



## **AUCC Background Document**

### **The Bologna Process: Implications for Canadian Universities**

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## **The Bologna Process: Implications for Canadian Universities**

*\* The following document represents a reworking of the original memoranda provided to members of AUCC's Standing Advisory Committee on International Relations (SACIR) and Board of Directors as part of their April 2008 deliberations on the Bologna Process and its implications for Canadian universities.*

### **Introduction**

Fundamental changes in higher education are underway in Europe as a result of the Bologna Process – the commitment by 46 countries across the continent to create an integrated European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. Given the magnitude of this initiative, it is therefore important to discern what, if any, implications there are for Canadian universities.

The focus of this document is:

1. To provide an update on the latest developments related to the Bologna Process within Europe, as well as external responses in Canada and elsewhere;
2. To take stock of key issues and implications from a Canadian university perspective.

While this document is by no means a comprehensive analysis of all the aspects of the Bologna Process (a vast, multilayered and ever-evolving process, not given to simple summaries or analysis), the content has been informed by interviews and discussions with numerous key experts both in Canada and abroad in addition to an extensive literature review of primary and secondary sources.

### **Background**

The Bologna Process is a voluntary intergovernmental initiative, which aims to create a EHEA by 2010 where education systems would be compatible, degrees comparable and students' mobility would be unhindered. Consisting of 46 signatory countries (see **Appendix A** for list), the Bologna bloc's size and high profile also act as an effective global promotion vehicle for European higher education.

### **The Decision-Making Structure of the Bologna Process**

Significantly, the Bologna Process is conducted outside the formal governance framework of the European Union (EU). It is an intergovernmental structure where decisions are reached by the consensus of the Ministers for higher education of the 46 signatory countries involved. This approach reflects the vast diversity in Europe's higher education systems while at the same time indicates how massive an effort it is and, not surprisingly, how progress is sure to be slow and incremental. (See **Appendix B** for more on the decision-making structure of the Bologna Process.)

## Origins of the Bologna Process

Higher education Ministers from 29 European countries first met in Bologna in 1999 and launched the process by signing a declaration establishing the necessary steps to create a EHEA by 2010. (Prior to this, was the Sorbonne Declaration, signed in 1998 by the UK, France, Germany and Italy, which laid out an initial framework.)

The original broad objectives of the Bologna Process were:

- to remove the obstacles to student mobility across Europe;
- to enhance the attractiveness of European higher education worldwide;
- to establish a common structure of higher education systems across Europe;
- for this common structure to be based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. (the third cycle has since been added.)

The underpinning philosophy of the Bologna Process is often referred to as the social dimension. This idea is based on the themes of equity and harmonization while respecting and celebrating the diversity of Europe – its countries and their institutions. This philosophy has been increasingly infused with additional language focussing on “economic competitiveness” with the involvement of the European Commission. This, in turn, has led to some convergence of the Bologna Process and the EU’s so-called Lisbon Agenda aimed at improving the competitiveness of Europe in innovation and the knowledge economy.

Since 1999 Ministers have met four other times to assess progress towards the creation of the EHEA – in Prague in 2001, Berlin in 2003, Bergen in 2005 and in May 2007, the UK hosted the most recent Ministerial summit in London. Here, they reaffirmed the commitment to “increasing the compatibility and comparability of European higher education systems while respecting their diversity”.

Over the course of the first three summits in Bologna, Prague and Berlin, the participating Ministers of Higher Education formalised the objectives of the Bologna Process into 10 action lines:

1. adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
2. adoption of a system essentially based on two cycles;
3. establishment of a system of credits;
4. promotion of mobility;
5. promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance;
6. promotion of the European dimension in higher education  
(from the 1999 Bologna Declaration);
7. focus on lifelong learning;
8. inclusion of higher education institutions and students;
9. promotion of the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area  
(added in 2001 at the Prague Ministerial summit);
10. doctoral studies and the synergy between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area (added in 2003 at the Berlin Ministerial summit).

## **Overall Objectives of the Bologna Process**

At its most fundamental level, the main objective of the process is the creation of the EHEA by 2010. Removing obstacles to student and academic mobility – within Europe and to students from outside – is seen as essential to attaining this main objective.

