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INNOVATIONS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S  
HIGHER EDUCATION PROFILE

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# INNOVATIONS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION PROFILE

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## Abstract

Premier Rann's transmogrification of Adelaide from Premier Dunstan's 'Athens of the South' to 'the Boston of the South' signals a major social innovation in higher education.

Changes in South Australian legislation and the national regulatory framework over the past twenty years have broken the monopoly of the state universities. A growth in a variety of higher education providers and the Premier's University City Project, which envisages Adelaide as a global centre of education, enhance the public profile of the emerging higher education scenario.

SA higher education institutions recruit students from all over the world to their local and overseas campuses, which increases pressure on accreditation authorities. The quality of institutions and courses is imperative to the ongoing success and growth of the SA higher education export industry.

For the purpose of the quality assurance of higher education in SA, the Quality Directorate, DFEEST performs a number of roles. These include, inter alia, providing quality advice and information regarding Australian standards for registration and accreditation of higher education institutions and courses and utilising rigorous quality assurance mechanisms to ensure consumers are exposed to a quality product. The Quality Directorate assists providers with their immediate needs arising in response to changes in the global market.

In this paper we will discuss:

- different perspectives on the changing profile of the higher education sector in South Australia;
- innovations in the regulatory framework locally and nationally in the global context;
- the Quality Directorate's role in maintaining quality standards of higher education delivery;
- quality assurance and consumer protection mechanisms; and
- substandard organisations.

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## Introduction

Higher education policy has been a prime concern internationally, nationally and in South Australia. Higher education policy, like any other policy, does not remain static; it responds to the particular needs of each society and takes global developments into account. According to Beauchamp (1992: 7), the educational arrangements of every society are a natural outgrowth of that society's historical development, cultural elements, and economic and political realities. This is very true for the development of higher education policy in South Australia, where the higher education profile and the policy that underpins it change on the basis of society's development, growth and strategic planning.

In this paper we will outline the traditional profile of higher education and the innovative changes that have emerged in South Australia in the last couple of decades. Before we discuss the current arrangements for higher education in South Australia, we will compare and analyse definitions of higher education. After examining the profile of higher education and a rationale for the changes, we will focus on the quality assurance processes that have been adopted in Australia, and particular local arrangements for quality assurance in South Australia. This will focus on the South Australian model, which emphasises the following criteria: credibility, cost effectiveness, consumer protection, continuous improvement, dissemination of good practice, and minimal bureaucratic burden and red tape.

The higher education sector is important to the future of the state including its international standing, population and economic growth. However, changes and growth in this area must be supported by policies and processes that ensure quality of education and provide assurance to consumers that the product they receive is of a high standard. We also argue that the current arrangements, under which quality standards, nationally established and administered by a local designated authority, produce optimum outcomes and are consistent with principles underpinning modern regulatory practices. Finally, we contemplate the national regulatory framework, modern regulatory principles and future challenges in relation to quality assurance standards and their maintenance in South Australia.

While we acknowledge that higher education funding is a crucial aspect for its quality and future economic sustainability, it is not the purpose of this study to discuss the previous government oversights and new government initiatives in funding arrangements. We also acknowledged that we do not link our findings to statistical data.

## Higher education

Currently available definitions of higher education relate to the level of study being post-secondary or after grade 12 as well as the range of institutions where a higher education degree can be obtained.

Wikipedia (2008a) defines higher education as that genre of education delivered by universities, vocational universities, community colleges, liberal arts colleges and technical colleges. Wikipedia also refers to tertiary education as third-stage, third level, non-compulsory education and lists activities performed by higher education institutions such as teaching, research and social services. Britannica (2008) refers to higher education as 'study beyond the level of secondary education' and then, similar to Wikipedia, lists institutions that deliver higher education degrees.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) website, which provides a wealth of information on higher education, stops short of providing a definition of higher education. The policy paper on the *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future* website (DEST

2003) provides a hint. It suggests the Australian higher education system plays 'a vital role in Australia's intellectual, economic, cultural and social development' and outlines four key policy principles that underpin the reform. These principles include sustainability, quality, equity and diversity.

A definition of higher education that goes further to particularise qualities that, for example, distinguish this form of education from the vocational education and training (VET) sector is not readily accessible.

