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Action

For action within
institutions

Executive Summary

Information on the
Bologna Process call
for all students to be
awarded the Diploma
Supplement
automatically by 2005.

Attachment(s)

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The Bologna Process: Diploma Supplement

Introduction

1. This note provides UK HEIs and HE stakeholders with further information on the Diploma Supplement, following from the Berlin Communiqué's call '*for every student graduating as from 2005 to receive it automatically and free of charge*'. The Berlin Communiqué was signed by ministers from 40 European countries at the last summit on the Bologna Process in September 2004. These summits are held to review progress in the Bologna Process to establish the European Higher Education area and to identify future steps. The two UK Ministers who signed the Communiqué in Berlin were Ivan Lewis, Minister for Skills & Vocational Education in Westminster and from the Scottish Executive, Lewis MacDonald, Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong learning.
2. This note provides further information on the Diploma Supplement for institutions which are now preparing to meet the 2005 deadline. More practical information is available from the UK's Diploma Supplement promoters listed in annex two. UK HE stakeholders are also discussing the issue in view of the on-going implementation of the Progress Files. A note on further developments will be produced.

Background

3. The Diploma Supplement has its roots in the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, also known as the Lisbon Convention¹. The Convention was produced by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and adopted by national representatives, meeting in Lisbon in 1997. A total of 41 countries have now signed the Convention including the UK, who ratified it in 2003. The Convention invites all

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¹ The full text of the Lisbon Convention can be found at: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/165.htm>. The current updated list of signatures and ratifications may be found at: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/CadreListeTraites.htm> (ETS no.165)

signatory countries to encourage their higher education institutions to issue the Diploma Supplement (or any other comparable document) to their students in order to facilitate recognition.

4. The Diploma Supplement is an instrument developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO which aims to describe the qualification in an easily understandable way and relate it to the higher education system within which it was issued. 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 the supplement is appended. Guidelines² indicate that it should be free from any value-judgements, equivalence statements or suggestions about recognition. It is a flexible non-prescriptive tool designed to save time, money and workload and can be adapted to local needs. It is not a *curriculum vitae* or a substitute for the original credential but rather a way of providing detailed information about any HE qualification.
5. There are eight information sections or 'fields' in the Diploma Supplement containing information about: (1) the holder, (2) the qualification, (3) the level of the qualification, (4) contents and results gained, (5) the function, (6) additional information, (7) certification, and (8) the context of the award in the form of a description of the HE system itself.
6. The Diploma Supplement is included in the European Commission's plans to create a single framework for the recognition of qualifications and competences across Europe. Entitled *Europass* it will incorporate five already-existing initiatives, with a view to simplifying the qualification recognition procedure. The programme also demonstrates a commitment to lifelong learning and new technologies by placing *Europass*³ on the internet, where users can update it as and when they gain qualifications. As well as the Diploma Supplement the framework would include the European CV, the European Language Portfolio, the MobiliPass, and the Certificate Supplement. It is expected that the European Parliament will approve this proposal by the end of this year. Work on a European standard for automatic exchange of learner information is in hand for the standards body CEN and it is intended that a standard should be agreed in 2007. The Joint Information System Committee (JISC) is running a project in the UK. Details are available at <http://www.cetis.ac.uk>.

Importance of the Diploma Supplement to the UK HE sector

7. As a signatory to the Lisbon Convention, the UK is committed to encouraging HEIs to issue the Diploma Supplement to students.

² For the guidelines, please see: http://www.aic.lv/rec/Eng/leg_en/DSrec_EN.htm

³ For more details on *Europass*: http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/pdf/2003/com2003_0796en01.pdf

