



Last modified: 29.01.2018

Advisory Group 4 "Diploma Supplement Revision"

FINAL REPORT

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1. Introduction

1.1 *Historical context*

The Diploma Supplement (DS) is a transparency instrument developed by the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO-CEPES between 1996 and 1998.

The DS forms an integral part of three important initiatives in the field of higher education internationalisation and of the recognition of qualifications across borders: the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the Bologna Process, and Europass. The first of the three, the Lisbon Recognition Convention (Article IX.3), calls on signatory countries to promote the Diploma Supplement or any equivalent document through national information centres or otherwise. Second, the implementation of the DS is one of the criteria used to measure the Bologna Process's progression in terms of qualification transparency. Third, the DS is one of five Europass transparency tools promoted by the European Commission.

The DS is a document attached to a higher education diploma. It gives a detailed description of its holder's learning outcomes, and the nature, level, context, content and status of individual study components. It includes several pieces of information: the name of the holder of the Supplement, the qualification and its level and function, the contents and achieved results, certification of the Supplement, information on the national higher education system under which the Supplement was issued, and other relevant information. It is free from any value judgements, equivalence statements or suggestions about recognition.

The DS helps higher education institutions, employers, recognition authorities and other stakeholders more easily understand graduates' skills and competences. In this way, the DS aims to promote transparency and recognition in order to facilitate mobility, access to lifelong learning opportunities, and graduate employability. It therefore represents a response to the twin challenges of both higher education and labour market internationalisation.

The DS already has a long history as it was one of the main subjects in all Ministerial conferences since 1997 (as seen in the annex V).

1.2 *Mandate of the AG*

The Advisory Group on the Revision of the Diploma Supplement was mandated to support the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO in reviewing the Diploma Supplement, in cooperation with stakeholders. A proposal was expected to be delivered to the BFUG by 2017.

The main tasks set out for the Advisory Board included:

- to develop a proposal for a revised version of the Diploma Supplement;
- to consult with external stakeholders;
- to ensure it reflects the recent developments in higher education;
- to take into account the revision of the ECTS Users' Guide;
- to base it more closely on Learning Outcomes, increasing its usefulness in recognition procedures;
- to ensure a close cooperation with the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO;
- to reflect on the digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement;
- to ensure its coherence between a review of the Diploma Supplement and the possible development of a "Doctoral Supplement" within the European Research Area;

In order to reflect the diversity of the EHEA, all Bologna countries, the European Commission, the Consultative members and the BFUG Secretariat were invited to participate in the Advisory Group activities. Altogether, 29 representatives of the BFUG members and other organizations were appointed as AG4 members, attended the group meetings and contributed to its work. In particular, the members representing the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO ensured a close cooperation with the respective organizations.

The full list of members is provided in ANNEX IV.

1.3 Methodology

The Advisory group was tasked by the BFUG to develop a proposal for a revised version of the Diploma Supplement in consultation with external stakeholders. To this aim the group had six meetings over the course of 2 years where all the changes have been proposed, discussed and adopted. The changes were made based on:

- Reports regarding the implementation of the Diploma Supplement (The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report, the 2012-2015 Ad-hoc Third Cycle WG). Answers from a questionnaire filled by all the AG4 members regarding the issues that need to be taken into consideration.
- Survey done by the European Commission within the ENIC-NARIC networks and the National Europass Centres for the Study to support the revision of the Diploma Supplement and analyse the feasibility of its digitalisation at European level.
- The reports made by the students, HEIs and employers regarding their view on the implementation status of the Diploma Supplement and needed changes.
- The members inputs based on their experience.
- Good practice examples.
- Feedback received from the BFUG Board.

2. Main issues discussed by the group

2.1 Implementation

2.1.1 General findings regarding the implementation

By looking at the 2015 Bologna Process Implementation report¹, an improvement can be seen regarding the implementation of the Diploma Supplement compared with 2012. However, in 2015, two thirds of countries have failed to fulfil all the requirements – that the Diploma Supplement should be issued to every graduate, automatically, in a widely spoken European language and issued free of charge. Insufficient incentives and lack of political will were reported to be the main factors for not fulfilling the requirements to issue a Diploma Supplement to every graduate, automatically, in a widely spoken European language, and free of charge.