Degree cycles figured largely in these plans in the beginning, as Ministers initially called for European higher education sectors to adopt a system based on two cycles, at Bachelor (3 years) and Master's level (2 years). Since then, focus has been extended beyond these two cycles so that doctoral level qualifications are now considered as the third cycle (3 years) in the Bologna Process. This will enable the promotion of closer links between the EHEA and the European Research Area. (The ERA – a parallel EU process designed to enhance research collaboration as a central pillar of the Lisbon Agenda.)

To the contrary, therefore, of some widely held beliefs, there are no Bologna degrees per se but rather “Bologna-compliant degrees.” This is one area of the Bologna objectives where implementation is progressing well. These degrees will be rapidly increasing in numbers coming out of the near 4,000 institutions within the 46 Bologna countries in the coming years.

## **Increasing Transparency through the Bologna Process**

In addition to the three-cycle system, the Bologna Process has produced tools designed to interpret and convert academic work in one country to academic work in another. The “transparency tools” include:

- European Credit Transfer System (ECTS);
- Diploma Supplement;
- Quality Assurance.

The development of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees aims to simplify comparison between qualifications across Europe. The flexibility and transparency provided hopes to enable students and teachers to have their qualifications recognised more widely, facilitating freedom of movement around a more transparent EHEA. This has been aided by the establishment of a system of credits in the form of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the adoption of the Diploma Supplement by all countries involved. The ECTS, a formula for calculating the value of credits earned, predates Bologna. It was initially introduced as part of the EU's Erasmus program as a means to facilitate academic recognition among partner institutions for the program's exchange students. ECTS has since become an essential component of the Bologna Process.

Similarly, the Diploma Supplement was initiated before the Bologna Process. This project began as part of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The idea of the supplement is to have a document attached to all higher education diplomas providing a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were successfully completed by the holder.

The quality assurance efforts within the Bologna Process remain a consistent area of great attention from the participants. The signatory countries, working closely with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European University Association (EUA) have made progress on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance – adopted by all countries at the Bergen Conference of 2005 – yet much remains to be done.

There have been difficulties in developing a coherent, cooperative mechanism for quality assurance across all the different jurisdictions and indeed, it was identified as one of the key priority themes for the next Ministerial meeting in 2009 as they strive to evaluate the newly established European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies. This body's goal is to improve the quality and ensure high standards of higher education in Europe as central elements of the Bologna countries' effort to make the EHEA attractive on the international stage. Part of the work, related to this, is to develop an agreed set of guidelines and explore ways to ensure an adequate peer review system for QA bodies.

The Bologna Process also outlines a commitment to lifelong learning in Europe, which the participants agree is essential to help meet the challenges of increased competition in the global workplace, and the use of new technologies.

Institutions have been urged to develop courses and curricula with significant European content, to increase the European dimension of higher education. This also entails the promotion of partnership activities and curriculum development between institutions in Europe, and the establishment of joint degrees, particularly at the graduate level. The EU's Erasmus Mundus and Atlantis programs, as vehicles for mobility and facilitating the development of joint degrees, are instrumental to this objective. These programs may provide a window for engagement for non-Bologna countries as well.

### **Progress on Implementation**

With such an ambitious agenda, it is not surprising that the levels of implementation amongst Bologna countries vary significantly. Progress on the main objectives are being tracked by the EUA and reported to the Ministerial conferences. Through this we see a wide array of levels of implementation of both country reforms of the education systems and of institutional-level reform. There are varying levels of political will as well within the group. The United Kingdom is a good example of the competing interests having an effect on progress.

While the government of the U.K. continues to be an active player in the Bologna Process, there are, not surprisingly, some signs of reluctance and concern coming from other stakeholders about the lessening of quality of UK higher education through compatibility initiatives of the Bologna Process. It was, in part, in an effort to confront this scepticism that the government offered to host the Ministerial summit of 2007 in London.