There appears to be a singular reluctance to explore the usage of the emotive epithet 'higher' that became linked with tertiary education in the nineteenth century in Germany and from thence the USA. In the nineteenth century 'higher education' referred to the sort of education provided at universities (*Hochschulen*—high schools) based on the prevalent idealist philosophy, the product of the cultural epoch associated with the term Romanticism and intellects such as Goethe, Herder, Fichte, Schleiermacher and Hegel. The focus was on the abstract and on the 'higher' realities of Plato's world of ideals, an ethical corollary of the virtue of thought over action and principles over practice, with the purpose of elevating the human condition to a higher plane. The conception 'higher education' is premised on the assumption that there is, as it is implicit in Platonism, a hierarchy of knowledge. This is nowhere better illustrated by the notion of higher degrees and the gradation of education awards in modern qualifications frameworks.

It is not the task of this study to develop a working definition of higher education that in fact reflects its substance. However, from the brief discussion above, it becomes clear that higher education is that area of education which leads and makes a significant contribution to innovation and change for social or individual benefit. An exploration of the concept of higher education may be useful as it sheds light on a constellation of aspirations relating to knowledge development, critical enquiry, sustained research, creative activity and community engagement that are common in mission statements of universities and higher education institutions.

### **Traditional higher education profile**

Traditionally universities comprised the higher education sector entirely. The university was regarded as the singular societal institution, with its specified rights, for the preservation and dissemination of higher forms of knowledge. In juridical terms, it was a creation of the state and existed at the pleasure of the state.

This tradition, excepting to some degree in the USA, survived the ravishes of time and the globalisation of western culture. In Australia statist proclivities were evident ab initio. The so-called 'sandstone universities' were the proud achievements of colonial governments. The University of Sydney legislation was enacted in 1850, that of Melbourne 1854, Adelaide 1874, Tasmania 1890, Queensland 1909 and Western Australia 1911. Australia's other 39 universities likewise were the consequence of legislation. Thus the universities as the dominant institutions in the higher education sector are very much in the domain of public policy. It was Menzies's public policy formulations that led to the expansion of universities in the 1960s and Dawkins' policies that shaped those created in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The complexion of the higher education sector has changed, in particular over the last two decades. The changes have been driven by innovations in public policy. In addition to public universities, other higher education institutions have emerged, namely self-accrediting higher education institutions and

non-self-accrediting institutions. While there are four self-accrediting institutions – the Melbourne College of Divinity, Bachelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, Australian Film Television and Radio School and the Australian Maritime College, which has recently become an institute within the University of Tasmania – there are (as of April 2008) 129 non-self-accrediting institutions. Both genres of higher education institutions, like the public universities, are subject to government regulation under legislation. The proliferation of non-self-accrediting institutions since the late 1990s is perhaps the most significant development in Australian higher education.

Non-self-accrediting higher education institutions are organisations that deliver courses approved by the government and subject to ongoing government quality assurance processes. Their profile varies enormously from single course providers to organisations capable of delivering courses in a range of discipline areas at all levels of higher education awards. The quality assurance process relating to this genre of institution is discussed in further detail below.

The value to society, in particular in terms of the export dollars that higher education earns (estimated as 11.7 billion in March 2008) ensures issues related to higher education are prominent public policy issues.

### **Local and global developments that trigger changes in higher education**

Australia is a federation of states and territories with separate and defined spheres for the two levels of government. The Commonwealth government is mainly concerned with the coordination of policies and strategies for higher education; the states and territories, on the other hand, are responsible for delivery of quality higher education within their respective borders.

Changes occur constantly; at both levels of government policies and approaches are continually initiated, imitated, modified and counteracted. Opportunities for innovation abound. Australian governments are continually reviewing and reforming education and training to address the issues that arise from and respond to social and economic change.

Harman and Meek (2000) summarise changes in the environment that have an impact on the education sector and its quality. These include globalisation, changes in educational technology, international recognition of qualifications, quality assurance arrangements in Australia and offshore, the needs of Australia's education export industry, the increased number of private providers, and the appearance of bogus providers. In that regard, for example, the appearance of 'Boston University' on the shores of Boston Bay, Spencer Gulf, SA led to legislation to protect higher education qualifications (*Tertiary Education Act 1986*). The emergence in the late 1990s of a number of Australian-based internet sites purporting to be virtual universities and the move of 'Greenwich University' to Norfolk Island motivated governments to establish a codified regulatory framework centred on the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes 2000.

