students. The Australian Government is providing for around 50,000 new Commonwealth supported places to the higher education sector by 2011 as a result of the *Backing Australia's Future* reforms and other initiatives. The Australian Government is also providing more funding for each Commonwealth supported student, linked to improvements in how universities are managed. In addition, extra funds have been made available for regional universities and new schemes and funding to encourage excellence in teaching, more collaboration between institutions and a renewed focus on equity has been introduced.

Australian Government funding policies have traditionally directed public funding to the public sector. However, recent reforms have opened Australian Government supported loans (FEE-HELP) to students attending eligible private institutions as well as some National Priority places in teaching and nursing. For students at private higher education institutions to have access to FEE-HELP, the institution must meet quality assurance and reporting requirements set out in legislation. Over 50 private higher education providers have met these requirements to access funding.

2. Situation analysis of cross-border education

Australia is primarily an exporter rather than an importer of education services, and during the last decade international students have become a very important part of the Australian higher education scene. Students coming from outside Australia to study at Australian institutions are usually referred to as *overseas students*, and there were 239,495 overseas students enrolled in Australian universities in 2005, most of them paying full tuition fees. Overseas students represent around 25 per cent of all enrolments.

Higher education institutions are also strengthening their international presence by making some programmes available off-shore. In 2005, 27 per cent of overseas students enrolled in Australian higher education institutions were studying offshore.

According to data reported by UNESCO, in 2006 there were 6,434 Australian students studying overseas (not including New Zealand).¹

3. National policies and practices on quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications in higher education

National framework and agencies

Australia has a comprehensive Quality Assurance Framework with responsibility shared between universities, governments, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB).

Degree conferring agencies, quality assurance agencies, accreditation bodies

Universities:

- are responsible for academic standards;
- have appropriate governance structures and academic approval processes;
- are empowered to accredit own awards;
- operate under various codes of practice; and
- have quality assurance processes for teaching and learning and research, which is outcomes-focused.

¹ UNESCO 2006. Global Education Digest 2006: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World. Canada: UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

Australian governments, including the States and Territories:

- legislate to:
 - accredit new universities and higher education courses offered by non self-accrediting providers; and
 - protect the word “university”; and
- use the *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* to ensure consistency of application. The protocols are currently under review.

The *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* cover the:

- recognition of Australian universities (including protection of term “university”);
- approval of overseas higher education institutions seeking to operate in Australia;
- accreditation of non-university higher education courses;
- monitoring of higher education franchising arrangements; and
- endorsement of courses as suitable for overseas students.

The role of the Australian Government encompasses:

- ensuring institutional accountability through funding legislation;
- collection and analysis of data from universities to review performance and assess national needs; and
- ensuring national data is available on quality including:
 - student/staff ratios;
 - retention/progression rates; and
 - graduate employment/salaries.

The Australian Qualifications Framework:

- provides a coherent system of award descriptors from school to PhD;
- lists all universities, other recognised providers and government accreditation authorities in a register (<http://www.agf.edu.au>); and
- ensures integrity of the system.

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA):

- is owned by Australian education ministers, the Board contains representatives nominated by the Australian and State/Territory Governments, universities and private higher education providers, plus the chief executive officer;
- audits quality assurance processes in Australian universities and self-accrediting providers every five years;
- may be chosen by approved non-self accrediting higher education providers to conduct a quality audit;
- audits all government accreditation processes every five years; and
- makes audit reports available to the public at www.auqa.edu.au.

Quality assurance of offshore provision

The 2003 Australian Government’s Ministerial statement on the internationalisation of Australian education and training, *Engaging the World through Education*, committed to:

- working with providers and other stakeholders to develop a framework to ensure that the quality of Australian education and training services delivered offshore continues to be protected and promoted;
- providing seed funding for Australian providers to develop good practice models; and
- enhancing offshore quality audits in the higher education sector.

In November 2005 Australian Education Ministers decided on the Transnational Quality Strategy framework. The framework:

- provides for increased access to data about Australia's transnational education and training;
- ensures that arrangements are in place which continue to protect and promote Australia's transnational education and training so that it remains well regarded internationally; and
- better informs international students and their parents as well as overseas governments, employers and education providers that the quality of Australian education and training delivered overseas matches that delivered to students in Australia.

The state and territory governments of Australia have been working with Australia's education and training system to build on the arrangements currently in place where necessary to ensure that the framework is effectively and efficiently implemented.