The main issue in implementation:

- Issuing Diploma Supplement automatically: only 31 higher education systems (26 in 2012) do so.
 - All countries issue Diploma Supplements in a widely spoken European language, but in some cases only on request.
 - Most countries choose English as the main non-national language for the DS.
 - While in 2012 five countries issued Diploma Supplements for a fee, the number is now three.
 - The issuing of the Diploma Supplement in the third cycle is less widespread than in the first and second cycles, but still two thirds of the countries issue the DS to all or some third cycle graduates which was not the case in previous periods.
 - 14 higher education systems (against 7 in 2012) report that they have launched studies to monitor how higher education institutions use the Diploma Supplement. The bodies carrying out such monitoring vary widely. It may be the ministry, the National Board of Education, an inspectorate, the quality assurance agency, the Rectors' Conference, or a Higher Education International Unit.
 - Checking how employers use the Diploma Supplement is rare and only four countries survey employers on this question.
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- The Diploma Supplement **template proved to be relevant** for HEIs across EHEA. The majority of surveyed HEIs that issued a document providing a description of the acquired competences, completed studies, their nature, level, context and content along with a higher education diploma, did so following the Diploma Supplement template.
 - There was a **lack of monitoring** on DS use and satisfaction at both national and international levels across the EHEA. Lack of direct feedback mechanisms were limiting the information that HEIs possessed about the potential usefulness of the DS to their students. Moreover, insufficient monitoring did not allow governments to assess the national level measures taken to enhance DS awareness and implementation.
 - Admission officers evaluated the DS to be **one of the most valuable tools for qualification recognition**, but its application for this purpose was still relatively low. **High satisfaction and low uptake indicated great potential to enhance the usage** of DS among HEIs for admissions procedures.
 - Even though the employers' survey carried out in the context of this study indicated that the documents outlining student achievement records (knowledge and skills of the holder, a description of the completed studies, their nature, level, context and content) were frequently used, the frequency of use of the Diploma Supplement and satisfaction of employers differed significantly among individual respondents.

The group agreed that the major issue that hinders the implementation of the Diploma Supplement is an **absence of common understanding**, among the users and the labour market stakeholders, on what exactly the Diploma Supplement is and what benefits it could provide to its holders. Moreover, there is still a lack of common understanding among the users, on how to fill out the current template. The kind of information provided under the different points still shows great variation.

The study on DS implementation formulated a number of findings on possibilities to **strengthen DS implementation**:

- Issuing institutions often had **different understandings of the requirements for filling out the DS**, which resulted in inconsistently presented graduate data (i.e. content, structure and layout) and **diminished comparability of information** provided in the document.
- Diploma Supplement users often noticed that the DS lacked additional information that would describe **internships, mobility periods, or extraordinary achievements**. Completing such custom entries would require a significant amount of manual work. Moreover, there was no specific section for extracurricular achievements within the DS template.
- **The length and complexity of the DS was evaluated in a contradictory fashion** by different types of stakeholders. Some employers expected more information about learning outcomes, and noted that the descriptions of educational systems were irrelevant. Meanwhile, HEI representatives expected more information about the content of curricula, while ENIC-NARIC representatives expressed a need for a more comprehensive description of educational systems.
- The current format and paper medium of the DS could not provide the **flexibility** needed to simultaneously meet the very diverse needs and expectations of different stakeholder groups. For the situation to change, the future DS template would need to become **more flexible** and **accessible in digital as well as analogue format**.

The Diploma Supplement was not well-known across all of its intended target groups. The level of use of the DS may have been higher if employers had received sufficient information on the Diploma Supplement's existence, benefits and applicability.

The AG discussed the purpose and use of the DS in order to identify the information it should provide, and what revision may be needed. This was done by acknowledging the fact that **the DS template should not vary from one country to another within the EHEA** since any variation would weaken the international status and value of the Diploma Supplement. Each country is responsible for the national implementation of the standard template, although some variations in the national layout may be accepted.