In SA the higher education sector is also influenced by the demographic factor – by the need to provide access to higher education for remotely located students, multicultural layers that allow institutions to deliver studies across borders, mobility of professional labour, changes in quality assurance processes in other countries and regions (for example through the so called 'Bologna Process' in Europe), and the growth of the higher education sector in the Asia-Pacific region.

More spectacularly the sector in SA is changing as a result of innovations in public policy and planning. The state's Strategic Plan, inter alia, established as a target an increase in higher education participation and doubling the number of international students by 2014. The Premier's University

City Project seeks to facilitate the achievement of those targets by actively encouraging outstanding overseas universities to establish operations in Adelaide. The University City Project is currently being implemented. Carnegie Mellon University established its branch in Adelaide in 2006; other overseas institutions, namely Cranfield University and University College London, are in the process of demonstrating their capacity to deliver courses in Australia. The overseas universities are seeking to operate in niche markets where there is a demand for their particular expertise. Cranfield University is seeking to deliver courses to the defence industry and University College London intends to exploit its expertise in environmental science.

The overseas universities conceive themselves as collaborating with local universities with the purpose of furthering knowledge and research. Flinders University is cooperatively engaged with Carnegie Mellon University in the field of public policy management. The University of South Australia's School of Communications has recently begun collaborating with Carnegie Mellon Entertainment Technology Centre. It is anticipated the presence of overseas universities will add a further dimension to intellectual activity in SA to underpin a culture of creativity and innovation.

A significant variable in the success of the University City Project is the state's quality assurance arrangements. The quality assurance arrangements underpin the reputation nationally and internationally of higher education in SA. Those arrangements are discussed below.

### **Multiple dimensions of the SA higher education sector**

It has been argued that higher education in Australia is prominent in the public domain and that developments in public policy are crucial. More recent developments illustrate the point.

The 2004 review of the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes 2000, led by Emeritus Professor Gus Guthrie (Guthrie et al 2004), and the Commonwealth's issues paper *Building University Diversity* (DEST 2005), led to significant developments. The Commonwealth paper summarises new directions in this way: 'A wider diversity of institutional types promotes growth and a greater range of choice for students, and also provides flexible entry points for institutions seeking to deliver higher education' (DEST 2005: 1).

The protocols revised in the light of the Guthrie Review and the Commonwealth's paper and nationally approved in December 2007 allowed for greater diversity of higher education institutions including:

- private non-self-accrediting institutions;
- self-accrediting institutions;
- public universities;
- interstate institutions;
- overseas institutions including universities; and
- specialised universities.

The SA higher education profile includes a number of these types of higher education institutions which can be categorised in the following distinct groups: public universities established by state legislation, non-self-accrediting institutions that have been given government approval to operate, overseas universities declared by the Minister, and interstate institutions that operate in SA as the state of secondary jurisdiction under the mutual recognition provisions in the regulatory framework.

The most recent development in Australian higher education is the entry of overseas universities into the market. This again is a consequence of innovation in public policy.

Many of these institutions also are registered under the Education Services to Overseas Students (ESOS) regulatory framework. South Australian institutions, like those in the other states and territories, have a long experience in delivering education and training services to overseas students. The experience is based on the Colombo Plan of the mid-twentieth century which was a postwar aid-based scheme that involved students from the developing world studying at Australian universities. In the market-oriented setting of today, international education policy is carrying the banner for cultural diversity and government economic objectives. In recent years international education directives have been supported by migration regulations to enable Australia to increase its population growth. South Australia, in particular, as an area of low population growth, takes advantage of international graduates. This contributes to an increased interest in recruiting international students from education providers and therefore places a greater level of responsibility on the government in relation to quality assurance of education and training delivered.

### **Quality assurance**

In the last couple of decades the term 'quality assurance' became associated with higher education processes. The term relates to various aspects of the higher education sector including academic quality, quality of administrative and financial systems, and quality of consumer protection provisions, as well as commitment to continuing improvement.

Quality in the context of higher education is defined as 'a judgement about the level of goal achievement and the value and worth of that achievement' (Harman and Meek 2000: vi). ISO 9000 concurs with this definition, referring to the 'degree to which a set of inherent characteristic fulfils requirements' (Wikipedia 2008b). The most progressive view of quality is that it is defined entirely by the customer and in the education sector quality is subject to students' and employers' satisfaction.

