AUSTRALIA-CANADA ROUNDTABLE ON FOREIGN QUALIFICATION RECOGNITION

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ANNEX 2
Best Practices in Foreign Qualification Recognition - Australia

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INTRODUCTION
In the past two decades, successive Australian governments have demonstrated increasing concern to monitor labour market outcomes for newly arrived skilled migrants - the ultimate public justification of the ‘success’ of the program. They have attempted to do so in the context of public ambivalence about the scale and changing demographic characteristics of intakes - in particular the increased admission of linguistically and racially diverse migrants from non-English speaking background (NESB) source countries. Between 1986 and 1991, 91,193 degree-qualified migrant professionals arrived in Australia, in addition to 39,239 with diplomas. By 1991, the overseas-born constituted 49 per cent of Australia’s mechanical engineers, 48 per cent of electrical/electronic engineers, 43 per cent of computer professionals, 40 per cent of doctors, and rising proportions in other key professions. Within 1 to 5 years of arrival, however, just 30 per cent of these degree-qualified migrants were employed. Few diploma holders from the same migration period had found work in any profession. Labour market outcomes were also disappointing for many migrants long-settled in Australia, with 41 per cent of 1981-85 and 49 per cent of 1986-91 degree-qualified arrivals professionally employed, and NESB workers invariably less advantaged\(^1\).

By the late 1980s just 50 per cent of NESB migrants’ qualifications were immediately recognised, compared to 90 per cent for English Speaking Background (ESB) migrants. Within this context the Committee to Advise on Australia’s Immigration Policies blasted ‘highly fragmented’ recognition procedures - a result of endemic ‘rivalry between state and federal jurisdictions’, and the collective failure of state and federal authorities, professional associations, unions and employer associations to secure better outcomes\(^2\). In 1989, the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia proclaimed the right of ‘all Australians (to) enjoy... equal life chances’, ‘fully... participate in society’, and ‘develop and make use of their potential for Australia’s economic and social development’\(^3\). Three major findings from the totality of Australian labour market research to 1990 were highlighted in this report:

*The first is that schooling obtained overseas counts for less than Australian schooling. The second is that pre-migration labour force experience is heavily discounted in the Australian labour market... The third is that, over and beyond these general processes, migrants from some countries get jobs with significantly lower status than Australian-born persons with similar qualifications and experience*\(^4\).

Research the following decade demonstrated few improvements in employment status for NESB professionals – the 1996 Census showing almost identical unemployment and under-employment outcomes across key fields, at a time of economic boom rather than recession\(^5\). They secured worse outcomes at every age, with recessions rendering them particularly vulnerable. They had difficulty converting overseas credentials into appropriate status work, locating this work in the fields for which they were qualified, and securing adequate earnings. This was despite their possession of generally higher qualifications than the domestic population (as in Canada). In Australia, negative employment outcomes for NESB migrants influenced public perceptions of immigration - exacerbating dissatisfaction with the thrust of contemporary policy, and reinforcing demand for justification of immigration’s economic value.

Responding to growing community concern, a federally driven and funded Australian reform agenda commenced in 1989\(^6\), the aim being to establish ‘the principles, procedures and institutional structures needed to establish an efficient, fair and consistent system for accreditation of overseas qualifications... (based on proposals) flexible enough to cover all occupations and to respond to changing occupational and award structures’\(^7\). Entitled ‘competency-based assessment’, the approach represented an
attempted democratisation of skills recognition. Vocational abilities were to be screened ‘in a way that is not dependent upon the nature and place of the skill development’, and recognized prior experience. Three types of assessment outcomes were specified: ‘full equivalence’ to local qualifications, ‘partial equivalence’ supplemented by prescribed local experience and/or study, and ‘no equivalence but with a transcript of demonstrated skills that a prospective employer may use for acceptance’.

