

## INTRODUCTION

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Government's paper: *A National Quality Strategy for Australian Transnational Education and Training: A Discussion Paper*.

The ATN has a strong interest in the outcome of the Quality Strategy, as offshore education is one of our key areas of interest and strength. ATN Universities account for around 20% of Australia's total student load. However we account for almost a quarter of overseas students, 43% of whom study offshore, making the ATN responsible for over 36% of all offshore students. This makes the ATN the largest collective provider of offshore education in Australia.

**Curtin University  
of Technology**

**University of  
South Australia**

**RMIT University**

**University of  
Technology  
Sydney**

**Queensland  
University  
of Technology**

<b>Overseas Students - Submission 1 2004</b>				
<b>State/Institution</b>	<b>All Students</b>			
	<b>Onshore</b>	<b>Offshore</b>	<b>%age Offshore</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Australian Technology Network</b>				
Queensland University of Technology	4,787	150	3.0%	4,937
University of Technology, Sydney	5,156	717	12.2%	5,873
University of South Australia	2,744	5,581	67.0%	8,325
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	6,094	6,020	49.7%	12,114
Curtin University of Technology	5,833	6,308	52.0%	12,141
<b>Total ATN</b>	<b>24,614</b>	<b>18,776</b>	<b>43.3%</b>	<b>43,390</b>

## CURRENT REFORM AGENDA

At the outset, the ATN believes it is critical that the Government's discussion paper, responses to it and possible outcomes, are all viewed in light of the current reform process underway. The ATN understands that both DEST and Australian Education International (AEI) are working closely with those involved in the *Building University Diversity* and *Building Better Foundations* reviews. We believe it is critical that this alignment continues to ensure that all issues affecting education are considered.

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Two areas of immediate concern are the implications of teaching only and research intensive institutions; and the use of the title ‘university.’

In our submission to the *Building University Diversity* paper, we make the point that, as a network collectively representing the largest providers of offshore education, our international reputation is intrinsically linked with our research capacity, which we believe would be diminished by such a divided system.

As well, we strongly believe that involvement in research should be essential to the definition of a university in Australia and any move toward research-intensive and teaching-only universities will restrict our capacity to build upon our international reputation with both on and offshore delivery.

At the heart of this discussion paper is the development of a quality strategy for Australian transnational education and training. Regulation of quality will be important to protect the reputation associated with the use of the title “university”. Providers should be required to meet agreed standards of performance in all areas of operation to be permitted to use the title “university”.

**Whilst the following submission broadly reflects the collective view of the members of the ATN, other issues pertaining to individual circumstances in each institution will be outlined within their own separate submissions.**

## **PROMOTION AND COMMUNICATION**

The ATN believes it is critically important to ensure our international stakeholders are fully apprised of our quality systems and frameworks. We also acknowledge that it is difficult to deliver a simple and concise message which will provide assurances of quality to prospective offshore students, due to the complexities of our system and the involvement of so many stakeholders. (Universities, schools, VET etc). The paper suggests a one-stop-shop portal to promote Australia's QA for both on and offshore provision. Market analysis suggests that students intending to study onshore will often choose the country first, then the region, then the university. Given that, a website at national level as an entry for prospective onshore students is useful. However offshore students are usually recruited from an existing cohort, and in that case the value of a portal becomes less clear. The ATN believes more information should be gathered on the 'demand' side before a judgement can be made as to web based content. That is, which stakeholders would use such a site and what information would they seek, etc.

As outlined in the submission by RMIT, a broadening of the focus of Australian Education International to include a specific role in relation to the communication and promotion of the delivery of Australian education offshore, augmented by the current role of AUQA in disseminating best practice models would be an effective and significant step forward.

## **STRENGTHENING THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK**

### ***Model 1: Augmented current model***

The ATN believes that, with regard to the university sector, the confidence of offshore parties has been enhanced since the advent of AUQA which audits the universities, including their offshore provisions. AUQA plays a fundamental role in quality assurance of offshore provision and we believe there is an argument for strengthening its current role within the framework of model 1. The ATN believes it would be prudent to strengthen

existing structures and procedures rather than introduce additional measures which appear to impinge upon university autonomy and apply yet another layer of increased bureaucratic responsibility. To try to expand the role of a Quality Authority across all sectors would be too clumsy and unwieldy and would result in an attempt at a one-size-fits-all approach which could have the effect of weakening and complicating the good work currently performed by AUQA.

### ***Model 2: Advisory Board***

In what is already a highly regulated industry, the ATN views this model as adding yet another layer of regulation. The paper itself (5:15) refers to the possible limitations, citing its inability to implement change quickly given the ‘large number of parties involved.’ There are also questions around composition, administration costs and whom the Board might advise.

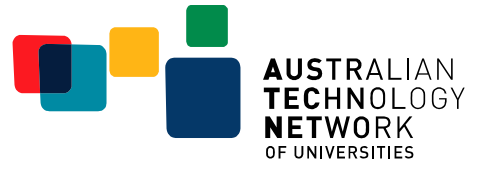
### ***Model 3: National Authority Model***

There is no clear indication as how this model would further improve national consistency and why the creation of such an authority could provide a ‘positive response to feedback from overseas governments and other stakeholders that our quality assurance is complex.’ The ATN would argue that this role should already be undertaken by AEI and form part of a broader Government to Government communications strategy. The ATN is also concerned that such an Authority would add yet another layer of regulation and duplicate the roles and functions which current bodies, including educational institutions are already undertaking or are well placed to undertake. For these reasons the ATN does not support a single national authority to cover all sectors. The ATN believes AUQA must continue to focus on the Quality Assurance aspects of the Universities’ offshore activities, however there must also be measures in place to monitor the quality of the offshore activities of the other education providers: ELICOS and Foundation program providers and primary and secondary schools.

## CONCLUSION

Various other issues are raised throughout the discussion paper, some of which will be addressed as part of separate submissions from individual ATN members.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on this discussion paper. The ATN looks forward to participating in the forthcoming industry based forums to progress the current debate. If you have any queries about the ATN's response or wish to seek clarification on any points made, please contact Vicki Thomson, Director ATN, on (08) 8302 9107 or via email at [vicki.thomson@unisa.edu.au](mailto:vicki.thomson@unisa.edu.au)



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