

SPECIAL REPORT

June 2007

Recalibrating the BC Transfer System: *Findings from the Consultation*

BACKGROUND

In November 2005, the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer launched a consultation, *Recalibrating the BC Transfer System*, motivated by significant changes in the BC post-secondary system over the last decade and concern that these changes had not resulted in concomitant adjustments in the structure of the BC Transfer System or the BC Transfer Guide. Besides gathering feedback on adaptations to current conditions, we also wanted advice on how best to position the BC Transfer System for the challenges and opportunities the next decade will bring. We chose the word “recalibration” to convey the sense of a system in need of adjustments to ensure continuing functionality within an ever-changing environment.

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A discussion paper identified the following issues:

- The organization of the BC Transfer Guide still follows traditional lines, designating colleges as sending institutions and universities as receiving institutions.
- Many students are moving between institutions and programs in ways that do not mirror these traditional patterns. Little information is available to help them plan.
- Private and some out-of-province institutions serve many students in BC yet there are few bridges to transfer.

- Transfer in traditional academic disciplines can still be challenging because of diverging requirements for the pre-major.
- Little information exists to guide students transferring in many career and vocational programs.

The discussion paper invited responses through various media: we elicited about 150 responses through an online survey, and at least as many through face-to-face discussion. We also received written responses from institutions and groups. A second survey targeting students received 146 responses.

FINDINGS

The following sections summarize the main issues covered in the consultation and the advice we received. A full report can be found at www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/recalibration.pdf

ISSUE 1: Organization of the BC Transfer Guide — Sending/Receiving Designation

Designations have their roots in the structure of the print version of the BC Transfer Guide. Organized as a grid, each sending institution had a section, with receiving institutions ranged across the top of the page. In contrast, the online guide provides the facility to search by both sending and receiving institution, and its flexible interface supported by a large database removes some of the original rationale behind the designations. Recent Central Data Warehouse (CDW) data reveal that close to 50% of students moving through the system are moving in ways other than college to university.

We asked “Should all institutions be able to request designation as both a sending and receiving institution?” Ninety-four percent of respondents answered yes, with all types of institutions equally likely to choose this response. Respondents noted that the primary function of the BC Transfer Guide should be to provide information for students and that expanding that information beyond the current restricted designations should be a priority. Many asserted that it is high time the organization of the Guide reflected the changing nature of the BC post-secondary system. Lifting the restriction on sending and receiving designations could lead, over time, to a transfer guide that provides information on multi-directional transfer.

At the same time, the majority of respondents indicated it was important that BCCAT carefully manage the transition to a multi-directional environment because of concerns regarding institutional capacity to support new transfer processes, increased faculty workload, and quality control and business-case issues.

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ISSUE 2: Regional Transfer Guides and Transfer Protocols

Questions in this section of the survey were designed to help BCCAT understand whether there were more efficient ways of providing transfer information than multiple bilateral course-to-course agreements, especially where few students are transferring.

CDW and The University Presidents’ Council (TUPC) data show evidence of a strong geographical influence on student movement. Students in the North, for example, are more likely to transfer to UNBC, while students in the Lower Mainland appear to move easily between colleges and universities. We do not know the degree to which the large numbers of students moving between Lower Mainland institutions are the result of aimless *swirling*, *purposeful migration*, or some mix of both. We asked whether BCCAT should “encourage the development of regional transfer guides, in which all institutions in a given region could request designation as both sending and receiving institutions?” 55% of respondents answered no to this questions, indicating that regional transfer guides may not be advantageous for students and would only be acceptable as supplemental to the provincial transfer guide, not as a substitute for it.

We also asked “Should institutions receiving few transfer students be encouraged to sign transfer protocols or guarantees, rather than negotiate multiple articulation agreements?” Respondents were divided on this question, some seeing efficiencies to be gained, while others feared disadvantaging students.

