



Australian Government

Department of Education, Science and Training

The Bologna Process and Australia: Next Steps

April 2006

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AND AUSTRALIA: NEXT STEPS

MINISTER'S PREFACE

The Bologna Process, whereby a significant number of European countries are working towards greater consistency and portability across their higher education systems, is likely to influence developments in higher education in many parts of the world including our region. It will have important implications for Australian higher education providers as we work to enhance our existing success and reputation as a provider of world-class education to both domestic and international students.

The Bologna Process involves 45 European countries undertaking a series of reforms intended to create an integrated European higher education area by 2010. Signatories to the agreement have agreed to work towards greater consistency in areas such as degree structures, credit transfer and quality assurance systems.

The purpose of the paper which I am releasing today is to initiate discussion on the significance of Bologna for Australia and possible Australian responses. The issues must be considered in a broader context – the long-term vision for higher education in Australia.

The Australian Government's ambition for higher education is that of a strong, confident, diverse and high quality sector that plays a vital role in our economic, cultural and social development. The *Backing Australia's Future* reforms, including additional funding of \$11 billion over 10 years, have gone a long way towards achieving this goal. However, the future of higher education in Australia must be considered in the broader international context. Many other countries are increasing their investment in higher education. Multi-national and multi-regional forums are focusing on or being established to deal with a range of higher education issues. Some are designed to increase access and quality, others are designed to harmonise approaches to facilitate the movement of an increasingly mobile skilled workforce. Our overall objective must be for a higher education sector which provides the greatest diversity and quality.

Australian higher education must remain abreast of these international developments in order to ensure that our institutions continue to be ranked amongst the world's best and that our graduates have the skills required to participate on the world stage.

The Bologna Process could have a number of implications for the acceptance of Australian higher education awards and options for student mobility. It has significant political support within Europe and applies to around 4000 institutions hosting 16 million students.

It is an important process that is receiving considerable attention, not only within Europe, but from a range of other countries. It presents challenges to, and opportunities for, Australia's relationship with Europe as well as Asia and raises the importance of developing effective multilateral dialogue with Australia's key Asian education partners about future directions in higher education. Australia has developed close links with Asia through education as this is a key driver in developing understanding and fostering closer economic linkages, including facilitating the movement of students and skills.

The Process aims, among other things, to provide for easier movement between institutions and, on completion of undergraduate study, the receipt of a transcript that facilitates entry to higher academic degrees and employment. If Australia is not able to maintain alignment with these developments, a significant proportion of the current 32,000 European enrolments in Australian institutions may find other destinations more attractive. Similarly should Asian countries or institutions choose to align with the Bologna Process, Europe may become a more attractive destination for those students.

The Bologna Process provides a series of opportunities and challenges, and is an opportunity for Australia to better align its frameworks with international standards and benchmarks. The challenge is how to achieve this and retain an Australian higher education sector that meets both domestic and international expectations of quality.

There are likely to be many and varied views on the benefits and costs associated with moving towards some comparability with the Bologna Process. The objective of this paper is to seek the views of the sector and all concerned with its future on how Australian higher education can respond in ways that best meet the sector's needs and positions it for the future.

Developing an effective Australian response to the Bologna Process requires a national dialogue to develop a degree of common understanding of the key benefits and outcomes Australia seeks through alignment with Bologna initiatives.

I look forward to a lively debate on the important issues outlined in the paper.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie Bishop". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the word "Bishop".

Julie Bishop
Minister for Education, Science and Training

April 2006

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AND AUSTRALIA: NEXT STEPS

The purpose of this discussion paper is to stimulate debate within the Australian Higher Education sector about the 'Bologna Process', which is driving reform within and between the 45 European signatory countries. The process seems likely to have a profound effect on the development of higher education globally, as observers from other continents are taking a close interest in the reform process and beginning to consider how their own systems can be more closely aligned with 'Bologna' thinking. 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.

The Department of Education, Science and Training has prepared this paper for discussion with the higher education sector in order to:

- provide an overview of the current state of play on the European higher education reforms; and
- seek input from and discussion within the sector on how Australian Governments and Australian higher education institutions might best respond to the European reforms. Our aim is to work with the sector to identify both the issues and the opportunities presented for Australia by the Bologna Process.