2.2 Quality of DS

The diploma supplement forms an important part of the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and is an important tool for graduates to ensure that their degrees are recognized by higher education institutions, public authorities and employers in their home countries and abroad. The diploma supplement should build on and include the use of common transparency tools such as learning outcomes, ECTS and how the degrees correspond to the national qualification framework(s) and external national quality assurance and/or accreditation. Analysing current situation it results that the DS is not always filled in in a proper way, thus giving not the same correct information to the end user of it. The AG4 group agreed that for this purpose some changes have been made in the DS and the explanatory notes were revised in order to be updated and to give consistent information on how to fill in the DS.

2.2.1 Learning outcomes

The importance of presenting learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplement is apparent and the usefulness of learning outcomes was brought up in the surveys and reports discussed by the group. According to the *"Study to support the revision of the Diploma Supplement and analyse the feasibility of its digitalisation¹ at European level"* (2017) the description of learning outcomes in the DS was of a significant importance to the employers and it also provided for the added value of the Diploma Supplement over alternative documents. Confederation of German Employer's Associations called for attention to better presentation of learning outcomes. ESU's report in 2015 "Bologna with Students' Eyes" also underlined the importance of learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplement and pointed out that learning outcomes were not always included into the DS nor did they represent the individual learning outcomes of graduates.

From the Diploma Supplement examples studied by the working group it was apparent, that learning outcomes were not always presented in the Diploma Supplement and when they were, the level of detail and/or personification varied from generic learning outcomes for the study program, to actual personal learning outcomes of the graduate.

¹"Study to support the revision of the Diploma Supplement and analyse the feasibility of its digitalisation at European level" (2017) by PPMI <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1ae19aac-6a9a-11e7-b2f2-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-32160429>

The working group agreed with the importance of presenting achieved learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplements and on the need of e.g. better instructions in the DS explanatory notes to support HEIs.

2.2.2 Presentation of data and additional information

The group discussed extensively the way of the data presentation and agreed to make some changes. These should help HEI's to fill in relevant data. The explanatory notes were changed in order to describe clearly what the different sections in the template stand for, what kind of information should or should not be provided, etc.

Regarding the field "additional information" the group agreed that they could be included in the DS if certified by the institution and if relevant to the purpose of assessing the nature, level and usage of the qualification. E.g. a mobility period abroad, a work placement etc. for which the student has not received credits or recognition, but which nonetheless is deemed to contribute to the learning outcomes defined for the qualification.

2.3 Students, HEIs, employers and the DS

The working group collected information on the perspective of students, HEIs and employers on the DS, their awareness and ownership of the document. This was done through previous studies conducted and reports compiled, as well as making use of new studies conducted whilst the working groups' work was on-going.

2.3.1 Students and the DS

European Students Union (ESU) made a report in 2015 "Bologna with Students' Eyes" and it showed that many countries appear to issue the Diploma Supplement in accordance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, nevertheless there was still a significant number of countries that did not fulfil the criteria of automatically awarding diploma supplements free of charge to the graduates. Furthermore, the report also reminded that the DS has an important role in the improved employability of graduates.

The recent *"Study to support the revision of the Diploma Supplement and analyse the feasibility of its digitalisation at European level"* further showed that the awareness of the DS and its potential uses is also quite limited among students and graduates. A few interviewed HEI representatives affirmed that students did not even know about the existence of the DS until they graduated. The Graduate survey data within the study indicated that while many of the respondents reported that they had received detailed information about the DS, a large share of students/alumni could not even answer the question. Although this data cannot tell us about how well students were actually informed about the DS, it does suggest that, at the institutional level, there is room for improvement in respect to raising students' awareness about the usability of additional student The *"Study to support the revision of the Diploma Supplement and analyse the feasibility of its digitalisation at European level"* also revealed that the most common use of the DS by the graduates was related to job applications, which supports the ESU report in signifying the importance of the DS for enhancing employability. The document was either sent with, or consulted to, fill in a CV, cover letter or professional profile by nearly half of the respondents to the study.

