

TEQSA SPEECH

Acknowledgements

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- Dr. Nay Win Oo, Deputy Director-General, Higher Education, Myanmar Ministry of Education

SPEECH

Our higher education system is built on opportunity and excellence.

The two go hand-in-hand.

When we provide people with opportunity through education great things happen.

Students achieve more from what they learn when opportunities are underpinned by excellence.

Education can't be treated as a number's game.

From the university lecturers and tutors delivering our courses;

- The researchers conducting world-leading research.
- The administrators running efficient operations.
- And the regulators at TEQSA and public servants in the Education Department.

I am proud to say the people who work in the sector are driven by excellence and not numbers.

I thank you today for your passion and commitment to excellence, because the results are impressive:

- Australia's universities – public and private – educated around 1.6 million Australian and overseas students in 2018.
- 90 per cent of undergraduates are in full-time employment three years after completing their degree – the highest level since 2013.
- 85 per cent of employers express overall satisfaction with their graduates.
- 80 per cent of domestic undergraduate students and 76 per cent of international undergraduate students rate their higher education experience positively.
- Seven Australian universities ranked in the top 100 of the three main rankings schemes

The theme of this year's conference is "Partnerships Driving Quality" so I would like to address areas where the sector has worked constructively and co-operatively with the Federal Government to improve the quality of the sector.

Our Government has a comprehensive agenda for the higher education sector.

We are working to re-shape the higher education architecture of this nation.

To ensure the success of this agenda we have a partnership with the sector that drives quality results.

I have made a commitment to the sector to work together on national policy settings.

Here is the evidence so far.

The sector was deeply involved in producing the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy, led by Dr Denis Napthine.

The review made seven recommendations to improve access to education, build aspiration for students and strengthen the role of providers in regional Australia.

We accept the aims of the seven key recommendations, and will be consulting on the 33 specific actions before responding in due course.

Professor Paul Wellings, the vice chancellor at the University of Wollongong, designed the performance-based funding model the Government has adopted.

This model will provide the mechanism for our Government to increase funding to the sector through the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) in line with population growth of the 18-64 year old cohort while also rewarding performance for the first time.

There are four performance metrics:

- graduate employment outcomes,
- student success,
- student experience, and
- participation of Indigenous, low socio-economic status, and regional and remote students.

And our Government has given graduate employment outcomes greatest precedence to incentivise universities to focus on the core business: producing job-ready graduates with the skills to succeed in the modern economy.

Graduate employment outcomes will account for 40 per cent of funding, with the other three measures weighted at 20 per cent each.

The model will help deliver a system that is strong, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of Australians.

Professor Peter Noonan, from Victoria University, conducted the review into Australia's Qualifications Framework (AQF) that recommends recognising the diversity of post-secondary education and to offer clear and flexible entry and exit points, as well as pathways within and between VET and higher education.

Professor Noonan has recommended the recognition of 'Microcredentials' to enable providers to offer short, highly-targeted courses to students and employers looking to fill a skills gap without getting bogged down in red tape.

The professor also recommends senior secondary students should be able to study subjects at school that count towards a vocational training qualification or university degree.

The work done by Professor Noonon will ultimately reinvigorate the connection between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education.

Emeritus Professor Peter Coaldrake, from QUT, led the review into Australia's Higher Education Provider Category Standards that has provided greater clarity to teaching and engagement with industry and community.

Professor Coaldrake's recommendations will protect the interests of students and Australia's international reputation for higher education, as it creates a more streamlined and user-friendly system.

The Coaldrake recommendations also suggest a new, innovative category of 'national institutes of higher education' to recognise the highest performing higher education providers which are not universities.

The Government hopes to respond to Professor Noonan and Professor Coaldrake's reviews before the end of the year.

The Hon Robert French, the former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia and current chancellor of the University of Western Australia, delivered his review into University Freedom of Speech.

Mr French recommended a voluntary Model Code for universities that establishes a framework to ensure freedom of speech and academic freedom while also respecting the institutional autonomy of each university.

It is pleasing to see the progress universities are making towards the adoption of the model code in a way consistent with their individual legislative framework.

I am committed to working with the sector to achieve 100 per cent adoption of the Code by next year and we will benchmark all responses against the Code.

The reviews that were handed down this year were of an exceptionally high quality, and have provided a solid foundation on which the Government can build a new higher education architecture.

These reviews were greatly improved by the close engagement of the sector.

Can I thank everyone who has made a contribution to the numerous projects undertaken this year and more broadly can I thank you all for the collaborative and constructive way you have dealt with the Government on every level.

Our Government is also working with TEQSA to ensure excellence in higher education.

This year, the Parliament passed a number of technical amendments to the TEQSA Act to fine tune the operations of the regulator.

TEQSA, of course, is a unique Australian approach to regulation of quality in higher education.