1. Overview

The Bologna Process involves 45¹ European countries undertaking a series of reforms intended to create an integrated European higher education area. The 1999 Bologna Declaration committed signatories to six objectives, which together aim to establish, by 2010, a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Within the EHEA the ease of staff and student mobility, and recognition of qualifications, will be greatly enhanced and facilitated by the alignment of national quality assurance agencies, uniform degree structures, the adoption of a common credit transfer system and a common way of describing the qualification (diploma supplement).

Australian higher education has much to gain, both domestically and in terms of its international education objectives, by taking steps in parallel with the Bologna Process. Compatibility with Bologna would closely align key features of the Australian higher education system with the university systems of 45 European countries and facilitate movement of students between universities and other forms of engagement between Australian and European institutions.

¹ Albania, Andorra, Armenia, **Austria**, Azerbaijan, **Belgium**, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, **Cyprus**, **Czech Republic**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, Georgia, **Germany**, **Greece**, Holy See, **Hungary**, Iceland, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, Liechtenstein, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, Moldova, **Netherlands**, Norway, **Poland**, **Portugal**, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia-Montenegro, **Slovak Republic**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**, **Sweden**, Swiss Confederation, Turkey, Ukraine, **United Kingdom**, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. (European Union countries in bold).

2. The Bologna Process

2.1 Background

The Bologna declaration was issued following a meeting of European Ministers of Education held in Bologna in 1999, and set into motion a process (thus the Bologna Process). It should be noted that this is not a European Union programme – membership is much wider than the EU and the EU has only partial ‘competence’ (or constitutional power) over education matters. However, the EU is a principal stakeholder in the Bologna process.

The Bologna Process is a commitment by 45 countries across Europe to harmonise their systems and structures of higher education in order to create an integrated European higher education area (EHEA). The EHEA is not intended as a unitary European system of higher education. Rather, it is a ‘space’ in which national systems possess common key features, in which qualifications offered by institutions in the EHEA are easily recognised and assessed by institutions and employers for purposes of further study or employment, and in which there is a high level of mobility by students and staff.

The Bologna Process is scheduled to be completed by 2010.

The main objectives of the Bologna Process are:

- *Easily readable and comparable degrees* - the foremost tools for achieving this are the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement.
- *Uniform degree structures* - initially, it was agreed that the degree structure would be mainly based on a two-cycle model. The first cycle, lasting a minimum of three years, ends in a Bachelor-level degree. Masters degrees are the second cycle. There has since been agreement (Berlin 2003) to the inclusion of third cycle degrees (doctorates) within the Bologna framework.
- *Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system* - many countries do not have a system of study credits and determine their degrees only in years or semesters. The objective of establishing a system of credits is to promote widespread student mobility.
- *Increased mobility* - obstacles to the effective mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff will be removed.
- *Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies* - the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education plays a key role in this.
- *Promotion of the European dimension in higher education* - closer international cooperation and networks; language and cultural education.

2.2 *Implementation*

Responsibility for implementing the goals of the Bologna Declaration in each signatory country rests with the respective national governments, academic institutions, student organisations and professional bodies. It involves bodies such as the European Commission, the European University Association (EUA), the Council of Europe, the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) as key partners. Experts drawn from the relevant organisations in the various countries are developing standards, guidelines and mechanisms that academic institutions can use when they restructure their programmes and degrees to conform with the requirements of the Bologna Process.

The Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) is entrusted with the overall steering of the Bologna Process. The BFUG is composed of the representatives of all member states of the Bologna Process plus the European Commission, with the Council of Europe, the EUA, EURASHE, ESIB and UNESCO/CEPES as consultative members. It is chaired by the EU Presidency. For the next three years the BFUG will be hosted by the United Kingdom's Department for Education and Skills (DFES). Here is the link to the BFUG web site:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bologna>

2.3 *Mid-term stock take on Progress*

European Ministers responsible for higher education met in Bergen, Norway from 19-20 May 2005 to take stock of the progress of the Bologna Process since the previous ministerial meeting held in 2003 in Berlin, and to set directions for the further development towards the European Higher Education Area. Australia was invited to attend as an observer.