To oversee the reform process, federal and state governments agreed to establish a range of specialist bodies, reporting to mainstream labour force development boards. The National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR), created in 1989, would have prime responsibility for four major functions: to ‘promote national standards for skill recognition, encourage competency-based assessments, develop counselling and referral services, and promote improvements to occupational regulation’, backed by a stronger research focus and a broader dissemination of research findings. A national outreach process underpinned each step of this process - representatives of professional associations, registration bodies, unions, the higher education and technical and further education sectors, overseas qualifications boards and employers continually invited to attend and participate in the dialogue accompanying new initiatives.

Despite clear gains, including definition of national competencies in nine key professions, control of licensure in regulated occupations remained in the hands of Australian regulatory bodies. While their role was to maintain professional standards and uphold the public good, they were frequently viewed as operating with a high degree of professional protectionism. In 1996, the Labor government confirmed the achievement of minimal reforms, noting a continued ‘automatic devaluing of qualifications and skills acquired from non-English speaking background countries' relative to those of English speaking background (ESB) origin, and ‘sufficient evidence of negative cultural and racial stereotyping by employers to warrant an education campaign to be mounted by the Commonwealth Government on the benefits of employing people from a variety of cultures’. Reform in the majority of professions and para-professions reflected state interests, despite the development of a number of promising trends (most notably in nursing, engineering and the trades). The Australian government’s primary strategy for addressing the problem of credential non-recognition remained funding of specialist labour market programs. In Western Australia, for example, the establishment of a bridging course for migrant nurses in the late 1980s converted an examination failure rate of 74 per cent (averaged across 10 years) to a pass rate of 89 per cent.

From 1999 the Howard government made a virtue of necessity. Pre-migration credential screening became a condition of eligibility for skilled migration. Criteria for the entry of skilled dependents and arrivals in other migration categories however remained unchanged - large numbers struggling to achieve appropriate labour market integration. In 2006 the Australian Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Migration conducted an exhaustive review of foreign credential recognition barriers and outcomes, with a strong focus on requirements by specific profession and vocational field. Its resulting report, entitled ‘Negotiating the Maze’, conceded there to be no scope for complacency, with serious challenges remaining. Fifty-five recommendations were made, designed to reduce confusion and contribute to improved labour market outcomes. A range of reforms are currently in process. By 2006 57 percent of Australia’s degree-qualified IT workforce were first generation migrants, along with 52 percent of engineers, 45 percent of doctors and 44 percent of accountants, the majority admitted as ‘Independent’ migrants through points-based selection. In the context of Australia’s growing reliance on degree and diploma-qualified migrants as a human capital resource, foreign credential recognition remains a significant social justice and efficiency issue.
NEW STRUCTURES TO FACILITATE SKILLED MIGRATION AND CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

Skills Australia
Established in 2010 within the DEEWR portfolio, Skills Australia is an independent Board composed of industry, economics and education experts, charged with advising the Minister on ‘current, emerging and future workforce skills needs’. A key function is development of Australia’s new Skilled Occupation List (SOL), solely for use in relation to GSM migration. In May 2010 the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship released the first SOL, ‘for migration purposes, identifying (71) occupations which are of high value and will assist in meeting the medium and long term needs of the Australian economy’. Following problems related to the MODL, the government’s explicit goals are ‘to ensure the… GSM program attracts migrants with high level skills, in occupations which meet Australia’s medium to long term skills needs, which can’t otherwise be met through efforts and measures aimed at employing, training, skilling and re-skilling Australians. Please note that a ‘Specialised Occupation’ is not included on the SOL if there are other more appropriate and specific migration options (specifically if the need can be met by temporary skilled migration or employer or state sponsored migration).

Australian Qualifications Framework Council (AQFC)
As early as in 1995 Australia’s State, Territory and Commonwealth Education and Training Ministers established the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) – phasing it in by 2000 to provide ‘a quality assured national framework of qualifications in the school, vocational education and training (VET), and higher education sectors in Australia’ by agreement with the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). The framework’s aim was to link all qualifications in ‘a highly visible, quality-assured national system of educational recognition which promotes lifelong learning and a seamless and diverse education and training system’. MCEETYA established the Australian Qualifications Framework Council to provide Education and Training Ministers with ‘strategic and authoritative advice on the AQF to ensure it is nationally and internationally robust and supports flexible cross-sector linkages and pathways’. Since July 2009 it has been the responsibility of the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment. It is important to note that the AQF is not responsible for pre- or post- migration qualification assessments for skilled migrants. It is critically relevant however to the determinations that are made, given its definition in 2011 of a revised 10 level framework structure, ranging from Certificate 1 (1) to Doctoral degrees (10). The AQF is a constant reference point for state/ territory authorized statutory bodies, licensing and regulatory bodies (including the Trade Regulation Authority), universities and other self-accrediting higher education bodies, the development of National Training Packages etc. In line with the AQF Framework, AEI-NOOSR facilitates assessment of equivalence to Australian qualifications – the key being nation-wide buy-in to this federally driven process.

