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Keynote Address

**Australia's International Education:
Strategies and Future Directions**

9.30am

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Thank you Mr Zong (*Zōng*)

I would like to thank the organisers of this wonderful forum for inviting me to speak on Australia's International Education: Strategies and Future Directions.

Every government is grappling with the same question 'how to internationalise our education systems for the benefit of our young people'. How do we help our young people get ready to operate in the 21st century, in an increasingly globalised community.

One leading expert has given us a good place to start, noting that:

"Internationalisation is the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, function and delivery of post-secondary education.¹" Internationalisation is a fundamental part of a tertiary education experience, which helps prepare all our students for participation in a global economy.

Internationalisation should be a natural part of each student's study experience. And we need this to be for all students, including those studying in their home countries.

¹ Knight, J. (2004). Internationalization remodeled: Definition, approaches, and rationales. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 8(1), 5-31.

A number of Australian universities now have internationalisation plans. For example RMIT has introduced the concept of a 'global passport' for its students. The purpose of the passport is to increase the opportunities for student and staff engagement with university and industry partners across the globe. RMIT also aims to give every student an opportunity for an overseas experience as part of their overall study plan. RMIT is not alone.

There are many aspects to the way students can benefit from the internationalisation of Australian education institutions. Transnational education is one aspect of this.

What is clear to all of us is that wherever or however a student studies their objectives are the same. As a domestic student, as an international student or as a student on exchange – a high the quality education leading to good employment outcomes are among the top priorities for most students.

Quality

Australia is well known around the world for the high quality of its education, that's why each year so many students study in an Australian school, TAFE or university.

With over 580,000 international students in Australia, one of the strengths of Australian higher education is the diversity of the student population. This diversity provides all students with the opportunity to interact with peers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

And students don't have to be in Australia to get a quality Australian education. In 2013 there were over 160,000 students enrolled in Australian education institutions outside Australia.

These students equate to about a third of all international higher education enrolments and over two thirds of all international enrolments in Australia's TAFEs. Many of these students are living in China.

Providing quality education is something Australia takes very seriously. Whether the student is local or on the other side of the world, we expect that if you are enrolled at an Australian education institution you are getting the best education possible.

Regulatory framework

The Australian Government has stringent quality controls for educational institutions whether they are operating in Australia or overseas.

The Australian education system is distinguished from many other countries by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Established in 1995 the AQF is a national policy that covers qualifications from school right through to university.

Students can be sure that if they are studying for an AQF qualification, that the institution is authorised by the Australian Government and that the degree or other qualification will be recognised around the world.

International students enrolled in Australian education institutions enjoy an unrivalled level of service and financial protection. The legislation and regulation is all encompassing, but importantly it sets high benchmarks for qualifications and lists the support services that institutions must provide to all international students regardless of where they study.

The Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) enforce the quality assurance processes in the higher education and vocational education and training sectors. They ensure that the high standards of quality expected by the Australian Government are met.

My colleagues, Professor Nick Saunders, Chief Commissioner of TEQSA and the Hon Michael Lavarach, an ASQA Commissioner, are both attending this forum. They will be providing more information on the important role their agencies play in Australian quality assurance later.

The Australian Government is absolutely committed to ensuring the quality of Australian education regardless of where it is delivered. An Australian education is, and should always be, a quality education regardless of where and how it is undertaken.

Two way mobility

An increasingly important part of the student experience is the opportunity to travel overseas. The Australian Government is doing much to encourage Australian students study abroad.

Over the years Australia has opened its doors to millions of young students from around the world and we in turn have encouraged our young people to go out and experience the world beyond our borders.

The Australian Government believes that investing in overseas experiences for students and researchers creates lasting people-to-people links. In addition to trust and goodwill, it builds language skills and creates future business and social partnerships. It also expands our knowledge and interest within the context of that culture and society.

The flow of students from Australia to China – and home again - builds knowledge and intercultural understanding for individuals that delivers mutual benefits to our economies and societies.

