

MEDIA RELEASE

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Graduate Education Leaders Issue Global Statement on Quality

International agreement reached at summit on principles for measuring quality in doctoral and master's education

Brisbane, Australia (15 September, 2010) – Higher education leaders from 17 countries agreed today to a statement of principles supporting the assessment of quality in doctoral and master's education and research training.

The agreement was reached after discussions at the Fourth Annual Strategic Leaders Global Summit, "Measuring Quality in (Post)Graduate Education and Research Training," jointly sponsored and hosted by the U.S.-based Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) and the Australian Group of Eight (Go8). The Global Summit is an annual event designed to promote international best practices on a pressing topic in master's and doctoral education.

In response to growing demands for accountability and greater transparency in higher education, academic and research systems around the globe have intensified efforts to meaningfully assess the quality and outcomes of university education. To date, however, governments, international organizations, and the higher education sector have focused these efforts almost exclusively at the undergraduate level.

The more specialized nature of doctoral and master's education, particularly in their research components, generally requires that assessment be based on more specific outcomes, such as measurable skills for research, teaching, and other professional activities, as well as theses and dissertations, which reflect the overall quality of training.

The summit promoted discussion of this topic through sessions on quantitative and qualitative measurements of learning outcomes in areas such as attrition and completion, program content and design, mentoring and supervision, international collaboration, skills and competencies, and employment.

"The summit has been a great opportunity for the leaders in postgraduate education from around the world to learn from each other about how we might better assess the quality and outcomes of postgraduate research and consequently improve the postgraduate education of future generations of researchers," said Professor Max King, Dean of Graduate Studies at Monash University.

During the final session, participants reached consensus on a set of principles intended to serve as a framework for establishing and exchanging best practices in quality assessment, both in the participants' home countries and via international networks.

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“Improving and advancing quality in graduate education is truly a global objective, and this year’s summit has enriched our collective understanding of strategies and tools for achieving that goal,” stated CGS President Debra Stewart. “The Strategic Leaders Global Summit continues to be one of our most effective vehicles for sharing best practices across national boundaries.”

The 43 participants included deans and other leaders of graduate schools, representatives of national and international associations devoted to graduate education, and a number of government officials with oversight for the quality of graduate education in their countries. Along with Australia and the United States, the countries represented were: Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand, the U.K., and Vietnam.

The [Principles](#), guidelines for organization practice, are attached.

Previous Strategic Leaders Global Summits focused on international collaboration in graduate education ([Banff, 2007](#) and [San Francisco, 2009](#)) and promoting scholarly integrity ([Florence, 2008](#)). A report based upon the proceedings will be forthcoming in 2011.

More information on the Global Summit is available at www.cgsnet.org/.

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The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of over 500 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. Among U.S. institutions, CGS members award 93% of the doctoral degrees and 76% of the master’s degrees. The organization’s mission is to improve and advance graduate education, which it accomplishes through advocacy in the federal policy arena, research, and the development and dissemination of best practices.*

* Based on data from the 2009 CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees

The Group of Eight is a coalition of leading Australian universities, comprehensive in general and professional education and distinguished by breadth and depth in research. www.go8.edu.au

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Principles and Practices for Assessing the Quality of (Post)-Graduate Education and Research Training

Preamble:

The assessment of quality in (post)-graduate education is critical to the success of master's and doctoral students and to the future of the global research enterprise both within and outside academia. All countries and regions stand to benefit from assessment efforts that seek to improve outcomes for students and countries. At the same time, the goals of quality assessment must be considered in relation to the diverse contexts in which students are trained. International discussions of quality assessment must therefore respect differences in the priorities and approaches of different countries, institutions, and disciplines, and the variety of educational, research and professional needs of their students. Acknowledging the differences in our national contexts, the delegates of the 2010 Strategic Leaders Global Summit have agreed to a set of common principles for assessing the quality of (post)-graduate education and research training.

1. The primary objective of quality assessment is to ensure and improve the quality of (post)-graduate training and student learning and professional development.

Evaluation must go beyond the assessment of research quality to address topics such as:

- Admission criteria and recruitment
- Student Learning Outcomes, including transferable skills
- Mentoring and supervising structures
- Infrastructure for (post)-graduate student training
- Quality of student experience
- Measures of completion and attrition
- Career placement both inside and outside academe

2. Another key objective of quality assessment is to assure external stakeholders of the quality of (post)-graduate education. Sharing the goals and outcomes of assessment with all relevant stakeholders, including the public, helps ensure that assessment efforts are understood and valued.

3. While quality can be assessed in a variety of ways, evaluation should be based on clearly-defined objectives, criteria and processes, and the intended uses of the results should be made clear to all relevant stakeholders. Different or multiple processes may be needed to meet different goals and audiences.

4. The development of specific quality metrics for research degrees is a key priority.

Areas to be considered in review of research degrees include:

- Monitoring progress through the degree
- Quality of the dissertation/thesis
- Exposure to interdisciplinary and global research experiences
- Skills for generating and communicating research
- Quality of the research training environment
- Research impact

5. Quality assessment is most effective when academic staff (faculty) play a role in designing or refining evaluation procedures.

- 6. Regular processes of internal and external review should be used to sustain and advance quality in (post)-graduate education.**

- 7. Graduate education leaders have particular responsibilities for defining, measuring, benchmarking, and improving the professional and transferable skills of students.**
To support this effort to improve program quality, it is important to closely follow workforce trends, develop better methods of tracking graduates' career trajectories, and ensure that students are trained to adapt to evolving career demands.

- 8. The assessment of quality in international collaborations is integral to (post)-graduate research training in the 21st century.** The globalization of (post)-graduate education and research demands rigorous, coordinated efforts to measure the outcomes of international experiences for graduate students, and to identify desired outcomes not currently achieved.

- 9. The success of future assessment efforts depends on the refinement of existing tools, qualitative and quantitative, and the development of new methodologies for measuring quality.** Key priorities in this area include the comparison of tools existing or under development, the exchange of best practices in their use, and the development of new technologies that support assessment and the sharing of data.

- 10. National and regional groups of university leaders responsible for (post)-graduate education and research training provide an important mechanism for sharing best practices.**