Tertiary Education Qualifications and Standards Agency
The Australian Government is also in the process of developing a new national regulatory and quality agency for higher education, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), with key legislation presented to Parliament late March 2011. Established as a Commonwealth statutory authority, TEQSA will be ‘an independent body with powers to register university and non-university higher education providers, monitor quality and ensure standards’, following the historic transfer of regulatory powers long vested in states. In line with AQF Higher Education Standards, TEQSA will combine regulatory and quality assurance functions, based on the principles of ‘regulatory necessity’, ‘reflecting risk’, and ‘proportionate regulation’. The goals for TEQSA are ambitious in global terms. Australia will be the first country to adopt independent regulation of education sector quality standards through a single national agency, not subject to state regulation. In particular TEQSA will ‘register
providers, carry out evaluations of standards and performance, protect and assure the quality of international education and streamline current regulatory arrangements. It will join together the regulatory activity currently undertaken in the states and territories with the quality assurance activities currently undertaken by the Australian Universities Quality Agency’. New national regulatory arrangements are also being introduced in the vocational education and training (VET) sector. TEQSA and Australia’s new National VET Regulator are likely to merge in 2013, ‘to achieve a more interconnected tertiary sector’ \(^{19}\). There will be a strong international focus, with TEQSA engaging to ‘share best practice with international counterparts and... build on the network of agreements and collaborations (previously established) to enhance links with international quality and accreditation agencies wherever possible and appropriate’ \(^{20}\). These developments represent radical national reforms, and a momentous historic shift in terms of regulatory power. They are the subject of lively current debate across the education and regulatory sectors.

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency
As demonstrated by the field-specific case studies to follow, Australia has recently admitted around 20,000 foreign health professionals per year to work on a temporary or permanent resident basis (primarily nurses and doctors). Serious registration anomalies have evolved, with marked variations in the rigour of assessment requirements by state – for example in relation to temporary resident migrant doctors. To secure uniform registration and practice standards, in 2010 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) established the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) based on 10 national boards (medicine, nursing and midwifery, dentistry, pharmacy, physiotherapy, optometry, podiatry, psychology, chiropractice and osteopathy). Four additional boards will be introduced from 2012. This represents an historic attempt at national uniformity that involves strong state buy-in. Assessment and registration are now provided by once autonomous state boards based on agreed national standards \(^{21}\). COAG’s role has changed in the past decade – from ‘an occasional summit meeting of domestic political leadership to... being charged with the paramount leadership role in the federation, including detailed oversight of the implementation of federally agreed programs’ \(^{22}\). In terms of credential recognition, its Reform Council determined in February 2011 that national health registration had largely been achieved, despite the risk of this being ‘implemented in a way that retains or creates separate, jurisdiction-specific registration processes’. According to the Shadow Minister for Health (by contrast) the changeover has been ‘strife-riddled’, with nurses and doctors struggling to secure registration and many professionally displaced \(^{23}\). National governance of health qualifications recognition remains a challenging issue, including in relation to foreign-qualified professionals.