The growth of higher education offshore provision has led the Australian Government to undertake initiatives to further strengthen the quality assurance for education services provided overseas by Australian institutions.

The first initiative provides increased funding to the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), to reimburse the direct costs of offshore audits and allow increased sampling of offshore operations of institutions. The quality of Australia's provision of offshore higher education will be detailed in an annual aggregate report, prepared by AUQA.

Information about the Transnational Quality Strategy can be found at www.aei.dest.gov.au/offshore

Enhancement of protection for overseas students

The Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 protects and enhances Australia's reputation for quality education and training services for overseas students who come to Australia on a student visa. It provides a range of consumer protections for students (refunds, tuition assurance and dispute resolution obligations). It achieves this through compulsory, nationally consistent registration of providers and their courses and appropriate enforcement powers and sanctions for non-compliance.

All higher education providers who enrol overseas students onshore must comply with the ESOS Act and its National Code. During 2006, amendments were made to the Act and the Code to:

- enhance protection of international students
- improve the clarity of the regulatory framework
- provide greater autonomy for providers on education matters.

The revised National Code commences on 1 July 2007.

Recognition of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions within and outside Australia

There are no procedures in Australian law whereby an overseas qualification can be formally recognised in educational terms, and the Australian Government has no official or legally binding process for the recognition of overseas qualifications of Australian permanent residents and citizens or of non-residents. There are different levels of recognition in Australia.

Information and advice on overseas education systems and qualifications (as well as on a range of recognition issues) is provided by AEI-NOOSR. AEI-NOOSR resides in the International Policy and Recognition Branch, part of the International Education Group in the Federal Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and is the Australian National

Academic Recognition and Information Centre (NARIC). AEI-NOOSR, which dates back to 1969, is the national expert and coordinating body on the recognition of overseas professional and educational qualifications. Among other functions (noted in more detail below), AEI-NOOSR facilitates and supports recognition decisions made by other bodies.

In Australia, powers to make decisions about international qualifications lie with the following bodies:

- for employment purposes—professional bodies and individual employers;
- for registration/licensing purposes—the State/Territory registration boards;
- for academic purposes—individual education institutions;
- for migration purposes—gazetted assessing authorities and DIAC.

These bodies determine whether the qualification in question:

- can be compared to an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualification; and/or
- has a suitable coverage of appropriate professional skills and competencies; and/or
- demonstrates an appropriate level of educational/academic skills and achievement.

Tertiary institutions in Australia are autonomous and make their own decisions on qualifications gained overseas for academic purposes.

Overseas-trained individuals residing in Australia seeking to practice occupations which are regulated by government (principally health-related professions, legal practice, and architecture) must seek registration with the relevant State/Territory registration boards. When the qualifications of overseas-trained individuals are assessed as part of an application for skilled migration, the competent authority is the relevant approved migration assessing authority. Information about skilled migration and assessing authorities is available on the website of the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (www.immi.gov.au). AEI-NOOSR is responsible for approving assessing authorities before their gazettal by the Minister for Immigration and monitoring their performance to ensure that assessment pathways are fair, accessible, equitable and transparent.

AEI-NOOSR

As noted above, AEI-NOOSR facilitates recognition decisions and promotes fair, equitable and transparent recognition procedures through a number of products and services. AEI-NOOSR:

- provides advice to the Australian Government on recognition matters;
- publishes the Country Education Profiles (CEPs), which describe overseas education systems and provide guidelines for assessing the comparability of their qualifications to Australian qualifications. They are used by professional bodies, registration boards, migration assessing authorities and State and Territory Governments to inform their assessments of overseas qualifications, and by Australian higher education institutions to inform admissions decisions for overseas students. The CEPs are available on-line via the AEI Online Shop at www.aei.dest.gov.au
- provides a national focus for professional bodies and agencies (including State and Territory Overseas Qualifications Units) involved in the recognition of overseas skills, through the provision of advice and information regarding relevant Government policies;
- assists in the development of assessment skills and encourages best practice by other assessing authorities and university admissions officers, through the provision of advice and professional development programmes;
- provides advice to Australia's higher education institutions on the assessment of overseas qualifications for admission purposes;
- undertakes educational assessments of overseas qualifications for individuals;
- provides advice to registration boards and professional bodies with responsibility and competence for assessing the qualifications of overseas-trained professionals;

- assists financially disadvantaged overseas-trained professionals who are Australian permanent residents to meet professional recognition requirements through funding support programmes;
- promotes the mobility of Australian professionals and the recognition of Australian qualifications overseas; and
- approves professional bodies as assessing authorities under the Migration Regulations 1994 2.26B and monitors recognition pathways and assessment practices for overseas-trained professionals.