Formed in 2011 in the shadow of Australia's first experiment with university oversight—AUQA (Australian Universities Quality Agency)—the key to its success, I believe, is its proportionate, risk-reflective approach to quality assurance that supports diversity, innovation and excellence.

I encourage TEQSA to continue to work hard to be sensitive to efficient oversight.

Over the past year, I have met private and public higher education providers and asked them how they find the current regulatory framework.

From the feedback I have received the sector is seeking a proactive approach based on positive engagement.

Professor Malcolm K. Sparrow, a leading international expert in regulatory and enforcement strategy, at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University offers useful guiding principles for regulators:

- be less intrusive but more effective
- be kinder but don't let them get away with anything
- be quicker but more careful
- deal with important issues but stay within authority
- be responsive but don't get captured.

It is good advice.

Another area where the government has worked closely with the sector this year is to address the issue of foreign interference.

Foreign interference is at unprecedented levels.

It is an evolving issue that affects government, business, society...and universities.

Our government takes allegations of foreign interference and espionage very seriously.

We have taken strong action to equip our intelligence and security agencies to protect Australians and our institutions, including appointing the first National Counter Foreign Interference Coordinator, establishing the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme and establishing the Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce.

Likewise, we want universities to take responsibility for being on the front line against foreign interference of their institutions.

Earlier this month, we published the Guidelines to counter foreign interference in the Australian university sector, these guidelines were written in close collaboration between the sector and our national security agencies.

As the guidelines make clear, Australia's universities have a strong working relationships with government agencies on security matters, and have regularly sought advice to help safeguard their people, research, systems and intellectual property, as well as rebuff attempts to breach security.

Both universities and government know that a robust and trusted sector is one in which risks are managed and benefits realised.

The guidelines on foreign interference were truly a partnership between government and the sector.

Five members from higher education were on the taskforce that developed the guidelines, and 36 universities contributed to the working groups that informed the final guidelines.

I would also like to acknowledge, the vice chancellor of RMIT, Martin Bean, who was an instrumental leader of the sector in the process.

Central to the guidelines are five key themes for action:

- Governance and risk frameworks;
- Due diligence;
- Communication and education;
- Knowledge sharing; and
- Cyber security.

Universities and our national security agencies will reconvene in six months to review the implementation of the guidelines.

This process will be ongoing and require constant adjustment from the sector as new challenges arise and approaches developed.

Our Government and the sector are also working together to continue to grow international education in a sustainable way.

International education contributed \$37.6 billion to the Australian economy last financial year, representing growth of 15 per cent year on year.

The sector supports 240,000 jobs, business opportunities and economic growth.

Australia is expected to overtake the United Kingdom as the second most popular destination for international students.

It is an outstanding success story by any standard that is driven and underpinned by opportunity and excellence.

Last week I made my first international visit as minister for education to Malaysia and India.

Both countries are strong friends of Australia as well as key strategic and economic partners.

It was heartening to see firsthand how a positive experience with Australia through our education system had ongoing benefits for our country.

Australian alumni are operating at the highest levels of government and business in Malaysia and India, using the knowledge they gained at Australian universities to improve their countries.

They are a testament to our education system and valuable connection between our two countries.

Nearly one in four international students receive their education at an Australian institution's offshore campus.

I visited the international operations of several Australian universities working in Malaysia and India.

Our friends in India were very interested in Australian providers establishing campuses in India and we have agreed to explore Indian providers operating in Australia.

One million Indians turn 18 every month. Indian parents are aspirational for the children and the country is backed by a strong economy.

Demand for education will continue to grow and Australia needs to be ready to provide support and offer services that leads to mutually beneficial outcomes.

Likewise, Australian and India are working towards the mutual recognition of qualifications in our countries and more joint research collaborations.

Before I conclude, one final observation about an emerging issue in relation to internal disciplinary processes at universities.

Last week, the Supreme Court in Queensland made findings about the powers of a University's Disciplinary Board in relation to the institution's misconduct policies.

The decision in *Y v University of Queensland* has made clear that providers need to take great care when considering disciplinary action in relation to allegations of criminal conduct, to ensure that the protections afforded to individuals responding to those allegations are not infringed.

Universities have a duty of care to their students and that includes ensuring processes around the enforcement of any codes of conduct are legal, fair and transparent.

If a student alleges they are the victim of a crime than our criminal justice system is the appropriate authority to deal with it.

These are complex matters and there is substantial legislation, case law and legal precedent available to anyone accused of a crime.

In conclusion, 2019 has been a year of progress on the government's agenda because we have worked in partnership with the sector.

I hope in 2020 the Government and the higher education sector will continue to:

- Reset the relationship to a true partnership;
- Renew our commitment to driving national prosperity; and
- Reshape the higher education architecture.