ISSUE 3: Conversion of Case-by-Case Transfer to Articulation-Based Transfer

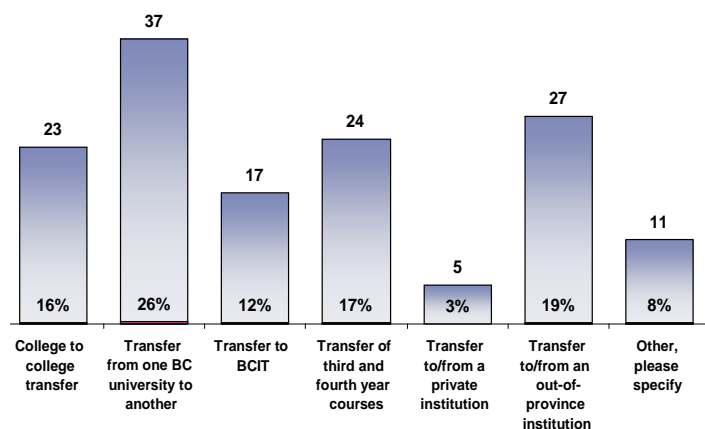
The questions in this section were designed to elicit advice on how to provide information not currently available in the BC Transfer Guide.

Q.8: Given the time and costs required to convert to articulation based transfer, what information should be made available first? [System Survey]

University to University	18	14%
Transfer to BCIT	14	11%
College to College	38	29%
University College to College	13	10%
Transfer in more Applied or Vocational Programs	13	10%
Third and Fourth Year Course-to-Course Articulations	12	9%
Other	23	18%
Total	131	100%

The option most frequently chosen was college to college transfer (29%), perhaps a reflection of the predominance of college respondents. Because information about university to university transfer is one of the most frequent requests that the (Transfer Guide) Coordinator receives we also asked this question in our student survey. The results were somewhat different.

Q.13: What specific kind of transfer information do you MOST want to see added to BCTransferGuide.ca? [Student Survey]



Respondents noted that lifting the current restrictions on designation would allow the Transfer Guide, over time, to contain many college to college, university college to college, or university to university articulations and that facilitating the recording of third and fourth year agreements would also help to expand information available to students.

ISSUE 4: Recording of Public/Private Articulation Agreements

While there is now a policy in place whereby private institutions with approved degrees can request articulation within the BC Transfer System, no formal bridges exist for transfer from non-degree private colleges. Nevertheless, some institutions do articulate, and BCCAT has received inquiries about the possibilities of recording such agreements in the Guide. Question 12, “Should we include articulation agreements with private non-member institutions in the BC Transfer Guide, at the request of the receiving institution, provided that the receiving institution is a member of the BC Transfer System?”, was designed to assess the openness of those inside the Transfer System to such an arrangement as well as to seek the opinions of those outside the system.

Respondents (who are, for the most part, from the BC Transfer System and from public institutions) are conflicted about the question of articulation with private institutions...[they] want assurance that strict quality controls are in place.

While a small majority (56%) answered yes to Question 12, an analysis of the comments offered by respondents to this question is illuminating, since it may reveal the depths to which respondents (who are, for the most part, from the BC Transfer System and from public institutions) are conflicted about the question of articulation with private institutions. For every comment that concentrated on the need to serve students by providing this information, there was another that expressed concern about the quality of private institutions. While somewhat open to this kind of articulation, the current members of the BC Transfer System want assurance that strict quality controls are in place.

ISSUE 5: Recording Out-of-Province Articulation Agreements

Over half of the questions BCCAT receives from students concern out-of-province transfer. We know that

many students in BC take courses from Athabasca University and other institutions offering online courses and programs, and that some colleges in eastern BC articulate with Alberta institutions. We asked “Should we consider justifiable exceptions to the policy of limiting transfer information to institutions within BC?” Two thirds of respondents to the online survey answered yes. However, participants in face-to-face meetings were less enthusiastic and many questioned the precedent that would be set, worried about mandate creep and diluting of resources.