SELECT BEST PRACTICE FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION INITIATIVES
In recent years, as established, Australia has fine-tuned selection mechanisms for the General Skilled Migration program. Analysis of DIAC’s Longitudinal Survey on Immigrants to Australia revealed 83 percent of principal applicants were employed or self-employed 6 months post-migration (despite large numbers being new graduates, and 8 of the top 10 source countries being in non-OECD Asia). The fields of computing, accounting, engineering, nursing, and business & management have dominated, in a context where field of employment was reasonably correlated with past occupation despite some de-skilling. As demonstrated by multivariate analysis, PA’s from English speaking background countries have fared well in recent years, securing employment rates of 92-97 percent, closely followed by migrants from North-West Europe and India. Within the early settlement period birthplace groups at risk of employment disadvantage have also been protected by the study-migration pathway (despite securing lower overall outcomes). For example 74 percent of onshore primary applicants from China were working at 6 months compared to 53 percent of PA’s selected in China. Employment rates for GSM
migrants to Australia remained impressive at 18 months. By this stage 85 percent of PA’s were employed, with a further 4 percent conducting businesses. Seventy per cent had work in their preferred occupation, compared to 53 percent at 6 months. Significant job mobility had occurred, with 34 percent of PA’s changing positions - typically to secure more highly skilled work and/or better remuneration (a common pattern for former international students). Reflecting this, salary levels had improved markedly. Recent skilled migrants to Australia were very positive at 18 months regarding their settlement process (93%). Just 18 percent had been unemployed the previous year - typically for a few months. Welfare dependence was negligible. PA’s partners were also entering the workforce in force (67 percent of informants stating that their partners were now working)24. While many factors play a role in these positive trends, the following best practices are some of the key initiatives that have served to facilitate foreign qualification recognition.

Facilitating Credential Assessment: AEI-NOOSR’s Country Education Profiles
To support the process of foreign credential assessment, successive Australian governments have made substantial investment in the development of Country Education Profiles – a highly informative series valued and used globally, given their recent expansion and updating. By April 2011 119 Profiles had been established, covering the education systems of the countries listed in Table 1. The aim of the Profiles is to provide information concerning qualification systems, rather than assess individual credentials. The design principles are:

- Easy to use
- Covers higher education, technical and vocational and post-secondary qualifications
- Includes lists of recognised educational institutions
- Describes the education systems and qualifications in each country
- Updated regularly
- Supports consistent, quality decision-making
- Flexible subscription options for the world set, regional set or individual CEPs for organisations and individuals
- No licensing fees: one subscription allows access for your whole organization25

Table 1: Australia’s Country Education Profiles as of 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Available Country Education Profiles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, People's Republic of, Cook Islands, Fiji, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Korea, Republic of, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar (Burma), New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Taiwan, Thailand, Tonga, Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France (see also Administrative Divisions: Reunion, French Antilles [Guadeloupe and Martinique], French Guiana, New Caledonia, French Polynesia), Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, FYR, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Poland, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Comprehensive, on-line and up to date, Australia’s investment in these Profiles has allowed NOOSR-AEI to withdraw from direct qualification assessment, with an estimated 700 applications by 2008 handled annually (‘difficult cases’), compared to some 3,000 eight years back. NOOSR’s primary focus is now national training – preparing around 600 credential assessment officers per year (primarily university admission officers, employers, professional bodies, government departments and agencies, recruitment agencies, and interested individuals). Field-specific grants are provided to national regulatory bodies, to allow more informed assessments to be undertaken in specific fields (in the recent decade, for example, to nursing bodies in relation to qualifications from Indonesia, the Philippines and China). Within this context the Profiles are described as ‘a guide to the educational level of an overseas qualification’ in relation to the Australian Qualifications Framework (i.e. national equivalence). They are administered with the following caveats:

We assess qualifications in terms of comparison, not direct equivalence. Comparing different education qualifications is not an exact process. Education systems are complex and differ widely from country to country. There are different educational philosophies, course names, structures, objectives and lengths, entry requirements, and educational outcomes. Assessing overseas vocational and technical qualifications can be especially difficult because many countries do not have a competency-based system.

