

SPEECH TO GRONINGEN DECLARATION NETWORK (GDN)  
CONFERENCE, MELBOURNE, 26.4.17

Thanks for invitation to speak today – this is a great honour.

Thanks especially to:

Minister (Senator Scott Ryan, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister  
for Cabinet)

Neil Robinson, our Chair

President of the Groningen Declaration Network, Victoriano Giralt

...and Prof Barney Glover for your kind introduction

[Opening remarks, welcomes etc.]

The sixth annual Groningen Declaration Network Meeting has brought us all together under the theme of *Extending Engagement*. This theme, and indeed the Groningen Declaration Network itself, could not be more fitting in a higher education environment in which student mobility across borders both institutional and national leads to increasing demands for access to online information on qualifications, credentials and all the details of an individual's academic history. From its inception, Groningen's goal has always been to make the secure portability of student data a reality and thanks to the commitment of peak bodies, governments and of course the higher education providers themselves, this is becoming a

reality. The fact that the Groningen Declaration now has over 50 signatories, with two more to come this meeting, from organisations in over 20 countries, speaks of the Declaration's, and indeed the Network's, growing value. It also speaks of the importance of empowering students to be able to use their credentials when they want to, where they want to.

For all of the countries represented here today international HE is both a vital activity and an expression of vision and principle – and this is certainly true of Australia. Australia's international education sector is one of the most diverse in the world, attracting around nearly ½ a million of the world's international students to our shores – over 55% of whom are enrolled in higher education. And we can add to those numbers the many thousands (around 64,000) of students pursuing Australian qualifications transnationally, through offshore campuses and partner institutions. This number has been increasing year on year and has led to the creation of the Council for International Education by the Australian Government. This Council is supporting the implementation of the National Strategy for International Education and the continuing growth of this \$21billion a year industry – Australia's third largest. Interest in studying in Australia is also expected to increase due to global events which

continue to highlight us as a safe destination for students from all over the world.

*So Extending Engagement* matters enormously to Australia – and it matters enormously to TEQSA too. TEQSA, as the national HE regulator and quality assurance agency, has strengthened its commitment to the international dimension of our work through the adoption of our International Engagement Strategy for 2016-2020. An international sector must be supported by a QA agency which is itself thoroughly international in its outlook and approach. This strategy is not only allowing TEQSA to further its vital role in quality assurance at home and overseas, but also ensures that we continue to enhance Australia's international effectiveness in higher education regardless of its location of delivery. To date, TEQSA has signed memoranda of understanding and cooperation with 13 international quality assurance agencies in countries as diverse as Papua New Guinea and China, Dubai and Malaysia. All of these agreements form a vital part of TEQSA's key objective to promote the role, importance and effectiveness of Australia's quality assurance and regulatory system, and the HE sector which it supports, nationally and internationally.

TEQSA's objects, set out in the Act of Parliament that established us in 2011, include: to "protect and enhance Australia's reputation for higher education", "to protect students...by requiring the provision of quality higher education" and "to ensure that students have access to information relating to higher education in Australia".

Key words there: STUDENTS – QUALITY - INFORMATION

So our perspective on the work being done by all of you through your commitment to the Groningen Declaration is unequivocally one of academic quality, and academic integrity, and the vital importance of both in underpinning the world of student-driven mobility which we now inhabit.

*"Citizens worldwide should be able to consult and share their authentic educational data with whomever they want, whenever they want, wherever they want",*

is, as you know, the goal of the Groningen Declaration. For us and other quality agencies, this ambition takes its place in a context of an increasing and deepening network of relationships between the quality and qualifications frameworks of the world. Before coming to Australia, I worked for the UK's Quality Assurance Agency - QAA. QAA is the custodian of the UK's national HE Quality Code – but that Code is also aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, within a framework set by the European Higher

Education Area, and assured by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA). Here in the Asia Pacific, TEQSA is a member of the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN), which is working to build the Asia Pacific Quality Register. The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, with over 300 member agencies, aligns quality assurance procedures around the world with its Guidelines of Good Practice. And through the Quality Beyond Boundaries Group, TEQSA is working to align our regulatory expectations with those of six other countries playing a key role in transnational HE, to the benefit of providers through lessened regulatory burden and to students through the increased trust that promotes mobility. The possibility of a truly global alignment of qualifications and quality assurance frameworks may still remain a goal on the horizon but it is one which, step by step, is getting closer.