2.3.2 Higher education institutions and the DS

The MAUNIMO report (2012): *Mobility: Closing the gap between policy and practice*, Outcome report of the project 'Mapping University Mobility of Staff and students' showed that: "Despite many years of promoting the implementation of ECTS, learning agreements and the Diploma Supplement at higher education institutions in Europe, mobility and transparency tools were still not universally familiar." The report also found out that: "MAUNIMO coordinators who thought that resources such as the ECTS or Diploma Supplement were widely known and fully accepted were surprised by the results, which often demonstrated that some members of the academic community were not aware of them and perhaps not consistently applying them."

Furthermore, the report discovered that: "According to the universities that took part in MAUNIMO, mobility approaches or strategies may have been developed but there is little knowledge of their impact. This may be because they remain unknown at the institution concerned or because not enough resources have been invested in communicating or implementing them."

Later reports and findings show that the situation remains very much the same. For example ESU's report "Bologna with Students' Eyes" showed that in 2015 not all HEIs met with the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention:

- only 31 out of 38 countries reported of existing legislation regarding the Diploma Supplement

- 27 out of 38 countries issue the Diploma Supplement automatically and 8 countries issue it only by request
- The Diploma Supplement is not issued free of charge in all countries

Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities -report did indicate, however, that awareness of the tools that facilitate mobility are on the rise within institutions. The report also pointed out that a combination of actions, such as defining learning outcomes, improving the use of ECTS, ensuring the quality of Diploma Supplements and their international understanding would contribute to increased mobility.

The (2017) *"Study to support the revision of the Diploma Supplement and analyse the feasibility of its digitalisation at European level"* further showed that more than 80% of the surveyed HEIs in the EHEA issued followed the template of CoE/UNESCO/Europass Diploma Supplement, with only a few using alternative documents for the purpose.

2.3.3 Employers and the DS

The Diploma Supplement plays an important role in enhancing the employability of the graduates; it provides relevant information about the graduate's academic achievements to the employers. The role of the DS in the world of work was first recognized already in the Prague Communiqué in 2001. For example, according to the *"Study to support the revision of the Diploma Supplement and analyses the feasibility of its digitalisation at European level"* graduates use the DS actively for employment purposes. However, there is very little actual surveys on the views of employers about the Diploma Supplement.

Confederation of German Employers' Associations / Member of Business Europe presented the views of employers to the working group in 2016. The DS is a useful instrument for assessing and comparing academic degrees from different countries. It can also contribute to the increased mobility of professionals who intend to work in another country within the European Higher Education Area.

Confederation called for better Diploma Supplements with attention to better presentation of information and more coherent use of the common template, which would contribute to the DS being more useful to the employers.

According to the *"Study to support the revision of the Diploma Supplement and analyses the feasibility of its digitalisation at European level"* (2017), the level of use of the DS among employers has been scarcely evaluated in the EHEA, with monitoring carried out only in Germany, France, Romania and Montenegro. The ENIC-NARIC in France collected data that showed it had not been popular among national employers in 2014. In contrast, a high share of employers in Germany in 2011 considered the DS as important (70%), with almost 50% perceiving the document as a decisive criterion in the candidate selection process².

Stakeholders in Germany noted that the DS had helped make acquired competences more transparent³. Even though in most cases the expectations for increased transparency attributable to the Diploma Supplement were higher than the actual experience, it was nevertheless considered to be a very beneficial tool by more than two thirds of surveyed employers. The description of learning outcomes in the DS had been the main source from which German employers obtained information about the qualifications of the candidate according to a study conducted in 2007⁴. This gives the Diploma Supplement an advantage over alternative documents in recognition and employment.