The communiqué from the Bergen meeting can be found at this web link:

http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf

At the Bergen meeting, membership of the Bologna Process was extended from 40 countries to 45. Ministers adopted an overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA and committed to beginning the adaptation of national frameworks for qualifications by 2007 and completing the process by 2010. The framework will have three degree cycles, generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competencies and credit ranges for qualifications within the first and second cycles. At this point, only Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom have national qualifications frameworks in place.

The European standards for universities and quality assurance agencies proposed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) were formally adopted at the meeting. The proposal for a European register of quality assurance agencies was welcomed and further work will be undertaken on the implementation of the register. The ENQA website is at <http://www.enqa.net/>.

Doctoral qualifications were identified as a priority for the next ministerial meeting. Universities were urged by Ministers to ensure that doctoral programmes promoted interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills.

A mid-term stock take of progress on implementation of the Bologna reforms was undertaken and presented at the Bergen meeting. The stock take revealed that progress towards the EHEA varied across member states. The first stage of the process to put into place the legislative structures and formalities has been completed by 33 members. More than half of students in the participating countries are now enrolled in the two cycle degree structure.

There remains, however, much to be done to achieve the goals of Bologna in all partner countries by 2010. Whilst there is a strong political will to achieve the goals set out in the Bologna Process, there are challenges ahead for many countries in implementing the reforms. Even countries that are advanced in formal changes to their higher education structures will need to work hard to ensure that higher education institutions implement the changes through appropriate curricula reform. There is also a major communication exercise needed to convince the European community, particularly employers, to accept the new degree structures. The stock take revealed that the recognition of the new bachelor qualification has been slow in some countries, particularly by some areas of the public service. In some countries up to 75 per cent of students are continuing to study through to completion of the post-Bologna Master degree.

The inclusion of five new members, which have been given the existing timeline of completion by 2010, is likely to produce greater variation in achievements between members at the next ministerial conference.

Having taken over the leadership of the Bologna Follow-Up Group, the United Kingdom will host the next Ministerial conference in 2007.

3. Our region and Bologna

Australia has developed strong bilateral and multilateral dialogues with countries in the Asian region on a range of education and other matters. A key theme in these discussions is the alignment of approaches where appropriate to facilitate growth and development. Education is a key to such development. It is important therefore that involvement in a broadly based Asia-Pacific regional consideration of the issues raised by Bologna will place Australia and our key partners at the forefront of future educational developments.

Some countries in Asia are already monitoring the Bologna Process. For example, China has shown interest in cementing its educational links with a number of European countries and has sought observer status for the 2007 ministerial meeting. This increased monitoring is a reflection of the global nature of education and the need to develop education systems that will ensure the movement of people and skills. The growing economic strength of Asia is also of interest to Europe and this is reflected in the increasing number of partnerships that are being developed between European and Asian

education institutions. In this context it is important that Australia works with its regional partners to develop an education framework that is consistent with European and other global trends. This will ensure that Australia and our Asian partners provide world class education and remain attractive to students from around the globe.

Engaging our key regional partners in dialogue on the Bologna Process provides another important strand on which to develop Australia's bilateral education relationships.

4. Australia and Bologna

4.1 The benefits of 'Bologna compatibility'

DEST's initial assessment is that Australian higher education has much to gain by aligning with the key Bologna actions. The potential benefits of Bologna compatibility are of two types:

4.1.1. Facilitation of interaction and recognition

The Bologna Process contains a number of initiatives that aim to clarify recognition requirements that would deal with recognition of periods of study abroad, cross institutional delivery, transnational education, and education delivered through industry placement.

Australian institutions already have a range of relationships with European universities, including joint programmes. While students and academics move between Australian and European universities, and Australian qualifications are recognised in Europe, impediments resulting from differences in systems and basic structures still exist. For example, differing degree structures can make recognition of qualifications difficult and the absence of effective credit transfer arrangements makes it difficult for students to easily undertake portions of study in another country. Bologna compatibility would closely align key features of the Australian higher education system with the university systems of 45 European countries and would allow broader cooperation, facilitate the movement of students between Australian and European higher education institutions and aid recognition.