Therefore, the quality debate is largely about quality outcomes. However, quality assurance focuses on academic standards and the administrative structure of an institution. The latter corresponds with UNESCO's definition of quality assurance, which emphasises 'the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained'. Quality assurance inevitably links to the international recognition of qualifications, which presents 'an increasingly urgent need to establish robust frameworks for quality assurance' (UNESCO 2008). UNESCO's actions in this area focus on informing higher education stakeholders and protecting students from substandard providers.

Australian governments' initiatives and fundamental reforms place the country at the forefront of establishing quality assurance mechanisms. One of the examples is the protection of the title 'university'. By 2006 legislative arrangements relevant to the establishment and operation of Australian universities were in place in four states and territories. The National Protocols 2007 confirmed national protection of the title 'university'.

The Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) introduced in 1995 provides national consistency to standards that serve the diversity of purposes of education and training. The *Commonwealth Education Services to Overseas Students Act 2000* provides rigorous consumer protection to overseas students. Higher education providers in receipt of Commonwealth funds are subject to additional requirements as part of their public accountability for funding.

These regulatory frameworks are reviewed regularly by the government, which involves comprehensive consultations with relevant stakeholders to ensure that changing needs and demands are being met and global developments are taken into account. To ensure successful implementation of regulatory frameworks the governments invest in various projects that provide support to institutions, allow easier understanding and interpretation of requirements, and constantly draw upon the stakeholders' expertise. As George Brown has written, 'Globally we are second to none, and quality is the only real brand' (Brown 2008). The government approach to ensuring quality is 'organised and well-informed', and deficiencies are being addressed in 'a timely and consultative manner' (Brown 2008).

The national regulatory frameworks are administered by state and territory governments, taking into account local needs and challenges. In SA local administration enables the government to work closely with higher education institutions including three state universities, address issues arising and achieve state strategic goals cooperatively.

While addressing requirements relevant to a particular aspect of the higher education sector, these frameworks pursue a number of similar aims, including protecting academic standards, enhancing the reputation of Australian qualifications, strengthening public accountability, promoting good practice, facilitating continuous improvement and allowing recognition of qualifications across borders.

### **South Australian approach to maintaining quality in higher education**

Quality assurance practices in Australia are based on cooperation between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and the higher education sector. State and territory governments are responsible for the legislation that assures the quality and protects the integrity of Australian universities and higher education awards in their jurisdiction. Their responsibilities include:

- specifying arrangements to establish and recognise universities, as well as protecting the use of the term 'university';
- protecting higher education award titles and accrediting higher education courses to be offered by non-self-accrediting institutions;
- approving the operation of overseas institutions of higher education including universities; and
- endorsing providers and courses of study as suitable for overseas students.

Imperatives for strengthening accreditation and quality assurance are being driven by the need to protect the burgeoning higher education industry. The industry delivers education and training services to domestic students, attracts a large number of international students and operates in other countries through offshore campuses where Australian qualifications are delivered. Accreditation by the appropriate authority provides confidence that a higher education institution meets the standards expected of Australian higher education.

The two major elements of the accreditation process are rigorous scrutiny of a provider's capacity and a review of the provider's performance every five years. This model is currently used in SA and is supported by the requirements of compulsory annual reports and conditions that are imposed on providers from the time of their accreditation. The government authority under the legislation also has a right to inquire into the provider's operation.

The Quality Directorate, DFEEST has a responsibility under the South Australian *Training and Skills Development Act 2008* to carry out an accreditation process of higher education courses and assess if an institution's academic and administrative policies and procedures meet appropriate standards. The accreditation and recognition process leads to approval for a higher education institution to operate within South Australia. Institutions wishing to operate under several jurisdictions can do so under the mutual recognition process, and can apply to the second jurisdiction either simultaneously or after the initial approval has been granted by the prime jurisdiction.

Private institutions have followed the lead of the universities and are exploring opportunities to deliver Australian qualifications offshore. Quality Directorate undertakes an assessment of the institution's capacity to deliver at an offshore campus.