Providing Access to English Language Upgrades for Accreditation and Work

English language ability matters greatly to Australian employers in the context of a rapidly diversifying labour force, where substantial numbers of degree and diploma-qualified workers are now born overseas. Australia’s federal government has both refined skilled migration selection criteria, and made sustained investment in language training for all migrants. The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) commenced with ‘shipboard English’ in the late 1940s. The service has since been vastly expanded and professionalized, informed by analysis of settlement service needs. As early as 1991 the AMEP was the largest government-funded adult English language teaching program in the world. ‘Learner pathways’ were designed at first point of contact, to map migrants’ progression from the acquisition of basic English to ultimate employment and/or formal study goals. By 2009-10 the AMEP was providing tuition and associated services through 18 subnational contracts to more than 50,000 clients from 193 countries, studying in 250 locations (typically through subnational not for profit organisations). The program reaches around 60 percent of eligible migrants, including 90 percent of humanitarian entrants, 55 percent of family migrants and 41 percent of the skilled migration stream.

Based on the Immigrant (Education) Act 1971, migrants lacking functional English are entitled to receive up to 510 hours of English tuition or ‘the number of hours it takes to reach functional English (whatever comes first)’ – the average client receiving 369 hours of teaching. State governments contribute...
complementary funding in the context of their ethnic affairs policy frameworks. For example by the mid 1990s the NSW Migrant Employment and Qualifications Board was publishing a biennial directory of migrant bridging programs in that state, running to over 140 pages. Additional financial arrangements had been introduced to provide English training related to qualifications recognition, through the Assessment Subsidy for Overseas Trained Professionals Program (DEEWR). Targeting permanent residents and citizens only (i.e. excluding recently arrived migrants), this initiative by 2011 provided funding for migrants qualified in the following fields: Architect, Chiropractor, Dentist, Dietitian, General Medical Practitioner, Medical Specialist, Medical Scientist, Nurse, Occupational Therapist, Optometrist, Pharmacist, Physiotherapist, Podiatrist, Radiographer, Veterinarian. The program supports preparation for pre-accreditation exams, targeting the English language skills essential to success in the MCQ, Clinical, and other field-specific tests. Preparation such as this in Australia is associated with markedly improved examination outcomes.

Delivering Competency-Based Bridging Courses - Nursing Case Study

Since the 1980s Australia has been a world leader in the development of comprehensive field-specific bridging programs designed to bridge migrant workers into full recognition and skilled employment. While competency-based reforms for professional registration have been limited, very positive gains have been achieved in nursing and the trades. From 1989 onwards, for instance, three month competency based assessment bridging programs were introduced by State Nursing Boards Australia-wide. These CBA courses offered:

- A clearly defined pathway into professional registration (once candidates had satisfied defined English language and training standards);
- Systematic revision of core nursing content, including anatomy, physiology and pharmaceuticals;
- Training in essential equipment use, orientation to Australian nursing practice, terminology, the health system, jargon etc;
- Information on initially ‘alien’ concepts such as duty of care, informed consent, the nature and style of Australian hospital hierarchies etc;
- Ease of access to supervised clinical training places in hospitals (typically constituting around half of the course);
- Scope for extension or reduction in length, in the light of participants’ demonstrated work readiness; and
- Formally structured and defined skills assessment procedures in situ.

In the state of Victoria pass rates of 90-95 per cent for participants were the norm following completion of three-month CBA courses by the mid 1990s. In New South Wales (the dominant immigrant state, where entry-level English was more flexibly assessed) pass rates varied from 55-71 per cent, with the growing participation of Filipino and Fijian-trained nurses reportedly ‘dragging down’ averages. By 2008 nursing pre-registration bridging courses were offered in 6 states/territories, largely based on the nationally agreed competencies, and requiring advanced English language standards at point of entry (an average score of IELTS Band 7 or Occupational English Test B). Focus and fees varied considerably, reflecting local specific priorities. Waitlists are long, and there are not enough places. By 2011 a wide range of universities were also providing entry to practice degree upgrades. Despite this, the proliferation of entry to practice courses has facilitated strong labour market integration for migrant nurses across Australia, including relatively stigmatized groups. By the time of the 2006 Census, labour market integration rates for degree-qualified migrant nurses resident in Australia up to 5 years were excellent. Between 2001 and 2006 permanent resident 6,680 nurses arrived, in addition to many with
diploma level qualifications. Access to professional nursing employment was strong for most groups: the best rates achieved by arrivals from Singapore (86 per cent), South Africa (79 per cent), UK/Ireland (76 per cent), and India (72 per cent), but with very positive representation also secured by less advantaged groups, including nurses from China (53 per cent), the Philippines (58 per cent), Hong Kong (59 per cent), Sri Lanka/ Bangladesh (63 per cent) - strong results compared to Canada. The availability of interest-free government loans facilitates accreditation course engagement (see Australia’s ‘Fee-Help’ scheme, with substantial loans available for permanent residents and former international students in addition to Australian citizens). Loans need to be repaid once migrants have achieved reasonable full-time salary status.