There are currently some 32,000 European enrolments in Australia. Growth in international enrolments over the past decade has been a major success story in international education, with growth in European enrolments supporting diversity in two ways: European students have more than doubled as a proportion of a growing pool of international enrolments; and European students tend towards a different discipline mix. As noted later in this paper, current patterns towards an element of 'study abroad' as a key component of a university education indicate that compatibility with Bologna would assist Australia to continue to capitalise on this trend. The adoption of effective credit transfer systems and a diploma supplement will be as valuable to Australian students seeking to study in Europe as it will be for European and other students seeking to study in Australia.

In addition, compatibility would help make Australian and European systems more transparent to students and employers from the respective regions. Similarly, the use of a common format (the Diploma Supplement – see below) to describe the content of studies undertaken would help European employers decide on the relevance of Australian qualifications, and *vice versa*.

The compatibility of Australia's quality assurance arrangements with those prescribed in the Bologna Process would increase the confidence that European institutions and employers have in Australian qualifications, make the quality frameworks of each party more transparent to prospective students and facilitate discussion between the European and Australian agencies on approaches to measurement and maintenance of quality higher education provision.

4.1.2. Benefits to Australian students and employers

The Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement is a short document attached to a higher education qualification aimed at improving international 'transparency' and at facilitating the academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates etc.). It is designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification to which this supplement is appended. It is intended to be free from any value-judgements, equivalence statements or suggestions about recognition.

The Diploma Supplement is also intended to provide information about the higher education system within which the institution operates to provide a basis for an assessment of the quality of the higher education sector.

The Diploma Supplement is beneficial to students and employers. The broader the currency of the supplement, the more useful to both parties, and not just in the reception of individuals with Australian qualifications in the European labour market.

There is a high level of awareness and acceptance of the Diploma Supplement among European higher education institutions and employers, and a large number of European countries now issue Diploma Supplements.

Further information on the Diploma Supplement and a number of questions for discussion are included in an Annexure at the end of this paper.

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

ECTS is a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme, objectives preferably specified in terms of learning outcomes and competences to be acquired.

ECTS is based on the principle that 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student during one academic year². Credits in ECTS can only be obtained after successful completion of the work required and appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes achieved.

The ECTS provides a common measure of student workload linked to learning outcomes which is recognised for the purposes of credit transfer.

Australia has the EFTSU system which, whilst providing a common measure of student workload applying across Australian universities, doesn't specify the workload in terms

² The student workload of a full-time study programme in Europe amounts in most cases to around 1500-1800 hours per year and in those cases one credit stands for around 25 to 30 working hours.

of learning outcomes and competencies. The lack of an accepted uniform national system of credits in Australia is a significant impediment to mobility – universities' different arrangements often mean that individual judgements have to be made for each student seeking credit for study completed.

It is possible that EFTSU calculations could be translated into the ECTS on the basis that 1 EFTSU = 60 ECTS credits. Moreover, Australian universities have experience with the use of the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) credit transfer system which is modelled on the ECTS.

From the point of view of students moving between Australian universities, the introduction of a common credit system would have clear benefits, independent of any benefits of international mobility.

4.2. The risks of 'Bologna incompatibility'

There are risks associated with Australian higher education institutions choosing to maintain positions of Bologna 'incompatibility':

4.2.1 Other countries or regions follow the Bologna route

The scale of the process and the importance of the countries involved may lead non-European countries to align their systems with the Bologna Process.

To some extent this is already happening. The Latin American countries, for example, have expressed interest in emulating the Bologna Process and had observers at both the Berlin and Bergen meetings and, as noted earlier in this paper, there has also been interest in the process in Asian countries.

Semester Abroad study patterns continue to grow and growing numbers of leading universities around the world state that a semester abroad needs to be regarded as an integral component of a student's program. Incompatibility with the Bologna Process will see the continued existence of higher barriers to the recognition of study which will reduce Australia's attractiveness to this market. It should also be noted that anecdotal evidence suggests that a study abroad semester can be a significant factoring choice of country and institution for further study.