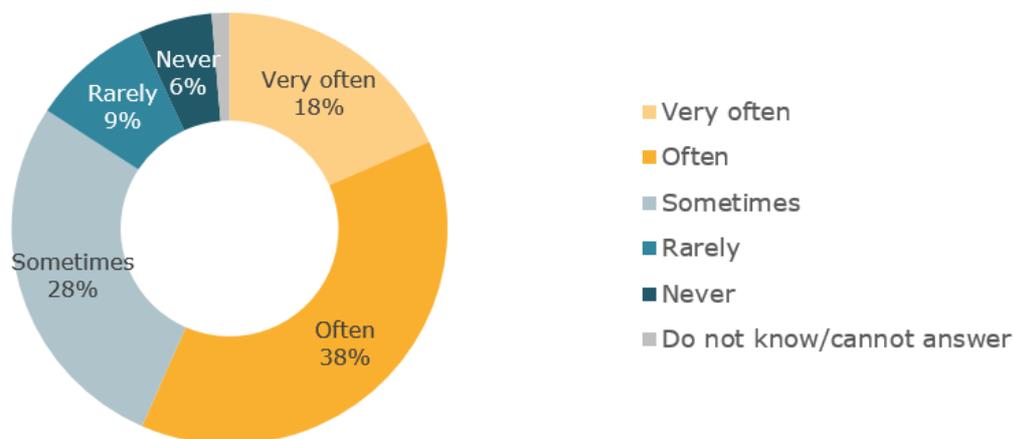
According to the survey of employers done within the *"Study to support the revision of the Diploma Supplement and analyse the feasibility of its digitalisation at European level"* (2017), , around 9 of 10 surveyed persons working in HR/recruitment had at some point used the Diploma Supplement or its alternatives to acquire information about job candidates. More than half of the surveyed enterprises asked for such documents from candidates often or very often (see graph below).

² DAAD, 2011. Bachelor und Master auf dem Arbeitsmarkt: Die Sicht deutscher Unternehmen auf Auslandserfahrungen und Qualifikationen. Available at: <https://eu.daad.de/medien/eu/publikationen/bologna/bachelor-master-publikation.pdf>,

³ Ibid.

⁴ DAAD, 2007. Bachelor, Master und Auslandserfahrungen: Erwartungen und Erfahrungen deutscher Unternehmen. Available at: http://www.iwconsult.de/imperia/md/images/iwconsult/pdf/download/akzeptanz_bachelor_master.pdf

Figure 1. How often do employers use the DS to acquire information on candidates?



Source: Employers survey, PPMI, 2017

The same survey among employers revealed that there were **three main reasons why employers did not use the tool**: lack of relevance of information presented in the DS for recruitment (by far the most important reason), lack of awareness about the DS, and lack of understanding of its purpose.

2.4 Format and Digitalisation of DS

The Group's work on this issue was based on the recent "Study to support the revision of the Diploma Supplement and analyse the feasibility of its digitalisation at European level" that had analysed the feasibility of the digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement and provided some useful indications and scenarios.

Many higher education institutions find the DS an administrative challenge. The target groups of the document often find it too long and yet lacking details on the content most relevant to them. Digitalisation of the DS would make the administration of the document easier, and also allow for a document that, through modularity or other solutions, enables the target groups to get easier access to the information which is most relevant to them. Furthermore, digitalisation of the DS opens up new possibilities of using the document more efficiently and flexibly in providing information on the academic achievements of the individual.

The main findings on the feasibility of digitalisation are:

- Most of the interviewed **stakeholders were in favour of the** digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement. The **digitalisation effort could potentially close the existing DS implementation gaps** and provide further benefits to its users.
- The **costs** of introducing the **digital Diploma Supplement were not that high**, however, the **perception of costs** made some HEIs reluctant. This could be resolved by providing a **clear explanation of the costs** involved and better dissemination efforts of digital practices.
- The **employers** largely agreed that digitalisation of the DS **could reduce recruitment process costs**. Likewise, many **HEI** and **ENIC-NARIC** representatives either **expected or confirmed** that digitalisation of the DS **would aid faster accreditation and validation**.
- Digital technologies allow for more varied security measures, which would ensure a **higher security standard for student data** than the paper format. However, in order to make the use of the DS as convenient as possible, security measures should take into account related services such as **user authentication options**.
- A digital DS would allow for a **more flexible format of the document**. More flexibility would allow issues related to the current **length and formatting** of the DS to be addressed, and accommodate **more customized information**. Digitalisation also opens up the opportunity for **further integration of the document with other related services**.

Currently only in a few cases the DS is issued digitally, but there are examples of it that can be useful for other HEIs. There are also several different approaches to digitalisation for HEIs to consider; from issuing a simple standalone certified electronic document to user-oriented services to open digital credentials. This means that HEIs can opt for different approaches most suitable to them, and also advance step by

step in the digitalisation of the DS, possibly alongside with other digitalisation processes of the institution. The DS study provides a detailed overview on these.