Comparable developments existed in other fields. For example by 1994 10 federally-funded bridging programs existed primarily in Melbourne and Sydney to support the labour market integration of migrant engineers, with models ranging from examination preparation for credential recognition, to sophisticated IT development (e.g. training in computer aided design for mechanical engineers), ‘English for Engineers’, engineering employment preparation, and extended field-specific industrial experience.

The above best practice examples are longstanding. The following highlight more recent innovations.

VETASSESS
VETASSESS is another highly innovative body, ‘Australia’s leading assessment and workforce skills developments organization’ with representation now in over 20 countries. An assessing authority gazetted by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, VETASSESS has the capacity to assess trade qualifications (like the Trades Recognition Australia), as well as general professional occupations (e.g. economists). Most notably it can deliver recognised Australian credentials through onshore and offshore short course training – in the case of trade-qualified migrants, for instance, to assure migrants have full recognition for employment purposes at point of entry to Australia. Based on needs assessment in English, VETASSESS tailors its services to meet ‘industry requirements, national standards and client needs’ in a wide range of countries (including Canada, Chile, China, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the UK and the USA).

Key strategies include skills gap analysis, assessment of qualifications for both the GSM and temporary 457 visa programs, testing of language, literacy and numeracy skills for employment, and provision of training resources. VETASSESS has a significant additional role in relation to document verification – for example as the first organization outside China to be authorized by the Ministry of Education ‘to verify the authenticity and recognition status of Chinese education qualifications’. In terms of the electrical trades, for instance, since 2007 it has been able to deliver ‘gap training’ courses at the Certificate 111 level to Australian standards, in line with the Electrician, Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration Action Group National Training package, based on competency requirements for electricians, line workers, cable jointers and refrigeration and air-conditioning mechanics. VETASSESS examines the trade skills of prospective skilled migrants in these occupations from the UK, India, Sri Lanka, South Africa and the Philippines, replacing the Trades Recognition Australia process for these countries. Where training gaps are identified, the requisite study can be undertaken in select offshore sites (eg the UK) or on arrival in Australia.

Investing in Global Assessment Partnerships - Medicine
Medical migrants, as noted previously, are applying to Australia in very substantial numbers – a pattern providing clear scope for global collaboration. In a recent best practice initiative, the Australian Medical Council (AMC) and the Medical Council of Canada (MCC) pooled 7,000 fully calibrated and upgraded
Multiple Choice Question items for global pre- and post-migration administration. Cross-national teams of clinicians worked together to devise item material and the exam format, with 6 examinations run to July 2008 to filter prospective medical migrants to either country. From its first administration in November 2006, around 1,000 candidates took the test (computer-delivered for Australia). The merits of such collaboration seem clear. The two participating nations reviewed, refreshed, and close to doubled their test items at a modest cost. The MCQ’s integrity was improved, through minimal recycling of items. The pass rate was around 55-60 percent (consistent in Australia with prior AMC examination outcomes). In 2009 the two Medical Councils used the same framework but are currently piloting very different delivery systems (Australia using a computer adaptive model, which became operational in February 2011). The Medical Councils are now assembling comparative data – their next step being to determine how these developments can be taken further. The exercise demonstrated there was substantial commonality in the technical side – a key challenge being to reconcile different jurisdictions’ legal requirements, given their capacity to reduce flexibility to develop combined systems.