Significantly enhanced student mobility may in the longer run depend on easier recognition of qualifications for employment. Stimulating developments in mutual recognition is complex and difficult. Lack of movement on Bologna compatibility will make it harder for Australia to demonstrate to the Europeans its bona fides in this area.

The risk for Australia in the long term, if it were to remain a 'Bologna outsider', is that there is likely to be a tendency for relationships to increase between aligned systems at the expense of those between less compatible systems.

4.2.2 Europe becomes a more attractive destination for overseas students at the expense of Australia.

The Bologna reforms may have the desired effect of increasing the attractiveness of Europe as a study destination relative to Australia. In particular, harmonised European structures will mean that a qualification (or study undertaken) in one European country is

recognised across Europe for the purposes of access to further study or to the labour market. Given the increasing use of English as a language of instruction in many European universities at the postgraduate level, a combination of potential access to the European labour market (nearly 20 times the size of that of Australia) and competitive tuition fees, post-Bologna European higher education may offer a very attractive package for many foreign students, particularly those in traditionally strong markets for Australia.

The attractiveness of Europe relative to Australia is likely to be greater if Australia remains outside the Bologna tent. The options (both in terms of study and employment) opened up by study in Europe will be far greater than those opened by study in Australia. It is already apparent that partly as a response to Bologna some countries have already moved to introduce shorter (from 5 to 3 year) Bachelor programmes and have introduced tuition based short term and degree based programmes for international students, some of which are now being taught in English.

Engagement with the Bologna Process would reinforce Australia's role as a key provider of high quality education that aligns with international requirements and in particular, strongly articulates with Europe and the requirements established under the Bologna Process.

4.2.3 Europe focuses on Europe

The Bologna Process could have the outcome that the focus and energy of European higher education institutions and students is concentrated primarily on the international opportunities provided within Europe to the detriment of Australia (and other non-European industrialised countries). This could occur for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the range and scale of the reforms to be undertaken as part of the Bologna Process will inevitably focus energies on matters of primary concern to the European countries involved. Issues of European integration may as a result loom far larger in European eyes than those of cooperation with non-European countries.

Secondly, a probable outcome of the Bologna Process is that the costs to students of international mobility within Europe will be reduced relative to those of studying outside Europe, as would be the costs of universities establishing academic exchanges or joint programmes outside Europe.

If Australian higher education is not 'Bologna compatible' (particularly as regards credit transfer, quality assurance and the Diploma Supplement), the risks of studying in Australia will also rise relative to those of studying in Europe – e.g., the risk that credit may not be granted for study or qualifications recognised for the purposes of further study or employment. It is foreseeable that some countries that currently offer loans or grants to students to study outside their home country, will prescribe that support will only be provided for study at foreign institutions that adhere to the Bologna framework.

The Bergen ministerial meeting made specific acknowledgement of the need for European higher education to look outward, not only inward. There were views articulated about the importance of engaging in constructive cooperation with other regions of the world, but much of any external focus will be on the position of the EHEA relative to the USA, emerging competitors such as China, and the impact of the reforms on less-developed countries such as those in Africa.

4.3 What would Australian compatibility with Bologna involve?

At a minimum, compatibility would entail:

- a three cycle (Bachelor, Masters, Doctorate) degree structure;
- promotion of the Diploma Supplement;
- a credit accumulation/transfer system compatible with the ECTS; and
- the existence of an accreditation/quality assurance framework meeting Bologna criteria.

The Bologna degree structure comprises a first cycle (Bachelor) qualification (involving 180-240 ECTS) and a second cycle (Master) qualification of (60-120 ECTS). Typically, a total of 300 ECTS is required for a Master degree. A small number of Bachelor qualifications (e.g. professional programmes such as veterinary science or medicine) may entail a work load of more than 240 ECTS. However, at this stage it appears that, in a number of countries, the 'professional' level qualification may be the Master degree rather than the Bachelor degree.

There are some challenges posed by the Bologna reforms in relation to our existing qualifications that Australian higher education institutions need to consider. One issue is the position of Australian graduate entry and four-year bachelor level qualifications. It is likely that the European pathway for professional accreditation in a range of professions will become a bachelor degree followed by a two-year masters degree. The level of acceptance of graduate entry or four-year bachelor degrees is as yet unclear.