The group agreed that the first steps towards digitalisation are not complex or costly –while digitalisation, when really invested into, can bring a lot more benefits to the institutions and individuals alike. **The conclusion was to encourage HEIs to adopt suitable digitalisation procedures for issuing the Diploma Supplement.**

2.5 *The doctoral supplement*

One of the tasks set up in the terms of reference was ensuring coherence between the reviewed Diploma Supplement and the possible development of a “**Doctoral Supplement**” within the European Research Area (ERA). As the “doctoral supplement” has not been yet developed within the ERA this task has not been addressed. Nevertheless, the group concluded that, the current and the revised format of the diploma supplement can be used by countries that decide to do so for the doctoral level.

2.6 *Role of DS for joint degrees*

The Diploma supplement plays an important role in relation to joint degrees and transnational or cross border higher education provision. In order to facilitate recognition of joint degrees graduates should be provided with a diploma supplement where ECTS or other types of credits which are award based on learning outcomes have to be part of. For this purpose the AG4 group agreed that a diploma supplement issued with a joint degree should clearly describe all parts of the degree, and it should clearly indicate at which institutions and/or in which study programmes the different parts of the degree have been earned. Considering also that Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee set out recommendations on the recognition of Joint Degrees on 29 February 2016 the respective foot note have been updated with the respective link. The AG4 group agreed also to add a definition on Joint degrees and to adopt for this purpose the definition from the European Commission concerning joint degrees as follows:

“Joint degree: A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.”

2.7 *Technical aspects: New template and explanatory notes*

The working group established that there is no need to apply major changes to the current template. The current template serves the needs of the users well, when it is used correctly and all the relevant information is filled-in. Furthermore, the working group acknowledged that in many countries the Diploma Supplement is only recently implemented in full and a major change of template would not be feasible at this stage.

The working group proposes a moderate number of changes to the template that are clarifying in their nature with the aim of contributing to the improved filling-in of the Diploma Supplement template by the higher education institutions. Furthermore, clarifications and better information are proposed to the Diploma Supplement explanatory notes to support and assist higher education institutions.

Summary of changes proposed to DS template:

DS Template	Current	Proposed
2.1	Name of qualification and (if applicable) title conferred	Name of qualification and (if applicable) title conferred (in original language)
Heading 3	Information on the Level of the Qualification	Information on the Level and Duration of the Qualification
3.1	Level of qualification	Level of the qualification
3.2	Official length of programme	Official duration of programme in credits and/or years
Heading 4	Information on the Contents and Results Gained	Information on the Programme Completed and the Results obtained
4.2	Programme requirements	Programme Learning Outcomes
4.3	Programme details: (e.g. modules or units studied), and the individual grades/marks/credits obtained:	Programme details, individual credits gained and grades/marks obtained
4.4	Grading schemes and, if available, grade distribution guidance	Grading system and, if available, grade distribution table
5.2	Professional status	Access to a regulated profession (if applicable):

The group also acknowledged that the final and formal adoption of the revised Diploma Supplement template is pending on the adoption by CoE and UNESCO in the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee meeting in 2019 as well as within the European Commission framework.

Summary changes proposed for the DS guidelines (renamed: explanatory notes)

1. Changes to the structure

- In order to better understand the how the DS should be filled in and used, the group agreed that the explanatory notes should start with the “**PRINCIPLES AND GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THOSE PRODUCING SUPPLEMENTS**”. This would underline the importance of these issues.
- The text has been updated and revised in order to make it shorter, easy to read and understand.

2. OUTLINE STRUCTURE FOR THE DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT

- The introductory paragraphs were updated emphasizing the purpose of the DS.
- The headings were modified in order to be the same as in the revised template.

3. DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT EXPLANATORY NOTES

- The introductory paragraphs of this section were moved to the beginning of the document in the Principles and general Guidelines for consistency reasons.
- Introductory paragraphs underling the purpose of each section (headings) were added.
- For each explanatory note the heading name was added in order to make the document easy to read;
- Changes were made to the language in order to make the document easy to read.