This responsibility is being undertaken with the main aim to protect the status and quality of awards delivered both in Australia and in offshore operations. For this purpose the Quality Directorate has a rigorous quality assurance and accreditation system that aims to protect the international reputation of Australian higher education, serves public accountability purposes, informs consumers' choice, promotes quality processes and outcomes, and disseminates good practice. These aspects, as Harman and Meek (2000) argued, were highly desirable but not present in the accreditation and quality assurance processes eight years ago.

Amongst the main policy mechanisms and tools subject to the assessment are curriculum and training materials, student testing and assessment, training and qualifications of teaching personnel, and structure and governance of the institutions. A scrutinised quality assessment process is undertaken to evaluate mechanisms and instruments including a quality management process with a focus on continuous improvement.

The assessment process is carried out by a Course Assessment Panel (CAP), which includes academic representatives from a relevant discipline from the three state universities. The panel is chaired by a person appointed by the Committee of Chairs, a standing committee that consists of retired academics and experts in quality assurance processes. Executive support is provided to the panel by Quality Directorate staff. In some cases, for example an assessment of an application from a foreign university or an assessment of a professional course, panel members may include national experts and representatives from a relevant professional body.

Quality Directorate undertakes annual quality control activities to ensure an approved institution complies with standards and it can recommend improvements in the institution's performance.

As noted above, institutions are subject to ongoing compliance with a number of regulatory, legal and accountability frameworks. Dual sector institutions, delivering both higher education and vocational education and training level courses, are subject to more legislative requirements. The Quality Directorate, exercising modern regulatory practices, aims to maximise integration of processes to minimise anomalous regulatory burdens and costs to the provider. The directorate itself strives for continuous improvement in its activities and practices and constantly receives positive feedback from higher education institutions.

### **The higher education regulatory framework**

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has established an agenda to reform regulation across Australia. The 2004 version of *Principles and Guidelines for National Standard Setting and Regulatory Action by Ministerial Councils and Standard-Setting Bodies* establishes rules fundamental

to higher education quality assurance. COAG's principles are founded on modern regulatory practices with the imperative to minimise red tape and the reduction of gratuitous regulatory burden. This infers, *inter alia*, minimal intrusiveness and consistency of regulation amongst jurisdictions, and regulatory practices that are flexible, responsive and collaborative.

The COAG agenda has been a major factor influencing the development of higher education quality assurance arrangements in Australia. The concern for national consistency has been reflected in the revised National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes 2007. The same concern has led to a recent national Inquiry into the Desirability of a National Higher Education Accreditation Body authorised by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). The inquiry was initiated to test the view that a single national accreditation agency would provide a more efficacious higher education quality assurance regime than the present regime, which has been described as a national system locally administered.

The same issue was canvassed by Harman and Meek in a study on higher education commissioned by the Commonwealth in 2000. They found no support for a national accreditation agency and advised against it on the grounds that 'it would raise difficult constitutional and intergovernmental issues'. They advised that 'accreditation in terms of the approval ... of new and overseas universities and the approval of higher education courses offered by non self-accrediting institutions should remain, at least for the present, a State and Territory responsibility' (Harman and Meek 2000: 75).

The present inquiry is being finalised and conclusions will be considered by ministers in July 2008. If public written submission is any indication, then the outcome of the inquiry will vary little in substance from Harman and Meek's recommendation. The majority of written submissions to the inquiry that have been made public indicate little enthusiasm for a centralised national accreditation body. A significant number of universities consider that a national accreditation body 'could increase red tape and put a "straight jacket" on their self-accrediting powers' and the peak private provider body, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training, stated that a centralised system 'might create more risk by removing the checks and balances brought to the process by various regulators working collaboratively' (Ross 2008: 3). 'Regulators working collaboratively' is the basis of the present national system locally administered.

### **National system locally administered**

The model denominated 'national system locally administered' might be described as a series of agreements on quality standards, shared understandings and commitment of jurisdictions to their implementation through local legislation and administration.

'National system locally administered' appears to be the most efficient and advantageous model to ensure the continuing evolution through a range of quality improvements for a number of reasons:

- Its consistency with COAG Principles and Guidelines for National Standards Setting and Regulatory Action by Ministerial Councils and Standard-Setting Bodies is compelling. The imperative to minimise regulatory burden, maximise capacity 'to deal quickly with exceptional or changing circumstances or recognise individual needs' and focus on outcomes rather than inputs is optimally achievable by a national system locally administered. Recognised authorities on regulatory practices such as Professor Malcolm Sparrow of Harvard University accept that decentralised regulatory systems are more responsive than

centralised systems for they are better able to mobilise a broader range of non-governmental resources to effect desirable outcomes. Further local bodies are better placed, through a range of actions (e.g. education), to take preventive measures to achieve an outcome and so minimise regulatory burden and intrusiveness. In debates about the location of regulation, decentralisation is associated with local responsiveness while centralised bodies are perceived to be less capable of local accommodation (Sparrow 2000: 32–33).