8. The Diploma Supplement plays a major role in the Bologna Process of which the UK is a founding signatory country. The Diploma Supplement has proved a useful tool for achieving transparency, recognition and mobility and as such a means for realising some key Bologna objectives.
9. A large number of UK HEIs have been supporting their students by implementing the HE Progress File. The Transcript element of the Progress File provides most of the detailed information required in the Diploma Supplement on the final achievements of the student but in a different format. Preparing the Diploma Supplement format may be relatively straightforward in some UK HEIs but, in others, it may require significant changes to student Information Management Systems (IMS).
10. There are certain objectives within the Bologna Process that could give rise to major compatibility issues for the UK HE sector, for example some of the options currently being canvassed on quality assurance, credit systems and qualifications frameworks. The implementation of the Diploma Supplement may be one of the more manageable objectives and might be seen to present the UK HE sector with fewer difficulties. It could be argued that the UK can demonstrate willingness to implement the objective, preparing the ground for the UK to engage more critically with other more difficult issues in the Process.
11. The Diploma Supplement is distinct from the UK HE sector's Progress File initiative. The Progress File encourages a formative learning process for students during their studies, helping them to optimise and enhance their knowledge and abilities. The Transcript element of the Progress file is an active integral part of this reflective process, providing information to students as they progress through their course. The Diploma Supplement is a summative document, providing details of individual qualifications, which have been successfully passed. It is not intended as a replacement for the actual credential. Its overall aim is to provide information to employers to facilitate recognition and mobility across Europe.

Issues for the UK sector

12. There are a number of data fields not included in the Transcript document that are required by the Diploma Supplement, but which would generally be available from a student record system, or other parts of an institution's regulations and record systems. These items and possible data sources are listed in Annex 1. Some items would be common across the whole institution or the relevant territory within the UK. The UK HE sector must now determine the best way to transcribe all necessary information.
13. It is likely that there may be cost implications for some HEIs in changing IM systems to produce the Diploma Supplement. Experience in some HEIs already implementing the Diploma Supplement reveals difficulties in extracting the information required from

management information systems to produce the document. Ideally HEIs will introduce the Diploma Supplement at a time that management information systems could do so automatically. Short-term developments in the implementation of the Diploma Supplement and the *Europass* proposal may also have an impact on IMS requirements.

14. The Diploma Supplement is widely used across the rest of Europe and the UK risks falling behind in meeting the Bologna commitment unless UK awareness is raised amongst HEIs, employers, professional bodies and students. The European University Association's (EUA) *Trends III* report published in July 2003 notes that some countries had introduced a Diploma Supplement even before the Bologna Process was launched in 1999, for example Belgium and the Czech Republic. Some have made or are making legislative reforms to facilitate introduction of the Diploma Supplement (Austria, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Sweden, Switzerland and Spain), while others are planning to make the DS a legal requirement in the near future. European Commission data from October 2003ⁱ indicates that most Bologna signatory countries have made some concrete progress towards introduction of the Diploma Supplement.
15. It is already a legal requirement in Europe for institutions issuing certificates and diplomas to secure the authenticity of claims made by them. It is important that this is true also of the Diploma Supplement to ensure the document can fulfil its intended functions.

Proposed actions

16. Institutions are encouraged to consider taking steps towards introducing the Diploma Supplement. They are also invited to contact the UK's Diploma Supplement promoters - listed in annex two - with detailed enquiries and on more general matters related to the Supplement, the UK Socrates–Erasmus Council, info@erasmus.ac.uk.
 17. These issues have been drawn to the attention of the Progress Files Advisory Group and in the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Scoping Group, chaired by Professor Robert Burgess. The Europe Unit will report on the outcomes of the various UK HE stakeholder discussions.
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Annex One

Possible data sources for data items required by the Diploma Supplement and not available in the Transcript document

Diploma Supplement Data Item	Possible Source
Family Name Given Name Student ID	Institutional ID plus HESA ID
Main field(s) of study	JACS codes as used by UCAS and HESA
Level of qualification	As in the QAA FHEQ
Official length of programme	As specified in institutional regulations
Access requirements	The institutional UCAS profile
Mode of study	As reported to HESA
Programme requirements	Institutional examination regulations and modular scheme options
Additional information	Reference to institutional website and to the DfES website on qualifications and who may award them
Further information sources	UKNARIC
Capacity of signatory	Official appointment of person, egg Academic Registrar
Requirement to provide common information on the national higher education systems	A draft of such a general statement for the UK is already in preparation by the UK NARIC

Annex Two

UK Diploma Supplement Promoters

- Stephen Adam, University of Westminster – sjadam@msn.com
- Tim Birtwistle, Leeds Metropolitan University - T.Birtwistle@leedsmet.ac.uk
- John E. Reilly, Director of the UK Socrates-Erasmus Council: j.e.reilly@ukc.ac.uk
- Anthony Vickers, University of Essex: vicka@essex.ac.uk
- Richard Whewell, University of Strathclyde: r.j.whewell@strath.ac.uk