

# Universities Australia

Presentation by Mr David Rome, Interim CEO, Universities Australia

Thursday 31 May 2007

Plenary Session 1

11.30am-1.00pm

Chair: **Dayanand Dongaonkar**  
**Secretary General**  
**Association of Indian Universities (AIU)**

Topic: ***Role of university associations in promoting and enhancing quality culture in higher education across borders – a ‘Universities Australia’ perspective***

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Thank you Mr Chairman for your kind introduction.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of *Universities Australia* – up until ten days ago known to many of you as the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee – I would like to thank the International Association of Universities (IAU) and the Conference of University Presidents of France (CPU) for the opportunity to contribute to the IAU’s Second Global Meeting.

*Universities Australia* was pleased also to have been invited to participate in the IAU’s inaugural Global meeting held in Alexandria in November 2005.

On that occasion *Universities Australia* was represented by Professor Millicent Poole, then Vice-Chancellor of Edith Cowan University in Western Australia, and a member of the AVCC Board of Directors.

Professor Poole’s presentation examined the topic, “Cross border education expansion: what policy level response for Associations?”

In seeking to build on the issues addressed by Professor Poole at that meeting, and on those matters included in the *Universities Australia/AVCC* profile in your program notes, I thought it would be most useful to focus my remarks on four key facets of *Universities Australia's* charter and activities that relate to its role in promoting and enhancing the quality of higher education across borders.

They are:

1. Advocacy and government relations strategies and activities;
2. Policy statements, codes and guidelines;
3. International cooperation and collaboration; and
4. Research projects managed by *Universities Australia*.

**Firstly, *Universities Australia's* advocacy and government relations strategies and activities.**

The key role of *Universities Australia* is advocacy for higher education in the public interest, both nationally and internationally.

To this end, one of the main objectives of our advocacy and government relations activities is to secure effective national investment in higher education to underpin the international quality of Australia's universities, their staff and students.

*Universities Australia* believes, in particular, that sustained public investment in core university teaching and research – at an internationally competitive level<sup>1</sup> – is critical if we are to maintain and grow the quality of teaching and research provision and outcomes in our universities and across campuses, be they in Australia or offshore.

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<sup>1</sup> 'internationally competitive level' = public investment that keeps pace with (if not ahead of) Australia's OECD competitor countries

*Universities Australia's* advocacy on international education issues is aimed at ensuring positive outcomes for universities, their staff and students from government policy, funding and legislative decisions, and from the actions of other groups and individuals related to higher education.

*Universities Australia's* strong positions and representations have resulted in many points of concern to the university sector being accommodated – particularly in the federal political sphere.

Two examples to support this claim:

- (i) Through *Universities Australia's* active participation in the recent major review of the *Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000*<sup>2</sup> we were able to convince the Government to not proceed with its proposal that would have required ALL international students (and effectively ALL students) to have their attendance marked in some way, including a required minimum 80% attendance for each student.<sup>3</sup>
- (ii) Through *Universities Australia's* participation on the Transnational Quality Strategy (TQS)<sup>4</sup> Working Group, we are creating a TQS system that acknowledges the differences between schools, vocational and technical education providers and universities operating offshore.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, through the associated TQS Working Group, we are working to ensure that the data collected on Australia's offshore education and training activities are sound; and that the quality assurance trials supporting the Strategy represent 'good practice'.

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<sup>2</sup> The ESOS Act is federal legislation which mandates a nationally consistent approach to registering education providers so that the quality of the tuition, and care of students, remains high.

<sup>3</sup> Such proposed changes are viewed by Universities Australia and its individual member universities as a bureaucratic intrusion on each university's autonomy; inappropriate in the university context, especially in relation to adult learners who engage in their own ways in their courses of study.

<sup>4</sup> The Transnational Quality Strategy is being developed to protect and promote the quality of Australian education and training being delivered offshore.

<sup>5</sup> Trial QA assessments are being run in respect of non-university providers (that currently do not have arrangements similar to those applying to university sector). These trial assessments are intended to identify the best way to conduct future QA arrangements for sector-specific assessments.

*Universities Australia*, and individual *Universities Australia* members, participate on a range of national policy and advisory bodies, the work of which is entirely focussed on – or relates in part – to the quality of Australian higher education provision, whether at home or abroad.

Membership of the Transnational Quality Strategy Working Group, for example, includes:

- representatives of federal and state education departments;
- public and private education peak bodies (from the schools sector, the vocational and technical education sector, to the university sector); and
- the international student peak body, the National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia.

This diverse working group has agreed that a successful transnational quality strategy should include:

- internal and external quality assurance arrangements<sup>6</sup> that are rigorous, accountable and cost-effective – and that build on existing arrangements wherever possible;
- a multi-sectoral approach<sup>7</sup>;
- clear understanding of ‘equivalence’<sup>8</sup> between onshore and offshore courses;
- continued liaison with overseas governments; and

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<sup>6</sup> Internal QA arrangements = QA procedures and processes of each university. External QA arrangements = AUQA procedures and processes

<sup>7</sup> Multi-sectoral approach = encompassing schools, vocational and technical education institutions, universities, private education providers and ELICOS providers.

<sup>8</sup> In the context of onshore/offshore QA, ‘equivalence’ needs to be interpreted as a measure of outcomes (for academic, student support & staff development) rather than inputs to enable compliance (ref. AVCC Report on Offshore QA Projects 2005).

- on-going consultation among governments (national/state/territory) and the education industry for effective and efficient implementation.

## **Secondly, *Universities Australia's* policy statements, codes and guidelines.**

A number of these policy statements, codes and guidelines are fundamental to *Universities Australia's* commitment to promoting and enhancing a quality culture in higher education across borders.