AEI-NOOSR does not assess trade-level qualifications. These are assessed by Trades Recognition Australia (TRA) - a part of the Australian federal Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (www.workplace.gov.au) – or by trade recognition authorities in the Australian states and territories.

AEI-NOOSR does not formally assess general secondary qualifications, as this is the responsibility of the individual states and territories.

Overseas Qualifications Units

Australian State and Territory Governments all maintain offices, known generically as Overseas Qualifications Units (OQUs), which offer settlement services for permanent and temporary residents, including qualifications recognition. The OQUs provide information and an educational assessment service (free in most states and territories), with assessments based on AEI-NOOSR's Country Education profiles published guidelines. The assessments issued by OQUs may be used for general employment purposes, to assist in application for professional registration or membership of a professional body, or to facilitate admission to further study. The OQUs refer clients with qualifications which are not covered by AEI-NOOSR's published guidelines to AEI-NOOSR for individual assessment. The OQUs are currently supported by AEI-NOOSR through the provision of assessment advice and professional development seminars. Contact details for OQUs are available on the AEI-NOOSR website (www.aei.dest.gov.au)

4. International cooperation, bilateral and multilateral agreements

Activities and actions undertaken to date to enhance international and regional cooperation concerning mutual recognition of qualifications in higher education

Mapping of qualifications frameworks across APEC economies

A very successful 29th APEC Human Resources Development Working Group (HRDWG) meeting, jointly hosted by DEST and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) convened in Brisbane from 17-20 April. The first day Symposium entitled *Recognising Quality* featured internationally recognised presenters on the globalisation of higher education, quality assurance and the utility of diploma supplements. Within the Education Network, DEST reported on its highly regarded study on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (see <http://www.apec.org/> for the press release by the HRDWG Lead Shepherd) and secured endorsement for two new Australian projects: *Mapping of qualifications frameworks across APEC economies* and *Measures Affecting Cross-Border Exchange and Investment in Higher Education in the APEC Region* to further Australia's agenda to promote mobility and trade liberalisation.

The qualifications frameworks mapping project will identify formal and informal qualifications frameworks systems, associated descriptors and quality assurance frameworks, and recognition agencies across APEC economies. It will review existing or planned surveys that may be expected to complement the project, taking into account any surveys conducted or planned by multilateral organisations, including by APARNET (which has collected data on

several individual economies in the region) and by the Brisbane Communiqué Senior Officials' Working Group.

The project will commence in January 2008 and be completed by September 2008. The end-of-project target being a completed account of the formal and informal qualifications frameworks, associated descriptors and quality assurance frameworks, and recognition agencies in the APEC region.

Pilot UNESCO Portal on Recognized Higher Education Institutions

Australia has been an active participant in the collaborative UNESCO/OECD project to develop *Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education*. As part of the UNESCO/OECD work on the Guidelines, experts identified the need for an International Information tool for higher education. UNESCO has agreed to develop an international web-based Portal on Recognized Higher Education Institutions.

Australia is also actively involved in the first steps of a Pilot Portal Project that will support the eventual development of the final *UNESCO Portal on Recognized Higher Education Institutions*. Australia's Education Counsellor to Paris, Mr William Thorn is chairing the Pilot Portal's Steering Committee.

The purpose of the Portal is to improve access to up-to-date, accurate, and comprehensive information on recognised higher education institutions/providers at the international level. This will help students make informed decisions on enrolment in higher education, and protect them from misleading guidance and information, low quality provision, rogue providers, and qualifications of limited validity. It will also be of value to other stakeholders in the field of higher education (ie governments, higher education institutions/providers, quality assurance and accreditation bodies, recognition bodies and professional bodies).

The Portal will function as a global search facility, which allows users to run searches for information from the official national websites of participating countries. The Info-tool will provide access to basic information in the following key areas:

- National higher education systems;
- Quality assurance and accreditation systems and associated bodies (at the global, regional, and national levels);
- Higher education institutions/providers and, where possible, the programmes that they offer (particularly providing information on how and with whom they have been accredited).