As part of the lead-up to the London summit, the U.K. House of Commons Education and Skills Committee undertook a study on the benefits of the U.K.'s participation in the Bologna Process. Several concerns were raised in the ensuing report about the loss of U.K.'s existing comparative advantage in higher education through the "standardizing" trend of Bologna and the lack of

flexibility in a fast changing global education landscape under the process. These concerns were in addition to some of the “Euro-sceptic” language from some quarters expressing misgivings about an ever-expanding role of the European Commission in a domain outside of its jurisdiction.

There is similar skepticism in other Bologna countries that may be slowing progress, along with misgivings on the part of some stakeholder groups in higher education. Some elements of student groups have been vocal in their concerns about the potential for the “commercializing” of higher education through the Bologna Process. Likewise, faculty representatives are not unanimous in their support for all aspects of the reform agenda.

Overall, while 2010 remains the notional date for the Bologna Process objectives, it will still be many years before all of the reforms are in place as originally envisioned.

At the recent London Ministerial meeting, in addition to reaffirming their commitment to “increasing the compatibility and comparability of European higher education systems while respecting their diversity,” the participating Ministers set priority themes for the 2009 Ministerial conference, including:

- taking stock of the overall implementation;
- design the evaluation of the newly established European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies;
- articulate future process after 2010; and
- dialogue with the world through a new strategy: “The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting.” (More on this below.)

### **A New Area of Action: The External Dimension**

Notably for Canadian universities, the countries involved in the Bologna Process are beginning to think beyond 2010 and look outwards to engage with other regions of the world. As a result of a resolution during the Bergen Ministerial Conference of 2005, a special Working Group of the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) was created to address the “external dimension” of the Bologna Process; in other words, how it relates to other regions of the world.

The group’s initial report presented in London in 2007 includes an extensive look at the external dimension and emphasizes the importance of this dimension being “*not just about international competitiveness, attractiveness and recognition but also about partnership and cooperation, policy dialogue and last but not least clear information on processes in European higher education.*”

The external dimension was also determined to be a key theme for deliberation for the London Ministerial conference. It was in this context that AUCC Vice-President of International Affairs, Karen McBride, participated as an external expert on a panel at the London summit – the first time Canada was invited and granted observer status at a Bologna Process event.

The main point advanced by AUCC at the London summit was the importance of a formal structure for policy dialogue with external stakeholders and partners. Some key observations made at the time, with respect to the dynamics of the Bologna Process were: European stakeholders (both governments and institutions) are firmly committed to the Process; and while the external dimension is important and Bologna participants are aware of the need to engage outside Europe, they have limited capacity to undertake outreach initiatives.

The external dimension continues to evolve and, as part of the May 2007 Communiqué in London, the Bologna Ministers of Education and Research adopted a new strategy “The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting” which constitutes the response to the global interest in the European higher education reforms.

The strategy encompasses the following five core policy areas:

- improving information on the EHEA;
- promoting European higher education to enhance its world-wide attractiveness and competitiveness;
- strengthening cooperation based on partnership;
- intensifying policy dialogue;
- furthering recognition of qualifications.

As part of the strategy, the Bologna Ministers tasked the BFUG to report back on overall developments of the Global Strategy by the next Ministerial meeting in 2009, with particular emphasis on two areas: improving the information available about the EHEA and; improving recognition through the assessment of qualifications from non-Bologna countries based on the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Overall, the new emphasis on the global context provides an occasion for a Canadian effort to interact more closely with the Bologna Process and the emerging EHEA through different actors such as the Bologna Secretariat, the EU Commission, the EUA and with partner institutions themselves in Bologna countries. There is willingness, on the parts of European actors to look out to the rest of the world as a source for greater collaboration with their re-energized higher education sector. As outlined in the Global Strategy: “... there is a need for enhanced higher education cooperation with non-EHEA countries in a spirit of partnership and solidarity, aiming at mutual benefit on all levels and covering the full range of higher education programmes.”

As noted earlier, there is a sense, however, that the focus among the Bologna countries will for some time to come still be weighted towards the internal process and they will not have the capacity to be very active externally. It will likely be necessary, therefore, for outside stakeholders to be pro-active in their engagement to access any opportunities offered by the Bologna Process.