Global collaborative assessment approaches such as these, which are based on cooperation between countries of comparable education quality and shared strategic goals, warrant further support and development. They have the potential to be smarter and cost-effective, to be globally available and e-based. They also have potential relevance to other qualification fields – including stage one assessment for allied health migrants in nursing, dentistry and pharmacy professionals. The field-specific sections will outline important current Canada-Australia mutual recognition initiatives in relation to the accounting, architecture, dentistry, physiotherapy professions.

**Bilateral/ Multilateral Agreements – Case Studies in Engineering and Accounting**

Research demonstrates Canadian and Australian engineering training systems (as in other fields) to be highly comparable. Important steps in relation to bilateral recognition have developed in recent years – driven by the peak regulatory bodies rather than by government. The Washington Accord is an exemplar of this process, in relation to engineering. Both Australia and Canada are foundation signatories to a multinational agreement established in 1989 to facilitate ‘the recognition or equivalency of accredited engineering education programs leading to the engineering degree’. It is important to note in relation to this that the agreement is limited to recognition of undergraduate degrees, excludes consideration of specialist qualifications, and does not cover the specific licensing requirements imposed by signatory countries (e.g. in the case of Canada a year of Canada-based professional engineering experience). There were 13 Washington Accord member countries by 2011 (compared to 9 in 2008): the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and South Africa. India is set to become a member this year. The Sydney Accord was signed in June 2001, designed to establish a comparable system for recognition of the training of engineering technologists (first involving Australia, Hong Kong, China SAR, Ireland, South Africa and the United Kingdom). In 2011 there are three additional members: Canada, New Zealand and the US.

Engineers Australia, the regulatory body in Australia, strongly endorsed these processes. As noted previously, Australia provides immediate recognition to around three-quarters of migrant professional engineers – a very generous outcome by world standards. According to an executive informant,

*The Washington Accord is essentially about 2 things. It’s about standards, and that’s what predominantly comes to people’s minds. But it’s also about the accreditation practices – the way the universities are accredited by the engineering institution in the jurisdiction. The way the Accord works is that each country produces a list of accredited courses, and it’s only those courses that are covered by the Washington Accord. So in India or Russia only the best*
universities would be covered, and if you should happen to come from a non-accredited course you would have to come through the full accreditation process (after migration). So there is a possibility for China, with a good raft of excellent universities – as good as anywhere! – to have those universities accredited and play a full part in the Washington Accord. But those engineers who have qualified in other universities will need to have their qualifications examined when they go to another country.

Under the terms of the Accord applicants must be licensed practising engineers in their home country, pass any required examinations or interviews to ensure they satisfy practice requirements in their new host country (eg understand codes, professional standards not related to the technical competence of the applicant), and complete defined periods of industrial practice if required (not generally the case in Australia). The other professional engineering accord in place is the APEC Register – an Asia-Pacific initiative which reflects the growing scale of regional flows, but is inherently more problematic given the scale of resource and training differences, involving both Canada and Australia. In 1996, the APEC Engineer ‘Towards Mutual Recognition of Qualifications’ initiative was adopted to ‘streamline recognition procedures to access work opportunities across the APEC region’. With 15 of the 21 regional members partially or fully engaged, the first priority was expansion of the knowledge base – to ‘map existing arrangements for accreditation, recognition and development of professional engineering qualifications, use this information to identify best practices in accreditation…. and deliver a best practices workshop’\(^{38}\). Definitions of ‘professional engineer’ included recognition by an authorized APEC economy body, completion of a minimum of 7 years engineering experience since graduation, and at least 2 years in charge of significant engineering work.

There remain significant challenges however in a regional context characterized by highly variable resources as well as training standards. According to the same senior informant:

> A number of countries (including Hong Kong and Singapore) have put very considerable effort into ensuring their university standards and accreditation processes are equivalent. Engineers Australia also invests a considerable amount of time in assisting countries with that – for example we currently have a strong focus on China, and in the past on Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. There is a current suggestion of the possibility to meet ‘ASEAN’ standards, based on establishing an accreditation process through Asia (not extending to the Pacific). Not as a competitor to the Washington Accord, but as a stepping stone on the way to Washington Accord standards, and as a way of establishing accreditation processes in countries lacking them to date\(^{39}\).

