



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

BOLOGNA PROCESS

CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

BOLOGNA POLICY FORUM - WEDNESDAY 29 APRIL 2009

STATEMENT BY AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION

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Thank you for the opportunity to offer some comments on Australia's interest in the Bologna Process and opportunities to engage in the Process in future dialogues.

Australia has welcomed the opportunity to participate in dialogues associated with the Bologna process, including this policy forum, and we look forward to further opportunities. We support the thrust of the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué and look forward to future exchanges on the identified priorities for the next decade.

Greater alignment between international systems of higher education will facilitate the movement of students between universities and other forms of engagement between our higher education systems.

Australia has a three-cycle qualification structure which makes it attractive to European students as they adapt to the Bologna degree structure – there are around 35,000 European students studying in Australia, the majority of whom are in higher education. Some Australian universities are making significant changes to their courses and degree structures to enhance their attractiveness to both domestic and international students and prepare them better with the skills and knowledge needed to give them the best prospects of success in a rapidly changing world. Recent changes to Government funding arrangements include increased support for students in Masters programs leading to professional qualifications, and these changes recognise, in part, the enhanced focus which the Bologna Process has placed on postgraduate education.



Mobility is one of the core components of the Bologna Process and an important feature of the Australian higher education system. More than 180,000 overseas students now come to Australia every year to study at one of our higher education institutions.

The recent Review of Australian Higher Education acknowledged that while we have had great successes in attracting international students to Australia, our own students need more and better opportunities to go abroad to study. The Review also recognised that global engagement is critical to Australia's success in the knowledge economy. Australian universities have long-established links with European universities and many have bilateral agreements in place to facilitate exchanges between staff and students and collaborate in research. However, the Review suggested that the Australian higher education sector will need to have more effective connections to global innovation and research networks if it is to continue to play a pivotal role in the national research and innovation system.

Many European national higher education systems are already very effective in the global knowledge economy and the development of a European Higher Education Area has promoted and enhanced collaboration within your region. Australia is keen to take a full part in this process through its partnerships in Europe.

Bologna Ministerial Advisory Group

As a reflection of the importance of the Bologna Process internationally, the Australian Government has established a Bologna Ministerial Advisory Group chaired by the Vice-Chancellor of Macquarie University, Professor Stephen Schwartz. This Group monitors developments in the European Higher Education Area and fosters debate on the Bologna Process in Australia.

Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement

A major consequence of Australia's interest in the Bologna Process has been the development of an Australian Diploma Supplement, which will be known as the "Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement". Just as the European Diploma Supplement will help in the recognition of European qualifications, the Graduation Statement will make Australian awards better understood internationally, enhancing the international mobility of graduates from Australian universities.

Developed by a consortium of universities, the Graduation Statement is the result of extensive consultations with the university sector. The Australian Government has committed \$3.7 million to assist publicly-funded universities in implementing the Graduation Statement over the next three years.

The Review of Australian Higher Education

The issues which have been discussed in your conference and this roundtable are of particular interest to Australia today as we are undergoing a period of further reform to the higher education sector. As I have already mentioned, in 2008, the Government initiated a Review of Australian Higher Education. The Review examined the future direction of the higher education sector and its fitness to meet the needs of the Australian community and economy. In response to the recommendations of the review, the Government has announced a range of initiatives, including a number of targets for the sector over the next 10 to 15 years. :

By 2025, 40% of Australian 25-34 year olds will have a bachelor level or above qualification.

From 2012, universities will be funded on the basis of student demand. The Government will fund a place for all domestic students accepted into an eligible, accredited higher education course at a recognised public higher education provider; and

By 2020, 20% of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level should be from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Future dialogues

Australia hopes to participate in future policy dialogues with European countries and other interested parties on reforms to higher education. We believe that smaller sessions on specific themes around the priorities you have identified for the decade to come in the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué will be of great value.

Australia has extensive engagement with multi national education policy fora in the Asia-Pacific . These include the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (APEC), the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) and UNESCO

For example, Australia has closely engaged with UNESCO in the revision of the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific. Australia will co-host an Asia-Pacific Qualifications Recognition Workshop with UNESCO and the Philippines in May 2009. Key issues to be addressed include the development in the Asia-Pacific of Qualifications Frameworks and recognition tools such as the diploma supplements.

Australia will seek to play its part in maximising linkages between the policy developments of the Bologna process and those taking place in Australia and multi laterally within the Asia Pacific.

Finally, Australia has recently participated in the first of what we hope are many policy dialogues with the European Union on education and training matters. In March 2009, Ms Odile Quintin, the Director General of the Commission's Directorate General for Education and Training, led a delegation of EC officers and national experts to Australia to discuss university reform and the modernisation agenda. We had a very fruitful discussion and look forward to continuing the dialogue next year on qualifications frameworks. We would be very much interested in participating in the conference being proposed by Ireland on the implementation of the European Higher Education Area's qualifications framework and the European Qualifications Framework in late 2009.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this discussion. The global economic crisis highlights more than ever the contribution of higher education to economic and social development around the world. Australia looks forward to a close association with the European Higher Education Area in future dialogue on these vitally important issues.