

AUCC Statement

Canadian Universities and the Bologna Process

June 2008

Introduction

Higher education, like most sectors, is transforming itself in step with the ever-advancing trends of the global knowledge economy. A high profile example of this is the reform agenda being implemented by Europe's universities through the Bologna Process – the commitment by 46 countries to create an integrated European Higher Education Area through initiatives such as a harmonized degree structure and enhanced credit transfer and mobility among European students. While the Bologna Process is a uniquely European initiative, its influence and impact on higher education is being felt throughout the world.

Canadian universities continue to be recognized globally for the quality of higher education delivered. They are, however, not immune to developments of the magnitude of the Bologna Process. It is therefore appropriate at this time to respond to this emerging European initiative by at once seizing its related opportunities and facing its challenges.

Canadian universities are committed to helping foster a knowledge advantage for Canada and realizing the federal government's stated goal of having the *"best educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce in the world."* Building on a long history of academic excellence, Canadian universities are furthering this endeavour by becoming more internationalized as institutions in an effort to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed in the global knowledge economy and society.

The internationalization of Canada's universities includes facilitating the two-way flow of students through international student recruitment and student exchange as well as bringing an international dimension to the curriculum. It is in these areas of student mobility and curricular reform where the Bologna Process will have its greatest impact on Canadian universities. In this light, it is necessary to address this emerging situation in European higher education in order to reinforce Canada's place in the world as a destination for and a source of the best and the brightest students, researchers and faculty.

AUCC members therefore, through this statement, acknowledge the significance of the emerging European Higher Education Area and hereby commit to undertaking a course of action to address the implications of the Bologna Process for Canadian universities and plan a path forward for engaging with our European partners, both old and new, in a spirit that mirrors Europe's own renewal in higher education.



Addressing the Bologna Process

AUCC, through its Standing Advisory Committee on International Relations and the Board of Directors, has been examining for some time how Canadian universities can best respond to the changes under way in Europe. It began by identifying the following three key implications of these changes for Canadian universities.

Competition in international student recruitment is the primary implication. The Bologna Process, among its other goals, is also a sophisticated exercise in marketing European higher education. As the Bologna countries seek to make Europe a more attractive study destination through its degree harmonization and support for increased academic mobility, they are likely to increase their international student market share at the expense of other leading host countries, including Canada.

Secondly, the impact of the increasing number of three-year undergraduate degrees from Bologna countries on Canadian credential evaluation policies and practices needs to be assessed. The coming influx of three year degrees presents obvious challenges for admission decisions in graduate studies at Canadian institutions and raises questions about the effect this will have on our graduate programs.

Finally, student mobility, through short-term exchanges and study abroad opportunities for Canadian students is an area in which AUCC believes it is imperative to act to take advantage of the emerging landscape of higher education in Europe. The prevalence of the transparency tools in the Bologna Process, such as the European Credit Transfer System and the Diploma Supplement, along with funding programs such as Erasmus Mundus, represent a potential for increased Canada-Europe student mobility and enhanced international curricula through joint degree programs.

A Commitment to Engagement

As AUCC pursues further action in relation to the Bologna Process, all activities will be informed by the guiding principle of the autonomy of individual Canadian universities to respond to these issues according to their own particular needs and strategies.

This exercise is also guided by the acknowledgement of the challenges in pursuing any collective approach aimed at aligning with the European model, given the diversity and complexity of Canadian higher education. CMEC has recently issued the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework (2007) which represents a statement of generally expected outcomes of various degree levels. Nevertheless, it would clearly be a much larger challenge to reach agreement across the provinces and institutions that this framework constitutes a guide to a standard approach to degree structures.

AUCC recognizes, however, that responding to the Bologna Process also represents a unique opportunity to examine ‘lessons learned’ and best practices in addressing Canada’s internal system of credit transfers and mobility among institutions across jurisdictions.

In the spirit of renewed engagement in higher education beyond our borders and given the circumstances related to the emerging Bologna Process, AUCC commits to:

- Keeping a close watching brief on the progress of the Bologna Process with respect to implementation of reforms and political direction in Europe.
- Closely monitoring the engagement of other non-Bologna countries such as the United States, Australia and China along with other actors within Canada, such as governmental partners and other higher education stakeholders.
- Continuing to raise awareness among its membership of key issues related to the Bologna Process through a continued national dialogue within the association, research on good practices and the organization of various information sessions and workshops.
- Pursuing a policy dialogue with European partners such as the European University Association, to identify ways of seizing the opportunities to enhance Canada-Europe cooperation, especially student mobility, and address any challenges for Canadian universities in the broader Bologna context.

As demonstrated by this initiative, Canada's universities are committed to enhancing greater global cooperation in higher education through activities such as two-way student mobility and joint degree programming. There are many opportunities for the government to leverage this commitment, through enhanced support in these areas to optimize Canadian university activities to engage Canada with the world. Additionally, Canada needs to maximize university efforts to attract the best and brightest international students in the face of increased competition from other countries.

Preparing our students to be global citizens and fulfilling Canada's priority of being a leader in the global knowledge economy requires new knowledge, new skills and new approaches to higher education through the continued internationalization of Canada's universities. Looking beyond Canada's borders to engage with leading partners in Europe as their higher education systems evolve is critical to this process.

Canadian universities commit to moving forward in step with the progress in higher education elsewhere in the world. Engaging with the Bologna Process and with other regions as well, will ensure the continued excellence of our higher education system and ultimately the prosperity and well-being of our society.