4. Glossary

- New terms were added in the glossary section and some definitions were updated.

The specific changes made to the explanatory notes are showed with track changes in annex VI.

3. Monitoring

The Working Group identified a need for a monitoring of the implementation but also the content and quality of the Diploma Supplements. There are various ways to achieve this. Monitoring supports the individual higher education institutions to implement and develop their Diploma Supplements and provides for the sometimes needed incentive to invest into this work.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Early conclusions

Based on the major role played by learning outcomes in recognition procedures and job recruitment, the consensus was that **the template of the Diploma Supplement should include a specific section requiring a clear statement of the learning outcomes effectively acquired by the student, in an easily readable format.**

The Group also agreed that the **current Diploma Supplement template provides the opportunity to include information on internships and mobility experiences, as well as reference to extracurricular learning achievements and the recognition of prior learning.**

Finally, the Group agreed that it would be advisable **to limit the revision of the template to a few necessary changes and rather work on the explanatory notes for filling out the template,** in order to improve the quality of the information provided. It was agreed that such information should be clear, useful and concise. The DS explanatory notes should take into account the recent developments in the EHEA, as well as the indications contained in the recently revised ECTS Users' Guide.

4.2 Main recommendations for the BFUG

- Acknowledge the DS as an essential tool for recognition, mobility and employability.
- Support implementation to reach full potential in line with student centred learning by recommending HEIs to revisit the DS and its implications
- The BFUG should acknowledge the work done by the AG4 and should support the proposed changes to the DS template and explanatory notes as this document is a common tool shared by the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO. The revised template will need to be adopted in both the Council of Europe/UNESCO and EU frameworks, and it is important that identical versions be adopted in both frameworks. However, the group took note of the fact that the 3 organisations cannot guarantee at this stage that the suggested modifications will exactly be taken over
- The BFUG should acknowledge the initiative of the European Commission with the Study to support the revision of the Diploma Supplement and analyse the feasibility of its digitalisation at European level.

4.3 AG4 proposals for the Paris Ministerial Communiqué:

- **The ministers commit to implement the revised DS template and explanatory notes proposed by the BFUG**
 - o **Proposed text:** "(...) call upon the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO to adopt the proposed updated DS template and explanatory notes."
- **The ministers agree to monitor the implementation of the revised DS at the national and institutional level.**
 - o **Proposed text:** "(...) call upon HEIs to revisit how DS can support the further development of student-centred learning and better communication of learning outcomes and to monitor the implementation of the DS at national level while continuing the regular monitoring and reporting exercise"
- **The ministers acknowledge that the digitalisation of the DS is the way forward towards enhancing its objectives and that technical solutions for this exist**

- **Proposed text:** “(...) encourage HEIs to embark on the digitalisation of DS and student data exchange, with a commitment to collect student data in a secure, machine-readable format, in line with data protection legislation.”

4.4 General recommendations from the group

1. EHEA countries and HEIs should promote the new template and its explanatory notes after they are adopted by the responsible bodies.
2. Countries should monitor the implementation of the DS at the national and institutional level.
3. Quality assurance agencies should take into account issuing the new DS in the accreditation process
4. Issuing a digital DS in the appropriate format should be encouraged.
5. The development of national guidelines regarding the use of the DS should be encouraged.
6. *Finally, the group agrees with the recommendations made in the „Study on the Diploma Supplement as seen by its users“⁵ :*
 - Taking into account the problems regarding the implementation of the Diploma Supplement in terms of content, structure and layout, “HEIs should stick to the DS model”
 - A common set of expressions for the different categories is helpful for the readability and comparability
 - Technical terms that are only common in a specific national system or even at specific universities, as well as unusual abbreviations, should be avoided.
 - Brief and clear information should be provided in the form of lists, tables, short texts
 - References to other documents should be avoided as the information necessary for the DS users has to be given in the DS
 - DS should be included in the Quality Assurance work and processes of the HEI

⁵ http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Diploma-Supplement-Study_Edit-MS.pdf