## External Responses

The next section will outline some of the key factors driving the response to the Bologna Process in non-Bologna countries by their governments and /or their higher education institutions.

The continuing progress of the Bologna Process has attracted a great deal of attention in the world of higher education beyond Europe. As a result, it has at once raised alarm bells and inspired imitative efforts as some countries or regions outside Europe attempt to renew their higher education systems.

For the numerous external players taking stock of the European situation, one of the main drivers of their efforts has been the sense of increased competition related to student mobility presented by the evolving bloc of Bologna countries. The perception is that Bologna could have an impact on non-Bologna countries' competitiveness in recruiting international students from within Europe and abroad.

The Bologna Process acts as an incentive to prospective international students to choose Europe for their place of study. It promotes educational and employment mobility within Europe while at the same time, the high profile of the process itself serves as a marketing campaign that will enhance Europe's reputation as a study and work destination worldwide. Also, intra-European mobility will be enhanced as European students, moving from one degree cycle to another, will be more attracted to other Bologna countries because of greater compatibility of degrees. Finally, the creation of joint graduate degree programs will likely increase within Europe as the higher education systems become more compatible. These highly prized programs will add another element of attraction to studying in Europe.

Another key rationale for the attempts of outside countries and their institutions to respond to the Bologna Process is the need to understand the nature of the changes and their impact on graduate admissions. In particular, the issue of the increase in three-year bachelors' degrees is a focus of attention as non-Bologna countries (particularly the U.S., as well as here in Canada) are seeking to determine if these Bologna degrees are adequate for admission into graduate studies in their institutions. Likewise, non-Bologna countries need to understand how the changes will affect the workings of joint degree programs with European partners as regards both the redesign of existing ones and the planning of future ones.

Finally, another key driver is the sense that there is a world-wide movement to respond to the Bologna Process. As a result, as some countries take steps to address the situation, others in turn feel compelled to follow suit lest they be left on the outside looking in. Australia has led the way, with a concerted effort through the issuing of a government white paper, followed by extensive consultation. China has been reported to be considering adopting a Bologna-like program and has attended several high-level Bologna meetings as an observer. Some South American countries are also considering related alignment activities. Countries (in Africa, for example) that have education systems modeled on Francophone/Anglophone systems are also looking at how to adjust their programs. In the United States, much of the literature, for example, refers to the Australian response to Bologna as a determining factor in the need for action.

Below are some examples of other countries' efforts, with particular emphasis on Australia and the United States, given the comparative dimension with Canada. Throughout these examples, it is important to distinguish between the scope and nature of government versus institutional responses to the issue.

## **Australia**

The Australian government's activities represent the most elaborate and proactive attempt to define a response to the Bologna Process. In April 2006, the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) developed a discussion paper: *The Bologna Process and Australia: Next Steps* which put forth the following rationale for the country's approach:

*“Australia needs to consider how best to respond to these global developments if its own higher education system is to continue to be seen as being of high quality and relevant to international standards and requirements. Students, both domestic and international, will need to know that the qualifications they are receiving from our institutions are portable internationally and aligned to the evolving needs of the global workforce.”*

In the document, the government posed a series of questions related to the need for alignment or other strategies to face the challenge of the emerging EHEA. Questions included those of a general high-level nature on whether or not Australia should seek to align its higher education sector with the outcomes of the Bologna Process, as well as detailed questions on the review of all programmes and activities with the system of higher education. The detailed questions denote a high degree of prescriptive action presented by the government with the aim of ensuring that the competitive position of Australian universities is maintained.

Notably, the government's discussion paper led to a response in May 2006 from the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) in which the committee responded to the questions posed and outlined their position. Overall, the AVCC agreed on the importance of monitoring the developments within the Bologna Process but equally stressed the important need to maintain the flexibility in Australia's own higher education system. There is a strong desire to retain the diversity of Australia's system and not diminish its cooperation and collaboration with universities in the rest of the world. This is especially the case with Asia Pacific where Australia has some of its deepest economic and trade connections. Indeed, Australia along with many Asian countries is undertaking the *Brisbane Initiative* – which looks like the beginnings of a Bologna-type process to integrate Asian higher education area. This led to the Brisbane Communiqué of 2006.