The Australian Government has introduced mobility programs to encourage young Australians to seek out international experiences as part of their program of study. These mobility programs, such as Endeavour Scholarships and Fellowships and the New Colombo Plan, are vital to the Australian Government's plans for creating an internationally literate workforce. A workforce which is just as comfortable conducting business in Sydney or Brisbane as in Shanghai or Beijing.

In 2015 the New Colombo Plan Mobility Program is providing funding to Australian universities to support 515 Australian undergraduate students to undertake study and internships in China. The New Colombo Plan Scholarship program is also supporting 11 scholars to undertake a study program of up to two semesters at a host university, accompanied by a work internship or mentorship and Chinese language training.

The Australian Government is also working at the government-to-government level to build closer relationships with the Chinese education ministry and other institutions. Last year the Australian and Chinese Ministers for Education signed a new agreement on mobility for students, researchers and academics. They also renewed the long standing arrangement on higher education qualification recognition between Australia and China.

Of course the Australian and Chinese governments have also recently agreed to the historic China Australia Free Trade Agreement.

These three agreements will underpin Australia and China's relationship in the coming years. They will drive the exchange of people and ideas, as well as trade and commerce. These agreements will also further reduce the barriers to exchanges and collaborations and will open up new and exciting opportunities for working more closely together.

Internships/Work

Young people who study or train abroad not only gain knowledge in specific disciplines in a different cultural context, they also strengthen key skills which are highly valued by employers.

The benefits of internships are well documented – they provide hands on practical experience, a sample of life in their chosen field, significant networking opportunities and workplace confidence.

Internships and mentorships are an important part of the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan, which aims to foster connections between Australians and overseas businesses and institutions. In addition to contributing to a student's academic qualifications, an internship offers students the chance to build their professional skills and networks. It also gives them the opportunity to link their study goals to future career opportunities.

Providing opportunities for students to live and work in another culture also helps to build mutual understanding and trust between people and societies. With overseas internships and other work experiences becoming more and more popular, we are successfully creating global citizens. These global citizens may not necessarily see home as Australia or China, but take each opportunity offered to them irrespective of national borders.

And while it may seem obvious that an international internship might benefit the student who has their eyes set on a global career; an international internship experience can also benefit those students who intend to find work in their home country. They will bring back new ideas and perspectives through which they have a broader world view.

Finally, overseas internships help develop important intercultural skills. International internships teach students to successfully work with people from diverse backgrounds and cultural identities and who may have values different to their own. I think we can all agree that being able to work collaboratively with people from varying backgrounds is a vital attribute for our young people.

Sino-Australian Joint Ventures

China has, for almost three decades, actively encouraged foreign institutions and academics to establish deep connections with China, and Australian institutions have taken up the challenge.

The Australian Education and Training Minister, the Hon Christopher Pyne, is a big supporter of Australian transnational education in China. Here students in universities, vocational colleges and schools undertake Australian qualifications and study disciplines that build their skills to meet the needs of China's transforming economy. Chinese students study Australian education from Yunnan (*yún-nán*) in the southwest to Jilin (*jí-lín*) in the northeast.

There are 346 active Sino-Australian joint education programs and institutions, up from 81 programs in 2007. There are also over 1,200 formal agreements between Australian and Chinese universities.

Australia now has more links with Chinese institutions than with any other country. Which makes it easy for students to move through the two education systems, between courses or institutions. They can be secure in the knowledge that formal agreements and recognition frameworks mean every step along the path of their higher education studies will contribute to their future goals.

The future of Sino-Australia joint ventures is promising. Last time I was in China the first cohort of students from the Southeast University – Monash University Joint Graduate School in Suzhou (*sū-zhōu*), Jiangsu (*jiāng-sū*) Province were just about to graduate.

In September last year, Victoria University celebrated the 15th anniversary of its transnational education partnership with Liaoning (*liáo-níng*) University in Shenyang (*shěn-yang*) by agreeing to continue to offer the very popular dual Bachelor of Business awards for another 10 years.