This could be a very appropriate strategy, including for countries associated with the substantial out-migration of engineers such as the Philippines.

Comparable multilateral agreements are being explored by other Australian regulatory bodies. CPA Australia, for example, has established offices in Vietnam, Fiji, London (also covering Europe) to facilitate accountant flows, in a context where 1 million Australian expatriates are overseas in any one year including disproportionate numbers are qualified in accounting. Globalisation rather than social justice drives this liberalization, as described by a senior CPA Australia informant:

> We’re on a continuous improvement process. We’re not locked into what we used to do. … Years ago we would have said to anybody, from any country, you need to undertake Australian taxation and Australian law studies. Not so now. We have mutual recognition
agreements with other professional accounting bodies. It may be two organizations in a country, or it may be one. Because those are conducted through negotiations, there are different terms under specific MRA’s, (supported by) a wide range of contacts with different professional bodies. They’re being influenced by our desire to build alliances. As our members are increasingly mobile, the first question they will have once they decide to work in the US, for instance, is how can CPA Australia help me to work there legally and effectively? We give advice on the MRA’s in each location. But in terms of MRA’s we recognize each other’s autonomy. For example we can’t compel AICPA (the US accrediting body) to take on any individual member and recognize them. What we can do is explain the process by which our member can approach the AICPA and meet their requirements. And that’s vice versa when AICPA members come to Australia – we assist them to become members of CPA Australia through recognition of their qualifications. All professional accounting bodies around the world need to keep on top of each other’s expectations and requirements, and when the issues that arise from the fact that some members of the particular accounting body are acceptable, and others aren’t, you need to work out how you communicate that effectively.

Such developments are certain to intensify in the future. At times however regulatory bodies may find themselves under inappropriate pressure – for example to liberalise immediate recognition for workers trained in under-resourced systems, in order to support the level of trade access sought by the host country’s primary producers. By 2006, when the Australian Parliament conducted the Review of Arrangements for Overseas Skills Recognition, Upgrading and Licensing, a wide range of multiple bilateral and multilateral agreements were in place, most notably:

- **The Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement** - a non-treaty arrangement between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments of Australia and the government of New Zealand, signed in 1996 and allowing full qualification recognition for citizens qualified in registered occupations).
- **The Asia-Pacific Regional Convention** - ratified by Australia in 1985, to facilitate the recognition of regional qualifications from contracting states for access to further education).
- **The Lisbon Recognition Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region** - ratified by Australia in 2002, focused on the recognition of qualifications to facilitate the global mobility of students and professionals).
- **ASEAN-Australian Development Cooperation Program** - developed in 1998 to ‘establish a network of professional accreditation bodies to promote regional mobility and mutual recognition of technical professional credentials and skills standards’.

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6 A few fields such as nursing had commenced the process some years in advance of these federal government initiatives.


24 For a comprehensive analysis of the research data and skilled migration policy trends in the past decade, see Hawthorne, L (2011), Competitors and Collaborators: Skilled Migration to New Zealand and Australia 2004-2010 – Policy Trends and Outcomes, Department of Labour, Wellington, May.


28 Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Annual Report 2009-10 (Canberra: Department of Citizenship and Immigration, 2010), 228.


For the most recent data on bridging course options for migrant nurses, see http://www.google.com.au/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4SUNC_enAU386AU386&q=bridging+programs+for+overseas+qualified+nurses, accessed 8 April 2011.


Hawthorne, L (1994), Labour Market Barriers for Immigrant Engineers in Australia, Australian Government Publication Services, Canberra – see Chapter 7 for detail on bridging programs.


Derived from an interview with a senior informant from Engineers Australia conducted by L Hawthorne for contrastive nine country UNESCO study to assess approaches to skilled recognition across Australia, Canada, China, France, Malaysia, Morocco, the Philippines, Senegal, and the UK (2008).

Derived from an interview with a senior informant from CPA Australia conducted by L Hawthorne for contrastive nine country UNESCO study to assess approaches to skilled recognition across Australia, Canada, China, France, Malaysia, Morocco, the Philippines, Senegal, and the UK (2008).