

Enhancing the Diploma Supplement

0. Terminology

Recognition body/institution network

International co-operation bodies and networks for recognition, e.g. ENIC/NARIC.

Quality assurance network

European wide co-operation between national quality assurance bodies, e.g. ENQA.

European

A European wide template for a curriculum vitae.

Europass

An instrument to collect qualifications gained through mainly non-formal education.

ECTS

European Credit Transfer System.

Diploma Supplement

An annex to a diploma describing qualifications obtained in higher education

Diploma Supplement Working party

A group consisting of representatives of the European Commission, UNESCO\CEPES and ENIC\NARIC that drew up the model Diploma Supplement.

1. Introduction

Diploma Supplement needs to improve the transparency of education and enhancing the employability of citizens. The world-wide acceptance of European degrees and diplomas requires better information about their content, academic and professional objectives and the competencies they give. Along with the content of the programmes, the quality of degrees and qualifications also needs to be established. The education systems of the different European countries are in a constant change, especially within the framework of the Bologna process. Tools for transparency are therefore needed.

The Bologna Declaration called for the "adoption of a system, of easily readable and comparable degrees". The Declaration therefore can be seen as an indication of the political support offered by the European governments for a tool like the Diploma Supplement.

The Diploma Supplement also facilitates the Lisbon Convention (Convention of the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Regions, adopted in 1997.). Much of the legal framework for recognition is in place, but continuous efforts are still needed to improve its implementation.

2. Issuing the Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement can only work successfully if it is widely implemented and promoted following the same model in every country for easy recognition and transparency. The model Diploma Supplement developed by the Diploma Supplement Working Party is strongly supported by ESIB.

However ESIB wants the information of the quality assurance systems of the respective countries to be included in the country descriptions of the Diploma Supplement. The country descriptions and information identifying the qualifications, and the level of qualifications should also be available to students at all times to help provide the information a student may require for qualifying, to pursue studies or parts of studies in another country.

According to ESIB, the Diploma Supplement should be issued automatically together with the degree and this among others to avoid the problems, both for students and institutions, caused by having to issue the document perhaps several years after obtaining the qualification. Furthermore, students may not be aware of their right to get a Diploma Supplement and thus it is the duty of the institutions to ensure that all their students are issued a Diploma Supplement automatically. For further protection of student rights, ESIB encourages the institutions to prepare to issue Diploma Supplements also retrospectively as far back as is rational and possible. Automatically issued Diploma Supplements should be considered as an integral part of the diploma and therefore free of charge.

ESIB urges that the Diploma Supplement should always be issued in English and the official national language(s) of the country where the institution is situated. This should be done in order to achieve the best possible measure of transparency on the national and international level and to avoid problems that will follow from having to translate the documents retrospectively. Translating e.g., degree titles into another language nearly always implies evaluation and an equivalence statement, which can cause confusion and be misleading. ESIB fully supports the instructions given by the Diploma Supplement working party on which sub-sections of the Diploma Supplement are to be given in the language in which the diploma is issued, and these are to be translated by the institution issuing the Diploma Supplement. For the future it should be possible to obtain the Diploma Supplement in as many languages as possible.

3. National – institutional commitments

To achieve an integrated European higher education area we need to establish more bridges in between the different systems, yet we need to respect the diversity and national autonomy of countries. The Diploma Supplement is one of the tools to build bridges. The Diploma Supplement is an instrument to create transparency, support mobility and promote employability in Europe. Thus it depends heavily on the institutional commitments.

To get this kind of commitment the national authorities and institutions need to take an active role in providing information and tools for the widespread implementation of Diploma Supplement. We must take the full advantage of the expertise and experience of the recognition bodies/institutions networks. ESIB also encourage that co-operation in between recognition bodies/institution networks and the quality

assurance networks is to be further promoted. In order to enhance the use of the Diploma Supplement and make it genuinely labour market relevant it is also essential that the labour market is sufficiently informed of its possibilities. Therefore co-operation in between the institutions, student organisations, recognition bodies/institution networks and the labour market is needed.

4. New challenges

Europe needs new measures to answer to the needs of recognition problems of higher education as well as the life long learning. In terms of employment and further education, European citizens must have the possibility to be mobile and this requires recognition of their qualifications. This becomes even more important in the sphere of the life long learning and the fact that future generations will change employment and require professional updating at increasing speed. In the future degrees and qualifications will need to become more flexible. Student must be given better opportunities to mobility, choice, and flexibility of studies and the learning must be student-centred: students can independently take responsibility for the building up of their degrees, in the national as well as in the international context. All this makes the developing of systems such as the Diploma Supplement and credit accumulation crucial. A credit accumulation system compatible with ECTS, together with the Diploma Supplement would form a powerful set of integrated tools to resolve the obstacles to these goals. In the future it is essential to develop one tool that is as comprehensible as possible in recognising qualifications. Students must be informed of the other recognition tools, such as the Europass and the European CV and encouraged to use them together with their Diploma Supplement. Especially the European CV is different from most other CVs through emphasising the importance of non-formal and informal learning – both of which are growing in importance.

5. Conclusion

In order for the Diploma Supplement to answer to the need to create transparency and contribute to recognition of qualifications and better employability, the system needs to be implemented more vigorously, and its use expanded. Genuine institutional commitment and information campaigning, also towards the labour market, are crucial. Co-operation in between the various actors needs to be further promoted as well as on the national level. Tools are needed to record and recognise life long learning.

Annexe: Model Diploma Supplement can be found at:
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/recognition/dsen.pdf>