Bilateral and multilateral agreements for recognition of qualifications in higher education

Bilateral agreements on recognition of qualifications

Australia maintains a number of bilateral education, science and training relationships within Europe, the Americas, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. A number of these agreements specifically include cooperation on issues relevant to qualifications recognition.

The Government of Australia and the Government of the People's Republic of China have an *Arrangement on Higher Education Qualifications Recognition*. The arrangement was signed on 24 October 2003 and aims to facilitate the recognition of higher education degrees and graduate awards to students in Australia and China as well as their academic credentials, so as to make it easier for students to pursue further academic studies in each other's countries.

In December 1998, the Governments of Australia and Malaysia signed a *Framework Agreement on the Recognition of Academic Qualifications* as a supplement to the

Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation in Education between the two Governments. The Framework Agreement facilitates increased student and academic exchange.

The *Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Education and Training* between Indonesia's Ministry of National Education and Australia's Department of Education, Science and Training was renewed on 10 March 2003. Priority areas of cooperation have been identified including higher education and qualifications recognition.

Australia's Memorandum of Understanding with Thailand was signed on 5 July 2004. It aims to facilitate improved mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications and enhanced credit transfer arrangements between Australian and Thai institutions of higher learning.

Australia has an Educational Exchange Programme Agreement with India that includes examination of mutual recognition of educational qualifications.

Australia also has an agreement with Saudi Arabia which lists among possible avenues for cooperation, the exchange of information about the equivalence of academic qualifications.

The Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement

Australia has only one bilateral treaty-level arrangement for the mutual recognition of qualifications, the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement. In 1996 the Australian Government, States and Territories and New Zealand signed the agreement establishing the Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement (TTMRA). The TTMRA forms a significant part of Australia's and New Zealand's policy of Closer Economic Relations (CER), which aims to develop an integrated trans-Tasman economy. Under the TTMRA, a person registered or licensed to practise an occupation in Australia is entitled to practise an equivalent occupation in NZ and a person registered or licensed to practise an occupation in New Zealand is entitled to practise an equivalent occupation in Australia, without the need to undergo further assessment of qualifications or experience.

Under the TTMRA, registration can be subject to conditions to achieve equivalency of occupations. If a registration authority considered that the qualifications, skills and competencies of a person registered in a jurisdiction were deficient in an area, the Act makes provision for a registration authority to impose conditions on registration, or to postpone or decline registration. Provisions enabling a registration authority to refuse registration require reasonable grounds to form the view that the risk posed to public health and safety could not be addressed by conditional registration. In that case, the occupation would not be considered "equivalent". Additionally, a registration authority may refuse the grant of registration if false or misleading information is submitted through the application process.

Occupational equivalency is also subject to any formal declarations made by a Minister from New Zealand and a Minister from each of one or more Australian jurisdictions, or by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in the context of a review. Such a declaration, by notice in the *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, can declare that specified occupations are equivalent, and may specify or describe conditions that will achieve equivalence.

Free Trade Agreements

With the increase in trade in education across borders and the importance of having qualifications recognised for the purposes of further study and employment, improvements in the recognition of qualifications are increasingly being sought through trade agreements.

Under previously negotiated FTAs, such as with Singapore and the United States, provisions were included that have seen both partners encourage their relevant professional bodies to enter into negotiations on mutual recognition of professional qualifications and/or registration procedures.

Australia is currently involved in FTA negotiations with China, Malaysia, ASEAN and Japan while negotiations will soon commence with Chile and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Qualifications and professional recognition are also an important element of these FTAs negotiations.

Multilateral agreements

Australia is party to two treaty-level UNESCO conventions on the recognition of higher education qualifications.

Asia-Pacific Regional Recognition Convention

Australia became a party to the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific (the Asia-Pacific Regional Recognition Convention) in 1986. Australia is committed to contributing to the development of academic recognition practices within the region and to promoting the exchange of information between assessors, as mechanisms to facilitate academic, student and professional mobility. Australia has taken an active role in the working party that was reviewing the convention prior to this meeting.