The government has also created a steering committee made up of representatives from across the higher education sector to oversee the review. This body is undertaking a series of state-based consultations and using the responses received as a basis for development of an official position vis-à-vis the Bologna Process. The over-arching message from much of the literature is that the current Australian higher education system is well placed to fit within the Bologna Process. Australia already, for the most part, has a 3 year undergraduate system, with a long established postgraduate masters and PhD program similar to the European system. Likewise, its

quality assurance mechanism is being developed with a view to being compatible with the evolving European regime.

Also in response to the Bologna Process, the development of a Diploma Supplement in Australia has gained ground. The Australian government has recently commissioned a consortium of 14 Australian universities to create a single shared template for an Australian Diploma. The project is proceeding well with a number of the consortium universities planning to pilot the new Diploma Supplement in 2008. They believe that this will be another step in aligning the Australian higher education sector with both the Bologna Process and the international trend towards providing enhanced documentation to graduates and improving the transparency and portability of qualifications.

On an institutional level, the University of Melbourne is taking a bold step in 2008 by introducing substantial educational reforms known collectively as the Melbourne Model. These reforms are designed to create an education structure that is compatible with both the U.S. and the European models. It comprises a three-year generalist undergraduate degree followed by a two-year professional graduate program.

The Bologna Process was also a central part of the agenda when, in December 2007, a delegation from the EUA visited Australia at the invitation of Universities Australia (formerly AVCC) to discuss closer cooperation in PhDs and joint degrees between Europe and Australia.

## **The United States**

In the United States, there appears to be less of a sense of urgency for alignment as there is no government-driven exercise comparable to the Australian case. For some time, the U.S. assessment of the Bologna Process was more apt to view it as a modernization exercise designed to bring Europe up to North American standards of higher education. As the EHEA approaches reality, however, attitudes in the U.S. are changing. The American higher education sector is beginning to wonder how globally competitive the U.S. actually is. It is also generating interest related to practical issues such as U.S.-European cooperation. There are a variety of activities at different levels being undertaken in the U.S. to address the Bologna Process and the implications for American higher education. AUCC's counterpart in the U.S., the American Council on Education (ACE) through its international commission, has been monitoring developments in Europe but has not yet developed any policy statements or positions related to the Bologna Process.

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) has dedicated some policy work to Bologna and it has figured prominently in the CGS conferences over recent years with a focus on the acceptability of the three-year degree for graduate programs. This includes the CGS sponsorship, along with the EUA, of The "Strategic Leaders Global Summit on Graduate Education" in Banff, Alberta which brought together representatives from the graduate education sector in Europe, Australia, Canada, China and the United States. The summit focused on opportunities to work collectively on best practices in both master's and doctoral education, as well as on joint and dual degrees and other international collaborations. This event produced the "Banff Principles on Graduate Education" – a set of principles designed to guide the various stakeholders in the strengthening

of international collaboration in graduate education and emphasized that in an environment of growing competition in graduate education, there was a need for increased international dialogue and co-operation.

Representing the most significant step, the Association of International Educators (NAFSA) – the largest organization in the U.S. focused on international education – has created a Bologna Task Force which is pursuing activities related to Bologna. With the guiding principle that U.S. institutions will address the changes in Europe through an individualized process and that no one single policy issued by an organization is either possible or desirable, they have sought mostly to stimulate dialogue and provide information for universities to make well-informed decisions and choices based on the individual institutions' missions and goals. They have produced a very thorough and informative guide for their membership. As a precursor to regional consultation and information sessions, the task force developed a discussion document and held a symposium in partnership with the European Association of International Education (EAIE) on the Bologna Process.