In particular:

- the ***Universities Australia Statement: Australian University Quality Assurance***<sup>9</sup>; and
- the *Universities Australia* publication, ***Universities and their Students: Principles for the Provision of Education by Australian Universities***<sup>10</sup>, and related codes and guidelines.

To quote the ***Principles*** document itself:

*The provision of education, whether in Australia or offshore, by Australian universities brings with it the ethical commitment that quality education be provided and that value be given for the investment made by students.*

Members of *Universities Australia* are committed fully to the educational, legal, ethical and financial provisions of the ***Principles*** and the various codes and guidelines.

Importantly, all *Universities Australia* member universities are signatories to ***the International Code***.

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<sup>9</sup> *Universities Australia Statement: Australian University Quality Assurance* is available at:  
<http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/publications/policy/statements/AustralianUniversity-QA-2005.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> The *Principles* publication is available at:  
[http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/publications/policy/statements/Principles\\_final\\_Aug2005.pdf](http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/publications/policy/statements/Principles_final_Aug2005.pdf)

It incorporates the *Universities Australia* Code of Practice and Guidelines relating to the provision of education to international students by Australian universities.

Both the *Principles* document and the *International Code and Guidelines* apply to **all students and all courses – domestic and international; onshore and offshore.**

None of these publications is set in stone.

They continue to be reviewed and improved to reflect the changing and dynamic nature of higher education provision, at home and abroad; and with the objective of ensuring a high quality learning environment that supports the diverse range of students within each university's funding context.

The International Code, first published in 1989, last revised in 2005, is scheduled to be reviewed next year.

### **Thirdly, *Universities Australia's* role in international cooperation and collaboration.**

As each of the associations represented here today would attest, international cooperation and collaboration are two of the most important contributors to the promotion and enhancement of the quality of higher education across borders – a key point - sometimes perhaps, not fully recognised by governments.

In this realm, *Universities Australia* seeks to develop and sustain mutually beneficial, active and lasting relationships with university sectors and sister organisations across the world.

Among other things we look at ways to:

- promote staff and student exchanges;
- strengthen research links and collaboration;
- collaborate in enhancing university management; and
- promote mutual recognition of qualifications.

In prospect are a number of forums and joint ventures involving *Universities Australia* and a number of the national associations represented here today, in which discussion of transnational quality issues is an increasing focus.

These include:

- a joint meeting of *Universities Australia* and the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) in India, scheduled for November this year (building on similar forums held in 2005 and 2006);
- The Latin American Executive Leadership Shadowing Program to involve Australian representatives participating in elements of the program to be held in Chile, Colombia and Mexico. This is a reciprocal program, following the inaugural program held in Australia in September last year;
- The Thailand University Administrators' Shadowing Program (TUAS)<sup>11</sup> – this is the first of the collaborative shadowing programs with which *Universities Australia* has been involved, which began in 1995. The next program is proposed to be conducted for the first time in Thailand in September this year;
- The China University Administrators' Shadowing Program (CHUAS)<sup>12</sup>, an annual program for senior administrators and research leaders of universities in Australia and China. This program was first run in 1999, and the next program is proposed to be held in Australia later in the year; and
- The China-Australia Middle Managers Program (CHAMMP)<sup>13</sup> which was established in 2005. This year's program begins in China today.

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<sup>11</sup> The TUAS Program aims to contribute to long-term education, training and research linkages, both institutional and individual, involving Australian senior executive university staff and their counterparts in Thailand.

<sup>12</sup> CHUAS is a reciprocal program established under the formal agreement between Universities Australia/AVCC and the China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE). CHUAS provides first-hand, on site experience aimed at greater understanding between Australian and Chinese universities, and to stronger personal and institutional links.

<sup>13</sup> Similarly to the CHUAS Program, the CHAMMP initiative aims to build links and collaboration between Australian and Chinese universities by facilitating knowledge and skills exchange at the middle management level.

**Fourthly, *Universities Australia's* involvement with research projects relating to quality higher education across borders.**

From time to time, *Universities Australia* takes on the role of project manager for Government-commissioned studies, and joint projects with other peak bodies.

As indicated in your program notes, *Universities Australia* acted as Project Manager for an Australian Government-funded initiative commencing in 2004, which supported 15 offshore quality assurance projects involving 14 Australian universities (with total funding of AUD 1.35 million).

While the 15 projects took different approaches and addressed different aspects of offshore quality assurance and good practice, there are a number of recurring lessons that emerged.

*Universities Australia's* analysis of the projects as a group has identified a number of critical success factors for offshore quality assurance:

- that offshore activity must fit within the overall university strategy;
- that due diligence must be observed when establishing programs offshore;
- that foreign government regulations must be understood and observed;
- that equivalence must be considered as a measure of outcomes (for academic, student support and staff development) rather than inputs;
- that universities need to be flexible in their programs to allow for the impact of language and culture on pedagogy, learning and student support, and professional development for staff; and
- that partnerships need to be built on open communication and mutual goals. It is essential that a partnership be more than commercial in intent to ensure successful outcomes for universities, partners and the staff and student body.

The outcomes of the projects have reached a wider audience within Australia, with federal government support through Australia Education International (AEI). They continue to be referenced and drawn upon as constructive examples of good practice in the provision of offshore higher education.

### **In conclusion**

Actively pursuing these facets of *Universities Australia's* charter and activities, that relate to promoting and enhancing the quality of higher education across borders, must be set against the political, legislative and regulatory frameworks which impact on our operations.

Our collective, overarching objective must remain sustaining and improving quality, quality assurance and academic excellence wherever our universities, staff and students are located.