

The Bologna Process - Implications for USQ programs and practice

What is the Bologna Process?

The Bologna Process of reform aims to establish, by 2010, a European Higher Education Area in which academic staff and students move with ease and quick, fair recognition of qualifications. One of the Bologna Process' successes has been in standardising European degree cycles and credit transfer. To date, 46 countries are signatories to the process.

The prospect of greater mobility of students and broader, mutual recognition of qualifications may have significant implications for USQ programs and its students, both domestic and international.

What are the elements of the Bologna agreement?

- **Uniform degree structures** consisting of undergraduate, masters and doctoral levels typically structured as 3 years + 2 years + 3 years. The master degree enhances the skills learned at undergraduate level and prepares students for doctoral study. In brief, degrees are sufficiently similar to be recognised across borders.
- **A system of credits** to demonstrate progress and to promote student mobility. Sixty credits measure the workload of a full-time student during one academic year. One credit is about 25 – 30 working hours. The pre-existing European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was used.
- **Increased mobility** for students, teachers, researchers and administration staff.
- **Increase in joint programs** and more flexible curricula.
- **A Diploma Supplement** that provides a uniform and consistent method of describing the nature, level, context, content and status of studies. The Diploma Supplement is written in English and the national language.
- **Quality assurance systems** at institutional, national, and European levels.

Some main issues for Australia

Synergies

- Australia does, generally, have a three cycle structure.
- Currently, Australian higher education quality assurance processes do fit broadly with the Bologna process.
- An Australian Diploma Supplement is currently under development by a consortium of 14 universities. The aim is to develop a single agreed template for an Australian Diploma Supplement and to make recommendations on implementation and management strategies. It is proposed that the supplement would be similar to the European documentation described above.

Challenges

- Australian universities need closer interaction with Europe, an effective credit transfer system and a diploma supplement.
- Australia has limited alignment with the European system of credits and lacks a uniform system of credits in Australia.
- Asian countries are looking at aligning with the Bologna Process, so Europe may become more attractive to Asian students than Australia. This is linked to a growing number of partnerships between European and Asian education institutions.
- The Australian 4 year degree and 1 year master's structure has little accord with the Bologna Process. Some Australian universities have already moved towards a more aligned degree structure.

The implications of Bologna for USQ program development

- The Australian higher education curriculum has placed considerable importance on a one year honours program. What are the implications of Bologna for the future development of USQ honours programs?
- Universities around the world see a semester abroad as an integral part of a student's program. To what extent can the USQ program revitalisation align with Bologna processes to attract European students to USQ and allow USQ students to study in Europe?
- Are there now more opportunities to collaborate with European colleagues to co-develop and co-teach degree courses and programs?
- How does the Bologna's focus on outcomes, influence the way in which USQ charts students progress to maximise their opportunities for work and study in Europe?
- Do our testamurs and academic transcripts contain information that is included in the model Diploma Supplement?
- Bologna is not the only model of education across the world. Australian higher education also needs to keep a close eye on developments in North America and Asia. The North American preference for four year degrees, for example, is finding new champions in Singapore, China and Hong Kong.

Useful references

AUSTRALIAN

- The Bologna Process and Australia: Next Steps:
http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/Bologna_Process_and_Australia.htm
- Australian Education International: <http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/GovernmentActivities/BolognaProcess/default.htm>
- Australian National Australia Diploma Supplement:
<http://www.une.edu.au/pdal/research/chemp/projects/dipsup/index.php>

OTHER

- Official Bologna Process website: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>
- Latest information from the 2007 meetings (London Communiqué)
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/londonbologna/uploads/documents/LondonCommuniquedefinalwithLondonlogo.pdf>
- The Bologna Supplement: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/rec_qual/recognition/ds_en.pdf
- NASFA (Association of International Education):
http://www.nafsa.org/_Document/_task_force_meeting_summary.pdf <http://www.nafsa.org/bologna>
- World Education News and Reviews: <http://www.wes.org/ewenr/bolognaprocess.htm>
- Bell, J.E. & Watkins, R.A. (2006) Strategies in dealing with the Bologna Process *International Educator* Sept-October pp. 70 – 75.

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