Throughout the materials produced, the Task Force recognises the potential for impact of the EHEA on the American system, as stated in the discussion document:

*“The movement to increase student mobility among European nations by creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), supported by a common degree structure, has expectedly led to dramatic changes in the European higher education sector. What was not expected, however, is that the process in Europe has spread to other countries and put into motion a paradigm shift for the U.S. higher education sector as it relates to admissions practices and curriculum development.”*

Nevertheless, the overall message of the Task Force's work to date maintains the need for open-mindedness on the part of American institutions and underlines the opportunities presented by the creation of the EHEA. There is a sense that the transparency offered by the tools being implemented in Europe through the Bologna Process such as the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement should be of benefit to U.S. institutions seeking to evaluate qualifications and develop exchanges. It should help U.S. institutions get beyond the competitive mode and instead view the Bologna Process as an opportunity for greater exchange and development of joint degrees. As outlined in the report from the NAFSA/EAIE symposium:

*“...the competitive aspect of Europe in a “Bologna-mode” may catch our attention – but the need to quickly realize the opportunities is where institutions will benefit. Joint/dual degrees are easier and should be stimulated by Bologna and greater information may ease the creation of joint degrees.”*

## **Mexico and Latin America**

Mexico, along with many Latin American countries has been working on Tuning América Latina (Tuning AL) a program that supports joint projects between Latin-American and European academics' networks. The project aims to take advantage of the experience and methodology applied by the Tuning Project in Europe, which is one of the important efforts launched by the

Bologna Process designed to focus on core competencies and the comparability of curricula in terms of structures, programmes and actual teaching on an institutional level. Tuning AL has undertaken different activities and meetings in 18 Latin American countries working especially on general and specific competencies, quality of teaching and learning processes and credit transfer. Tuning AL is an example of an initiative created to bring Latin America closer to Europe in terms of higher education and responding to the agreements established by the governments of both regions.

## **New Zealand**

The New Zealand government, following the example of the Australian government, has undertaken a review of the Bologna Process. It also was present at the London Ministerial summit as an observer.

The Ministry of Education convened a ‘Bologna Day’ for the education sector in February 2007 which brought in experts from Europe, Australia and the United States to discuss developments and address implications for outside countries. Much of the literature on the Bologna Process coming out of New Zealand focuses on the same questions being raised by the Australian government’s process. It also emphasizes the quality of New Zealand universities and how the system is well regarded and already compatible in several ways to many parts of the world including Europe. The government also recently launched an international education strategy which in part referred to the Bologna Process as a motivating factor in lending support to New Zealand higher education opening up to the world.

## **The Canadian Context**

The fundamental changes underway in the European higher education system as a result of the Bologna Process have led AUCC to undertake an exercise to help understand what, if any, implications there are for Canadian universities and potentially develop a Canadian response to the Bologna Process. AUCC is not the only Canadian player following the Bologna Process closely. Interest in the Bologna Process continues to grow in Canada and various other players in the higher education sector are taking steps to assess and address the issue.

Elsewhere in Canada, the implications of the Bologna Process are attracting attention from the provinces through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) and from the federal government through Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) as both are monitoring developments in Europe. CMEC is working on an ongoing basis to ensure that information sharing is improved, both within Canada and with European partners. Additionally, CMEC’s provincial/territorial post-secondary education ADM committee is planning to address the Bologna Process in the coming months. We understand that this committee is developing a policy paper which will outline key issues of the Bologna Process and its possible impact for the provinces and territories.

The Canadian Association of Graduate Studies (CAGS) has kept its members abreast of developments with several sessions dedicated to the Bologna Process at its annual conferences. It was also an active participant in the Banff Conference which, as noted above, led to the Banff Principles on Graduate Education.

Currently, there is a great deal of interest among the Canadian university community in obtaining more information and analysis on the Bologna Process as evidenced by the level of participation in the information session on Bologna at AUCC's September 2006 meeting of international liaison officers, the directors of international initiatives on campus.

Indeed, several individual Canadian universities recognise the opportunities of the developments in Europe and are beginning to be actively engaged in the Bologna Process and its outcomes. Some have developed the use of ECTS through exchanges with European partners through HRSDC's International Academic Mobility program. Some are reviewing their admissions policies to consider openness to the Bologna three-year degree, while others are indicating an interest in developing a Diploma Supplement, along the lines of the Bologna Process model. Quebec institutions are monitoring the Bologna Process closely, given the close relations and numerous exchange arrangements with French partners which may be affected by changes under the Bologna Process in France's universities and les Grandes écoles.