The recognition of Australian one-year masters courses will also need to be monitored because whilst there is scope for a one-year masters within the Bologna structure, it is likely that the two-year masters will become the norm in most countries. The one-year masters may become a course offered only to international students in Europe and questions may arise about the professional recognition, comparability and quality of such courses within Europe. The use of Australian honours degrees as direct entry points to doctoral studies may also be problematic in Europe, since the pathway to doctoral studies within the Bologna Process will be through a masters qualification (3+2).

4.4 Australian structures and processes which fit within the Bologna framework:

- Australia has a three cycle (Bachelor, Masters, Doctorate) qualification structure. There are some areas in which efforts would be needed to achieve Bologna compatibility, for example any desired repositioning of Australian Honours degrees, four-year and graduate entry Bachelor degrees and one-year Masters courses, to ensure alignment with Bologna structures and emerging trends.
- The Diploma Supplement has been trialled in Australia, but institutions will need to make decisions about adoption;
- The Australian quality assurance system generally fits within the broad guidelines established by the Bologna Process, but a documented audit of compatibility may be useful as a tool for marketing and dealing with future recognition issues in Europe. There is a question of whether AUQA should seek admission to the proposed, but yet to be developed, European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies, should its eventual guidelines be framed to include external countries.
- Australia has the EFTSU system which provides a common measure of student workload applying across Australian universities. It may be possible to adapt this system so that it connects more effectively with the ECTS.

5. Questions for discussion

- How important is it that Australia seeks to align its higher education sector with the outcomes of the Bologna Process?
- What are the implications for the autonomy of Australian institutions and the diversity of the sector in becoming Bologna compatible?
- What risks do we run by failing to pay adequate regard to these European developments?
- What further steps does Australia need to achieve a three cycle (Bachelor, Masters, and Doctorate) degree structure which is compatible with the Bologna architecture?
- What are the implications of the Bologna Process for four-year Bachelor level qualifications, one-year Masters courses and the pathway to Doctorate studies via an Australian honours degree?
- Is there a need to review the content of Doctorate programmes to align them with Bologna thinking, given the Bergen declaration that Doctorate programmes should include interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills?
- Are there any implications for current funding or regulatory structures which need to be considered?
- Do we need to undertake further work in order to achieve a credit accumulation/transfer system compatible with the ECTS?
- Would our national accreditation/quality assurance framework meet Bologna criteria without further modification?
- What actions could be taken to address the implications of the Bologna Process for our Asia – Pacific regional interactions with Governments and higher education providers or our broader relations with the global education community?
- What further processes do we need to put in place to make sure all stakeholders within the Australian system are kept up to date with developments in and implications of the Bologna Process?
- What are the costs (financial, resources and time) to individual institutions to move towards Bologna compatibility?
- Would compatibility deliver real benefits for Australian graduates and employers in terms of labour mobility?
- Would longer courses, aligned with Europe, be more attractive to Australian and overseas students than shorter, cheaper courses based on the existing Australian model?
- Would the introduction of the Diploma Supplement in Australia be viable and beneficial? More detail about the Diploma Supplement, including further questions, is provided in the Annexure at the end of this paper.

6. Next Steps

Within the Department, the Higher Education Group will have carriage of domestic issues relating to the Australian higher education sector's alignment with the European reforms. The International Education Group and its counsellors in Europe and throughout the world will continue to monitor and address the effects of the reforms on Australia's international competitiveness in education provision.

DEST will be undertaking further work on the implications of the Bologna Process for the higher education sector in Australia involving:

- issuing this discussion paper and inviting stakeholders to respond to it; and
- establishing a working group on the discussion paper during 2006.

Submissions and responses to the issues set out in this paper are due by 30 April 2006. You need not confine your responses to the above questions if you think there are other issues to be addressed. Submissions should be emailed to:

quality@dest.gov.au

Alternatively you may write to:

The Group Manager
Higher Education Group
Department of Education, Science and Training
PO Box 9880,
Canberra City 2601

Unless you request that your submission be treated confidentially, submissions may be made publicly available on the DEST website as part of the consultation process. In addition, you may wish to note that because DEST may be required to release your submission by the operation of law, judicial or Parliamentary body or government agency, the Department can give no undertakings that your submission will never be made publicly available.