And the Sydney Institute of Languages and Commerce (commonly known as SILC) - A partnership between the University of Technology Sydney and Shanghai University has graduated over 12,000 students since it established just over 20 years ago.

Australia and China also has a long standing relationship in vocational education and training. Already a number of our training providers operate in China, building connections between our two countries.

There are a huge range of joint vocational education and training (VET) programs in China across a variety of sectors, including information technology, engineering and tourism. Students are provided with an opportunity to learn globally relevant skills, in a way that suits their learning needs.

While the established VET links between our two countries are significant, there is much we have to learn from each other, and much we can do to address shared challenges within the region.

Australia and China have agreed to a major VET policy dialogue this year, involving representatives from government, industry and training providers. This will deepen each other's understanding of our VET systems and strengthen skills collaboration.

The VET dialogue will also encourage exchanges on shared skills priorities and challenges, including approaches to quality assurance of VET programs.

It is clear that the Australia-China education relationship is extensive and dynamic, encompassing collaboration at the government level, between peak bodies and individual institutions.

This long history of collaboration provides a strong platform on which to build further cooperation, in order to ensure Australian and Chinese students are provided with the best possible education.

Research

Australia's Prime Minister, the Hon Tony Abbott MP, described universities as being at their best when they are characterised by an "unquenchable curiosity". The Prime Minister also noted that "universities impart knowledge but their mission is to discover it and to deepen" this knowledge.

Importantly, when universities pursue new knowledge they help us answer difficult problems and solve complex challenges. Universities, therefore, are

the engines of knowledge creation, which are fuelled by the boundless curiosity of our talented researchers.

With only 0.3% of the world's population, Australia produces 4% of the world's scientific output (as measured in published articles). We are known for innovative research that has led to scientific breakthroughs such as the bionic ear and Wi-Fi.

Australia has more Nobel Prizes per share of population than any other country.

And the Shanghai Jiao Tong (*sh-ah-ang hai jiao tone*) World University Rankings places four of our universities in the top 100 and almost half of all Australia's universities in the top 500.

With a highly innovative and talented researcher workforce, I know that Australia looks forward to new and exciting opportunities to collaborate with China. Australian universities see China as a highly valued research partner, with whom we can jointly develop new knowledge and innovative partnerships.

Future directions in international education in Australia

I know our international partners are interested in where Australian international education is heading. I am pleased to give you an update on the latest developments in this area.

As you may know, we are developing a draft *National Strategy for International Education*.

The draft *National Strategy* takes a broad view of international education. It's an approach to global engagement through education that includes everything I have spoken about today: two-way mobility, work experience opportunities, quality assurance, research and partnerships.

It also looks what we need to do to ensure that international students in Australia continue to have a positive and rewarding experience.

The Australian Government is working hard to build a whole-of-government approach to coordinate policy for Australian international education.

There are a number of high-level initiatives underway that together with the draft *National Strategy* will set in place a new architecture for international education.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is leading the development of an alumni engagement strategy to strengthen collective efforts towards Australia's diplomatic, trade, investment, international education and research interests.

The Department of Industry and Science is leading the Australian Government's response to the Chief Scientist's vision for science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM. This includes setting a strategy for international engagement in science and research.

Conclusion

Both Australia and China understand that quality education is a means to develop economic prosperity and social well-being. All students want the same things – a high-quality education and an enriching educational experience that leads to good employment prospects.

Australia and China's longstanding education relationship provides a solid basis for future cooperation. We have complementary strengths and much to offer one another as we pursue the shared objective of developing world class education systems.

As China's world-class education and research facilities further develop it becomes an even more attractive global partner. Australian institutions, supported by the Australian Government, will continue lifting the quality of their engagement with China for mutually beneficial outcomes.

I hope that through this forum we will all be able to review trends and proposed policies directions, and check in on the current status of Sino-Australia transnational education engagement.

I look forward to hearing the discussions and to talking to you about the future of Australia's transnational education sector.