

Speech by Senator Scott Ryan, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Cabinet

Opening of the Groningen Declaration Annual Network Meeting

It is a privilege to be here in Melbourne representing the Minister Senator Simon Birmingham.

Higher education is an increasingly international venture. Whether it is Australians choosing to work overseas after completing their studies at home; international students undertaking a degree here and then taking their qualification back to their home country or Australians choosing to study abroad and then work locally – global movement for higher education is increasingly commonplace.

It is therefore necessary that expanding education links between Australia and the world through student mobility is a key priority for the Turnbull Government.

With the global movement of higher education students, universities and employers need to know that the qualifications of students and future employees are legitimate, authentic and safe.

I am pleased to be here at the Groningen Declaration Network Annual Meeting and support the launch of *My eQuals* – as mentioned – the brainchild of Australian and New Zealand universities working together.

My eQuals is a new online platform that will give students access to their authentic, digital academic records anytime, anywhere.

Around 90 per cent of universities here in Australia and in New Zealand have signed up to trial *My eQuals* across several sites - starting with the University of Melbourne, Monash University and Griffith University, as well as the University of Auckland in New Zealand.

This platform will improve student mobility by providing evidence of academic progress for students moving between institutions at home and abroad.

There are many benefits of this. Student qualifications will be secure because universities retain control of their academic records.

Universities will certify that digital documents are accurate and authentic before they are released.

Privacy will be assured because only the student can access their academic records - the university can't see who they chose to share it with.

Beyond the Declaration Network Annual Meeting, the Turnbull Government is also working to strengthen higher education globally by improving the integrity of qualification recognition.

Improving trust in Australian qualifications and reducing barriers to mobility are a really important part of the Australian Government's National Strategy for International Education 2025, something I had a bit to do with in my time as parliamentary secretary.

We are encouraging other governments, within the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, to put qualification recognition systems in place so graduates can move around the region to look for employment opportunities or to complete further study.

Australia hosts hundreds of thousands of international students each and every year. They come here because they trust that the qualification they earn here will be accepted for further study and employment around the world, as well as in their home nation.

It is vital that we support their decision to study here – and the investment they make, which in itself is very substantial – by better allowing them to use their education internationally.

With an increasingly mobile global student population, qualifications fraud is a significant international issue that acts as a barrier to workers looking to pursue opportunities outside their home country and reduces trust in qualifications.

Qualifications fraud can restrict student mobility because it undermines this trust. It affects the reputation of both providers and systems.

The Australian Government is leading the drafting of the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications.

This ambitious international treaty is expected to introduce binding commitments to address fraud through improved information-sharing and verification systems like *My eQuals* and other such tools developed in response to the Groningen Declaration.

It is very encouraging that the Groningen Declaration now has 56 universities and private sector signatories representing 20 countries, including Universities Australia and VETASSESS here in Australia.

I'm pleased to hear that 37 Australian and 8 New Zealand universities are working together to combat the issue of qualifications fraud and pursue the terms of the declaration.

As someone who wasn't, to be honest, particularly familiar with the declaration 24 hours ago, I would have to admit, it is one of those things that, when in Government and not being directly involved, when you see the work being done and understand the rationale, it makes perfect sense. When it is led by the sector it can lead to an incredibly effective, self-regulation that builds trust and strengthens the sector.

To all of those here visiting, to all of those in Australia who have been involved in this and *My eQuals*, congratulations on this very important work.

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