Administering areas:

International Education Group, Americas and Europe Section: (02) 6240 9130

Higher Education Group: Quality Assurance Framework Unit: (02) 6240 5857

Annexure

The Diploma Supplement

Background

Under the Lisbon Recognition Convention (ratified by Australia in 2002) Australia has an international obligation to promote the widespread use of the Diploma Supplement by Australian tertiary institutions. As discussed in part 4.1.2 above, the Diploma Supplement is a European initiative which aims to describe a higher education qualification in an easily understandable way and relate it to the higher education system within which it was issued. An outline of the European Diploma Supplement can be found at http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/rec_qual/recognition/ds_en.pdf.

The Diploma Supplement is a useful tool for achieving transparency, recognition and mobility of qualifications. There is widespread, and increasing, use of the Diploma Supplement across Europe. Implementation across the Bologna signatories has been varied despite the intention to provide a standardised Diploma Supplement automatically to each student graduating in 2005.

A Diploma Supplement equivalent in Australia has value in promoting employability and academic recognition in ways similar to those projected in the EHEA. European students returning to Europe for employment or further studies without a Supplement will increasingly be questioned as to why they do not have a similar explanatory note for their qualifications. Potential students from Asian countries may also place a greater value on a European rather than an Australian qualification if the Diploma Supplement offers greater mobility throughout Europe.

Without a Diploma Supplement, Australian awards are less likely to be well understood internationally, potentially affecting Australian graduates' international mobility for further study or employment purposes and Australia's competitiveness in the international education export market.

Trial of the Diploma Supplement in Australia

In 2002, in recognition of the value of the Diploma Supplement, DEST funded a pilot project to identify the costs and implications of issuing the Diploma Supplement for a small sample of Australian higher education institutions. The project's outcomes highlighted a number of issues relating to the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, including:

- that while the pilot project used small cohorts of students at each institution, the logistics of printing and delivering a diploma supplement was possible;
- the desire to demonstrate the quality of an institution's courses and graduates to employers or higher education institutions overseas was considered a significant and important goal;
- the capability of student administration systems to aggregate information required to issue the Diploma Supplement varied across institutions. While most possessed the required data across a number of tools, considerable amounts of data had to be migrated across systems;
- the official testamur and academic transcript of most institutions contained information that is included in the model Diploma Supplement; and

- initial costs associated with establishing systems to generate Diploma Supplements are relatively high.

DEST commissioned a further trial of the Diploma Supplement in 2005, to determine detailed consideration of system requirements and costings. This confirmed the findings from the previous pilot that the most significant costs associated with providing Diploma Supplements are related to the development of integrated IT systems and the maintenance and quality assurance of data.

Consultancy on good practice

Building on the outcomes of the pilot project, a consultancy study was commenced in January 2005 to identify good practice in developing and implementing the Diploma Supplement in Australia.

The consultancy raised a number of key issues and recommendations for DEST to consider in the development of strategies to promote the use of the Diploma Supplement. Foremost among these was the importance of increasing the awareness of Australian higher education institutions of the purpose of the Diploma Supplement and the engagement of key stakeholders in the establishment of a taskforce to focus on the development and implementation of the Diploma Supplement.

Questions for Discussion

DEST is keen to elicit the views of stakeholders on the viability in Australia of the Diploma Supplement. The following questions are raised for consideration. Responses can be included in any submission prepared for part 6 above.

- How could the Diploma Supplement be better promoted to higher education institutions?
- What information would higher education institutions find useful to assist them in developing a fuller understanding of the Diploma Supplement?
- What are the main barriers to wider take-up of the Diploma Supplement?
- Is the establishment of a taskforce to focus on the development and implementation of the Diploma Supplement a worthwhile endeavour?
- In Europe, concern has been expressed that some institutions are not following the recommended template for the Diploma Supplement. It is argued that part of the value of the Supplement is lost if institutions implement different formats. Should an Australian Diploma Supplement be modelled on the European template, and should it be in a standard format?