- Constitutional issues associated with a centralised body are circumvented and the tests required by state policy such as those in the SA Department of Premier and Cabinet Circular PC021 *Guidelines for Evaluating Proposals for National or Multi-jurisdictional Schemes for Uniform or Consistent Legislation, National Standards and Cooperative Regulatory Schemes* are inapplicable.

The circular states that Cabinet, which is obliged to evaluate proposals for a national regulatory scheme, is required to ask the threshold question whether 'it is in the best interest of the state to participate in the scheme at all'.

- Consumer protection is the central matter in higher education quality assurance. Student issues are issues of immediacy requiring prompt attention. Local regulators are best placed to deal with consumer protection issues such as complaints and other related concerns as they are close to the ground with a capability to mobilise informal and local extra-regulatory resources to expedite issues requiring immediate resolution.
- A national system locally administered is the perfect fit for Australia's demographic circumstances. A centralised administrative apparatus dealing on a regular basis with sensitive issues relating to people's livelihoods and students' futures is inappropriate in the context of provider locations and equitable access.
- A number of occupations (e.g. nursing and teaching) are subject to state legislative requirements. SA bodies relating to the teaching and nursing professions indicate that national standards will be implemented locally.

### **Future challenges**

At the Australian Higher Education Congress in Sydney in March 2008, a Commonwealth spokesman for higher education outlined key challenges for Australian higher education. These include fair access to higher education especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, addressing the labour market needs, being internationally competitive, diversifying the fields of education, utilising innovative paths to research and education, building integrated relationships between vocational education and training and higher education sectors, quality outcomes and effective contribution to the economic development of the country. The Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education discussion paper (Bradley et al 2008) elaborated on these challenges. The Commonwealth has addressed some of these challenges by setting immediate goals like increasing access and doubling the number of scholarships to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds, while the state government has concentrated on ensuring the quality of higher education degrees and reducing the regulatory burden through integrated audits.

In the keynote address to the Quality in Postgraduate Research Conference 2008, Dr Stewart, President of the Council of Graduate Schools, USA, emphasised a set of challenges in sustaining quality of higher education in a competitive world. These challenges in many aspects correspond with

the ones identified by the Australian government and first of all relate to the globalisation of the talent market. As labour becomes more and more mobile, and millennial students' demands focus on global thinking, the education delivered in SA institutions needs to be internationally recognised and this can be achieved through its quality. It is also important to respond adequately to demographic transformations and to develop workable concepts to ensure accountability. Some might argue that these challenges increase pressure on education providers and are hard to address due to limited resources. However, by addressing these challenges in a timely and innovative manner an institution wins its position in the national and international arena both from the consumers' and the stakeholders' perspective. Nothing is static in this world and everyone can do better.

The question that remains unanswered is: Do we want the Australian higher education system to be similar to the US or British system or should we follow the European system proposed under the 'Bologna Process'? Will we gain more advantage by being different? Can we, in the globalised world, create a distinct feature that will allow our higher education system to attract more consumers nationally and internationally and raise the country's academic profile to a higher level?

### **Conclusion**

In South Australia changes in the profile of higher education are an organic outgrowth of the local context and the state government's strategic objectives. While creativity and individual freedom is highly valued it is paramount to ensure that certain standards are met and consumers' rights are protected.

The diversity of SA's higher education profile provides opportunities for consumers to choose between local, interstate and overseas institutions, undertake studies in a broad range of disciplines and obtain degrees that are recognised internationally.

The current regulatory arrangements ensure the quality of institutions and the courses they deliver. The system works successfully and cooperatively with other jurisdictions to ensure national consistency in requirements and in exercising modern regulatory principles.

The achievement of higher education policy goals in South Australia is especially impressive because it occurs within the unique SA context. The partnerships and presence of overseas university campuses may be an answer to South Australia's aim for excellence and international recognition.

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