These universities are aware of the importance of these developments as it affects such a large bloc of partners – both current and potential. They have taken advantage of the existing connections with European partners – through departments and through individual academics and administrators to closely monitor and engage in dialogues internally and with European interlocutors.

Some of these institutions are seeking a position on the graduate admission questions given the possible influx of the three-year degrees. (These are to be expected from Bologna countries as well as from the growing pool of Indian institutions.) There is a sense that, ultimately, the admission decision has to be evaluated based on individual merits and not dismissed because of length of study and that the main consideration is the concentration of study in the three-year Bologna degree which gives the student a solid preparation for graduate studies.

## **Opportunities and Challenges**

In early 2008, members of the Standing Advisory Committee on International Relations (SACIR) deliberated on the latest developments related to the Bologna Process. The committee identified the following three issues as most critical for Canadian universities in relation to the Bologna Process along with the primary opportunities and challenges associated with each of them.

### ***1. International student recruitment***

A central concern for Canadian universities is competition in the global higher education sector. As Bologna countries step up efforts to reform higher education in a concerted manner, by creating a strong bloc of modernized and compatible systems, they are likely to increase their international student market share at the expense of Canada. The greater number of programs delivered in English throughout the Bologna countries is also a point of attraction.

A key motivation for the signatory countries, and at the heart of the Bologna Process goals, is making European universities a more attractive study destination to the growing pool of international students, both within Europe and from without.

#### Opportunity

With students emerging from Europe with more transparent credentials (through ECTS and the Diploma Supplement), Canadian graduate programs may be able to tap into a greater pool of students with quality undergraduate education. This would necessitate an intensifying of advocacy efforts to increase support for recruitment and academic exchange.

#### Challenge

There is a risk that European students will remain in Europe for graduate studies to take advantage of more compatible systems. International students (especially from Asia-Pacific and other key source countries) will also be attracted in greater numbers to the European higher education area, either at the undergraduate or graduate level, for many of the same reasons. The shorter length of PhD programs in Europe relative to Canada may also be attractive. Canadian institutions will therefore need to aggressively increase marketing and promotion efforts as well as funding incentives to attract the best and the brightest international students.

### ***2. Graduate admissions and credential evaluation***

A related concern is whether the increasing number of three-year degrees from Bologna countries will be accepted as sufficient for admission to graduate studies at Canadian institutions. If they are accepted, what does this mean for the quality of Canadian graduate programs, and will Canadian students still generally be required to have a four-year degree for admission into graduate study?

Some institutions are evaluating their graduate admission policies for holders of three-year degrees. (These are to be expected from Bologna countries as well as from the growing pool of Indian institutions). There is a sense that, ultimately, the admission decision has to be evaluated based on individual merit and not length of study, especially since many of these three-year degrees include much more specialization in the discipline and less general education, as per the North American model of undergraduate study, which gives the student a solid preparation for graduate studies.

Another factor is related to the nature of the Bologna Process as a “moving target”. While the three-year degree is the recommended model, there are still variations of this being maintained and adopted across Europe, even within the Bologna framework.

### Opportunity

Adjusting Canadian graduate admission policies and practices to this new reality has the obvious benefit of positioning Canada as a more attractive choice for the growing pool of talented students looking for admission to Canadian graduate studies, with high quality degree qualifications that happen to be of shorter duration.

### Challenge

Canadian universities would need to revamp graduate admissions policies and practices to consider the emerging Bologna-compliant degrees in a new light. There is also a risk that the quality of graduate students may not be as high, given the shorter undergraduate degrees as preparation, which may in turn compromise the overall quality of the graduate education experience in Canada. Individual institutions would need to monitor and respond as appropriate, and developing a pan-Canadian approach would be difficult.

### **3. *Student mobility***

The third key issue is student mobility, as it relates to short-term exchanges and study abroad opportunities for Canadian students. This is the area in which SACIR members believe there is an 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 ECTS and the Diploma Supplement, represent a potential for increased student mobility. These tools facilitate exchange because the recognition of periods of study abroad becomes easier for partner institutions. Funding programs such as *Erasmus Mundus* are also sources of great potential for enhanced cooperation. The quality of European higher education and greater capacity for European institutions to create such programs is also increasing through the Bologna Process, thus enhancing opportunities for enhanced Canada-Europe cooperation.