And none of this of course is principally for the benefit of QA agencies themselves – the purpose is to support providers wishing to offer courses and programs in other countries, to support students who wish to travel to study or to build portfolios of learning from several, perhaps many, providers in many different locations. The quality comes from the providers and students themselves; agencies like TEQSA exist to underpin the frameworks within which that quality can be recognised, exported, trusted and used to build

individual learning programs and careers. But, I repeat, quality is from the sector itself – which is why we are so supportive of initiatives like the My eQuals project, launched here today: the sector coming together and addressing the challenge of qualification and credential security. While government and peak body assistance is vital, sector driven initiatives are just as – and arguably even more - important. As we have seen, services such as My eQuals are ensuring the higher education sector actively meets ever changing expectations and needs of both students and employers. That is why TEQSA, and indeed I personally as a member of its Steering Group, have been supportive of My eQuals since its initial inception.

The challenges faced by us all in advancing the vision of the Groningen Declaration are many. TEQSA is active in the battle against breaches in academic integrity through cheating, impersonation and fraud and My Equals, as well as being a vehicle for student mobility, will be a powerful defence against the rising problem of qualification fraud and forgery. The attempts to build internationally robust frameworks for quality assurance will continually come up against national priorities and even barriers, particularly at a time when international tensions are leading to new demands for protectionism. And the very freedoms offered by online HE delivery can threaten to break through much of the traditional

structure of higher education: we see the example of MOOCs that offer combinations of content that are driven entirely by student choice, which may well not fit into the qualifications of a single provider or even country. Indeed, in online education we see in sharp focus many of the opportunities and challenges that the Groningen Declaration and all it represents set out to address.

The increasing popularity of online education around the world is breaking down barriers between providers and countries alike. While most students still attend traditional campus-based lectures and tutorials, the online provision of content and services has increasingly become an integrated feature of educational delivery and indeed an expectation of many students. Blended learning models enable student to access resources, interact with each other and their teachers and learn online. We're also, both in Australia and abroad, seeing a progressive increase in students choosing to study *completely* online. Australian online education grew by almost nine per cent during 2012-2017 which, while bringing with it challenges for quality assurance agencies and regulators, has accelerated the sector's development into a truly transnational community. The development of communication technologies have, as we know, contributed to massive increases in economic, cultural and political participation – and the same too can be said for education participation. Online learning allows people who are faced with

distance or even time barriers, to further their education in a way that suits them and their needs.

TEQSA is acutely aware of the increased interest and activity in online education, and our focus has been, and will continue to be, on ensuring students who choose to study online receive the same quality of education they would within campus walls, even if delivery and the learning experience differ greatly. Recently, TEQSA's engagement with the challenges of assuring the quality of online education has led to work with APEC, the organisation for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. This work has allowed us to share what has been learnt with APEC member economies including Vietnam, China, Mexico and Indonesia. This international collaboration is helping to build confidence throughout the region, both in TEQSA's approach to online quality assurance and the implementation of similar risk- and standards-based approaches in member economies. In such confidence lies the basis of trust that underpins mobility –and it is therefore a key way in which QA agencies can help build an educational environment which is supportive of the goals of the Groningen goals.



The notion of education quality is one about which you will hear a lot of over the coming days. As student numbers increase, so too do the number of higher education providers. The balance that TEQSA, and indeed quality assurance agencies around the world, need to manage is that of supporting a sector that is meeting demand, maintaining quality and, above all, supporting students in their choices, their journeys and their goals. We want to play our part with you in ensuring that the Groningen vision is achieved.

THANK YOU

Anthony McClaran

CEO, TEQSA

Melbourne, April 2017