ISSUE 6: Developing More Program Transfer Information and Innovative Transfer Models

These questions were intended to gauge the level of support for BCCAT’s current Transfer Innovations initiatives, in order to assess whether they truly have the potential to provide useful additional information for transfer students. There was considerable support for continuing to fund Flexible Pre-Major Projects although, significantly, it came more from colleges (78%) than from universities (50%). Respondents also agreed that it was important to continue to encourage articulation committees to work on projects to provide more program-specific transfer information, especially in career, applied and vocational areas.

ISSUE 7: Is it Time for a Complete Re-examination of the BC Transfer Model?

This issue covered a series of linked questions, all of which were intended to solicit advice on the viability of our current model of transfer, predicated on the designation of institutions as sending and/or receiving institutions, and on multiple bi-lateral agreements for discrete courses. The consultation paper presented several alternates for consideration, but only one was described in detail – that of multilateral transfer.

Q.14: Is it time for a complete re-examination of the BC transfer model?		
No – it’s fine as it is	3	2%
No – concentrate on improving the current model, not changing it	46	36%
Yes, incrementally, but only if we are sure that there is a better approach	58	45%
Yes – the current model no longer fits our post-secondary environment	22	17%
Total	129	100%

Respondents associated with public colleges and private institutions were most inclined to favour change. Since respondents from colleges represent a disproportionate number of the overall respondents, their responses have influenced the outcome for this question. Many private institutions are understandably in the change camp; however, whether they want a policy shift that holds the promise of including them versus a change to a new and different model of transfer can only be inferred. For some public college respondents loosening restrictions on institutional designation may be enough. For others, however, nothing less than a radical overhaul may be indicated. In this desire we may be seeing echoes of the 1996 *Charting a New Course* recommendations that the transfer system needed to be replaced by a new model which does not privilege receiving institutions over sending institutions.

Taken as a whole the responses indicated a desire for enhancement and incremental improvements rather than wholesale change. In addition, many cautions were sounded about the unintended consequences of upsetting a stable system and about the need to base change decisions on solid evidence of student movement or of transfer difficulties.

ISSUE 8: Priorities, Suggestions and Advice

The numerous comments and suggestions received in the course of the consultation are described in the full report. (See www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/recalibration.pdf.) They provided a rich and varied cornucopia of opinions and views, reflecting the diverse experience that respondents brought to the task of considering what changes would most benefit students and the system.

CONCLUSIONS

The diversity of advice we received creates some dilemmas regarding how best to advance in some areas. What we see is a system that is open to change, but only where it can be assured that this change will progress in a careful and balanced manner, and will not jeopardize either institutional resources or the standards and quality-checking mechanisms that underlie and support the transfer system.

To sum up, participants maintained that expansion of the system must be undertaken with the utmost care but move forward we must. Ultimately, our goal must be to achieve what is most helpful for students, both inside and outside the BC Transfer System. Making progress towards that goal, while respecting institutional autonomy and resource constraints, and being mindful of the demographic social and economic context for the BC post-secondary system in the next 10 to 20 years, will require strategic and careful planning.

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The *Campus 2020* Report, recently released, contains several recommendations which may impact on the outcomes of the Recalibrating consultation, including recommendations 30 and 31 to expand the Transfer System. Recommendations related to developing an accreditation system (25, 26, 27) could change again the landscape of transfer in BC, while the emphasis on a systematic approach to data collection across all sectors (5 and 6) will ultimately assist the Transfer System in making decisions about the movement of students based on evidence.

NEXT STEPS

Given the dynamic and evolving nature of our system, we are likely to be recalibrating for the foreseeable future. A future *Special Report* will detail the recommendations approved by Council, and describe the plan for implementing those recommendations.

BCCAT welcomes your comments or feedback on the issues identified in this report. Please reply to articulation@bccat.bc.ca.

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