### Opportunity

Exchange programs and joint degree initiatives may be easier to arrange with a wider array of European partners because of Bologna's transparency tools. Likewise, there appears to be a growing focus built into the Bologna Process on reaching out to partners.

### Challenge

Canadian universities' access to European partners in cooperation through exchange and joint degree programs may be reduced in the short to mid-term as European institutions focus on seeking other exchange partners within the Bologna bloc with more widespread use of the ECTS and Diploma Supplement, the use of which may be required for partnerships and funded mobility arrangements. Canadian universities may also need to revamp existing exchange and joint-degree arrangements with European institutions as these partners reform their degree and credit structures.

## Appendix A

### Bologna Process Signatory Countries:

Albania	Germany	Poland
Andorra	Greece	Portugal
Armenia	Holy See	Romania
Austria	Hungary	Russian Federation
Azerbaijan	Iceland	Serbia
Belgium	Ireland	Slovak Republic
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Italy	Slovenia
Bulgaria	Latvia	Spain
Croatia	Liechtenstein	Sweden
Cyprus	Lithuania	Switzerland
Czech Republic	Luxembourg	The Republic of Macedonia
Denmark	Malta	Turkey
Estonia	Moldova	Ukraine
Finland	Montenegro	United Kingdom
France	Netherlands	
Georgia	Norway	

## **Appendix B**

### **The Decision-Making Structure of the Bologna Process:**

The governance of the Bologna Process begins with the first political level – the Ministerial conferences where the European Ministers responsible for higher education meet every two years to assess progress and to plot the course for the near future. This is the most important forum in the decision-making process.

The Ministerial meetings are supported by two groups: The BFUG and the Bologna Process Board. They are organised and administered by the Bologna Secretariat. The U.K. housed the Secretariat of the Bologna Process as hosts of the last Ministerial meeting in London in 2007. It was recently transferred to the Benelux countries as the hosts of the next 2009 Ministerial summit in Leuven.

The BFUG is made up of Ministerial representatives from all 46 Bologna signatory countries and representatives of other European-level organisations participating as consultative members including:

- the European Commission;
- European University Association (EUA);
- European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA);
- European Students' Union (ESIB);
- European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE);
- the Council of Europe (CoE);
- Education International (EI) Pan-European Structure;
- Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations (UNICE) (The Voice of Business in Europe); and
- UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO–CEPES).

The BFUG role is to follow up on the recommendations made at the Ministerial meetings. The group produces a work programme which constitutes a series of conferences and activity relevant to all involved in the process. Countries are also free to pursue their own follow-up activities according to the Ministerial Communiqué.

The Bologna Board is smaller. It consists of the hosting countries of the previous and forthcoming Ministerial summits, and representatives of the acting, previous and succeeding EU presidencies. Also involved again are the European Commission, the organisations listed above and representatives of two countries from outside the EU. The group is chaired by the host of the next Ministerial meeting.

In both groups, the CoE, the EUA, EURASHE, ESIB, EI Pan-European Structure and the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations take part as consultative members. (They also, in addition to the representatives from the 46 countries, attend the Ministerial conferences as delegates.)

## Appendix C

### Additional Resources

**Official Bologna Secretariat:**

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>

**The European Commission: Education and Training:**

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html)

**European University Association:**

<http://www.eua.be/index.php?id=65>

**International Association of Universities:**

<http://www.unesco.org/iau/newsletters/iaunew13-4-en.pdf>

**NAFSA Special Focus Network on Bologna Process:**

[http://www.nafsa.org/knowledge\\_community\\_network.sec/recruitment\\_admissions/bologna\\_process\\_network](http://www.nafsa.org/knowledge_community_network.sec/recruitment_admissions/bologna_process_network)

**Government of Australia and the Bologna Process:**

<http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/GovernmentActivities/BolognaProcess/default.htm>