Lisbon Recognition Convention

Australia signed the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (the Lisbon Recognition Convention) in September 2000. Ratification occurred on 22 November 2002 and entry into force on 1 January, 2003.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention aims to improve the international assessment and recognition of higher education qualifications. The most important obligations placed on the Australian Government as a result of ratifying the Lisbon Recognition Convention concern assessment practices in Australia. These are:

- to endeavour to ensure that the procedures and criteria used in assessment and recognition of qualifications (for example, awarded by autonomous higher education institutions) are transparent, coherent and reliable;
- to encourage higher education institutions to recognise higher education qualifications conferred by a recognised higher education institution in another Party, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the qualification conferred and the corresponding qualification in Australia; and
- to endeavour to ensure that a holder of a higher education qualification issued in one of the other Parties to the Convention can obtain an assessment of that qualification upon request.

Other obligations include:

- encouraging all education institutions to comply with any reasonable request for information for the purpose of assessing qualifications earned at that institution; and
- ensuring that clear and adequate information on its education system is provided when requested by other Parties for assessment purposes.

The treaty also obligates Australia to maintain a National Information Centre (NIC). The functions of the NIC are to facilitate access to authoritative and accurate information on the Australian higher education system and qualifications and the higher education systems and qualifications of other parties. AEI-NOOSR is the national expert and coordinating body on skills assessments and recognition, and carries out these functions.

Update on the Diploma Supplement Pilot Project

Australia has an obligation under the Lisbon Convention to “promote the use of the UNESCO/Council of Europe Diploma Supplement or any other comparable document” (Article IX.3).

A Diploma Supplement is an attachment to an academic or vocational award which describes in a form which can be understood internationally:

- the award, its level, duration, mode of study and subjects completed
- the standing of the qualification in employment or professional terms
- the status of the award and the awarding institution
- the national education system at the time of the award.

Its purpose is to make the qualification more portable and its value more transparent. It addresses problems faced by employers and assessing bodies in the recognition of international higher education qualifications.

In response to its ratification of the Lisbon Convention in 2002, the Australian Government funded a pilot project to identify the costs and implications of issuing the Diploma Supplement for a small sample of Australian higher education institutions. A further trial of the Diploma Supplement in 2005 considered, in detail, system requirements and costings. A consultancy study was also undertaken in 2005 to identify good practice in developing and implementing the Diploma Supplement in Australia, which raised the importance of increasing the awareness of the purpose of the Diploma Supplement in Australian higher education institutions.

During 2006, the Minister for Education, Science and Training issued a discussion paper, *The Bologna Process and Australia: Next Steps*, and consultations were held by DEST with the higher education sector and peak professional bodies on the implications of, and possible responses to, the Bologna Process in Europe. There was strong support for an Australian Diploma Supplement, indicating potential for widespread take-up by Australian universities.

In September 2006 the Australian Government announced it would provide \$400,000 for a consortium of universities to develop a single agreed template for an Australian Diploma Supplement. The successful consortium, representing 14 universities led by the University of New England, the Australian National University, and the University of Melbourne, commenced the project to develop the template in January 2007. The consortium is expected to complete the project by January 2008.

Brisbane Communiqué

On 4 April 2006 Australia hosted the inaugural Asia-Pacific Education Ministers meeting in Brisbane. Twenty-seven Ministers and senior officials from countries from Turkey to the Marshall Islands met under the following theme:

“What actions on education and training can be agreed that will strengthen good relations in the region; and underpin its social and economic development, through the international mobility of students and research collaboration?”

The ‘Brisbane Communiqué’ was released at the conclusion of the conference, in which Ministers agreed to collaborate on a number of broad goals to encourage and facilitate regional student and academic mobility and exchange, and to address barriers to these activities. Ministers agreed to work towards four key goals:

1. Quality assurance frameworks for the region linked to international standards, including courses delivered online
2. Recognition of educational and professional qualifications

3. Common competency based standards for teachers, particularly in science and mathematics
4. Development of common recognition of technical skills across the region in order to better meet the overall skills needs of the economic base of the region.

5. Emergent issues relating to the recognition of studies, diplomas, and degrees in higher education

Issues concerning recognition of academic qualifications in the context of the changing environment of higher education such as e-education, transnational higher education, virtual universities, corporate universities etc.

Quality Assurance in higher education is a topic of significant interest, as it is tied to a nation's capacity to have its qualifications internationally recognised. Australia is currently exploring the merits of developing bilateral relations with overseas audit /accreditation agencies. Australia is an active participant in various fora to enhance international and regional cooperation concerning recognition of academic qualifications, including the UNESCO/OECD project to develop the *Draft UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross Border Higher Education*, which was referred to earlier.

Quality assurance in Australian transnational education

Education is a highly innovative field, and a key innovation has been to deliver Australian education and training to students offshore, known as cross-border or transnational education. There are many different means of transnational delivery, including offshore campuses, twinning arrangements and delivery through partnership arrangements with local institutions. Each year, more than 100,000 international students are enrolled in Australian transnational courses, comprising approximately one quarter of all international student enrolments in Australian education and training.

As providers develop and apply new practices, it is vital that transnational education and training activities continue to meet the demands for quality by international students, their parents, governments and potential employers.

To respond to this challenge, the Australian Government has invested \$A10.6 million over four years to assure the ongoing excellence of Australian education & training as transnational activities expand.

As indicated earlier, the Australian Government worked with state and territory governments and Australia's education and training system to develop the Transnational Quality Strategy framework to protect and promote Australian transnational education and training.

Information is available at <http://aei.dest.gov.au/offshore>.

In relation to the issue of the recognition of qualifications awarded following non-conventional programmes of study (such as on-line study or study at a transnational institution), Australia does not consider that study undertaken by these means is necessarily an obstacle to effective recognition. AEI-NOOSR's guidelines for the assessment of educational qualifications do not differentiate between qualifications awarded following traditional programmes of study undertaken on campus and those awarded following distance education of some kind, including on-line education or study at an overseas campus of the awarding institution. Instead, AEI-NOOSR's assessment methodology relies on assessment of a range of factors, including:

- the education system - this can include historical factors and influences, the organisation of the quality assurance measures

- the status of awarding institutions in the country of origin; i.e. whether it has the appropriate authorisation to make the award in question in the “home” education system and considerations such as resources, staffing and quality assurance mechanisms
- entry requirements to the programme of study undertaken - this can include the level of education required for entry to programmes of study, the role of entrance examinations, and the competitiveness of entry
- the programme structure, including its level, length, structure, orientation, breadth and degree of specialisation.

Relevance of the 1983 Regional Convention for Asia and the Pacific to the changing context of higher education and suggestions for its revision

Australia considers that it is of great importance that we use the Regional Convention for Asia and the Pacific and its Committee to continue and intensify our efforts to improve the current arrangements for qualifications recognition in our region. Qualifications recognition is a complex activity requiring a variety of considerations. Australia acknowledges that the assurance of comparable quality between two systems is an important part of the recognition of qualifications and that there is great value in fostering regional quality assurance arrangements.

There are considerations other than quality involved in the qualifications recognition process between two or more countries, including:

- the differing structure and characteristics of the underpinning systems of school education;
- differences in the length, structure or level of specialisation of the respective programmes of study;
- differences in the way programmes are delivered (for example, by distance education or by traditional study on campus) which may in some cases lead to different educational outcomes;
- variation in the practice of an occupation or profession for which the qualification is intended to prepare graduates where appropriate; and
- differing assessment methodologies in the countries concerned. For example, some countries may be more concerned with the length or structure of the programme or the mode of study, while other countries may place more emphasis on the competencies or outcomes achieved at the end of the programme of study and training.

Australia considers that establishing a stronger regional network of recognition bodies and (where possible) bilateral and multilateral recognition arrangements with other countries is the most appropriate and effective way to understand and recognise the differences that exist in higher education sectors in regional countries and to develop effective mutual recognition arrangements.

A good, cost-effective example of the value of developing a strong recognition network is seen in the Europe-based ENIC-NARIC Network. Australia believes that there is an urgent need for the establishment of National Information Centres like the ENIC-NARIC in this region. The Centres would consist of nominated individuals in each country through whom questions related to qualifications recognition could be directed and responded to with authority. These centres would use a list server to exchange information on education systems and qualifications (APARNET).

As part of being a signatory to the Asia Pacific Convention, Australia believes National Qualifications Frameworks are an essential first step toward qualification recognition. Qualification recognition should be considered for all modes of delivery and all education and training qualifications. Furthermore, Australia - as a signatory to the Lisbon Convention -

strongly supports the principle that 'recognition should be granted unless substantial differences can be shown'.

Australia welcomes the review of the Regional Convention. However, some fundamental questions need to be addressed, namely:

- Why have so many countries in the region not ratified the Convention?
- How can drafting a new Convention assist with qualifications recognition in our region?
- How will a Convention drafted in 2007 help in resolving recognition matters we are facing?