5. Annexes

1. The Diploma Supplement Template

II. The Diploma Supplement Explanatory Notes

III. Terms of Reference of the Advisory Group 4 on the diploma supplement revision

Name of the Advisory Group Advisory Group on the Revision of the Diploma Supplement
Contact persons (Co-Chairs) Linda PUSTINA – Albania (Linda.Pustina@arsimi.gov.al) Cezar Mihai HAJ - Antonela TOMA– Romania (cezar.haj@uefiscdi.ro ; toma.antonela@medu.ro)
Composition Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, BusinessEurope, Council of Europe, EI/ETUCE, ESU, European Commission, EUA, EURASHE, Finland, France, Italy, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, UNESCO ⁶ . A number of external experts may assist the Advisory group. TBC: Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, ENIC/NARIC Network
Purpose and/or outcome The Advisory Group on the Revision of the Diploma Supplement is mandated to support the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO in reviewing the Diploma Supplement, in cooperation with stakeholders. A proposal for a revision should be presented for consultation to the BFUG by 2017. The original Diploma Supplement was adopted within two different frameworks, the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee (LRCC) and the EU Europass Decision. The revised DS will have to be adopted within the same frameworks. The BFUG can advise on the revised version, but cannot adopt it. The Advisory Group should give consideration to issues such as the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ensuring it reflects the recent developments in higher education;- Taking account of the revision of the ECTS Users' Guide;- Reflecting on the digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement;- Basing it more closely on Learning Outcomes, increasing its usefulness in recognition procedures;- Ensuring coherence between a review of the Diploma Supplement and the possible development of a “Doctoral Supplement” within the European Research Area;- Ensuring close cooperation with the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO;- Following up on the adoption of the same revised version of the Diploma Supplement within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention as well as that of the European Union (Europass) and taking account of relevant developments in other parts of the world.
Reference to the Yerevan Communiqué <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Finally, we take note with approval of the reports by the working groups on [...], Structural reforms,[...]. Reference to the report by the structural reforms working group <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ The SRWG suggest that in Yerevan the Ministers:<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ ask that the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO review the Diploma Supplement, in cooperation with stakeholders and taking account of developments in other regions of the world, with a view to ensuring it reflects recent developments in higher education, including the development of learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks, is relevant and up to date for the

⁶ Liaison with the WG 2 on “Implementation – Fostering implementation on agreed key commitments” (person TBD)

purposes of mobility and the recognition of qualifications as well as promoting employability and that it takes into account the possibilities for providing up to date information offered by modern information technology, including the digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement itself;

- ✓ ensure the adoption of any revised version of the Diploma Supplement, in identical versions, within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention as well as that of the European Union (Europass) and taking account of relevant developments in other parts of the world;
- ✓ ensure coherence between a review of the Diploma Supplement and the possible development of a “Doctoral Supplement” within the European Research Area.

Reference to the report of the pathfinder group on automatic recognition

- The PfG recommends to EHEA Ministers
 - ✓ to increase the usefulness of the Diploma Supplement for recognition decisions mandating a working group to review the template, promoting a DS model which is based more closely on Learning Outcomes.

Specific tasks

- to develop a proposal for a revised version of the Diploma Supplement;
- to consult with external stakeholders;
- to inform the Working group on fostering implementation of agreed key commitments on its progress;
- to present to the BFUG a finalised draft for consultation by its members;
- for the Council of Europe, European Commission and UNESCO to report back to the BFUG on the adopted version of the revised Diploma Supplement;
- to disseminate the adopted version of the revised DS and to promote its use.

Reporting

The BFUG will receive regular reports and updates.

Progress reports will be submitted before the BFUG meetings mid-2016 and end 2016/early 2017. The final report will be presented together with the proposal for a revised Diploma Supplement, for comments, mid-2017.

Meeting schedule:

[the timetable is just tentative, will be decided by the advisory group at a later stage and concerted with the Council of Europe , UNESCO and the European Commission]

First meeting: January 2016

Second meeting: May 2016

Third meeting: June 2016

Fourth meeting: October 2016

Fifth meeting: March 2017

Sixth meeting: September 2017

Liaison with other WGs' and/or AGs' activities

- WG 2 on “Fostering implementation of agreed key commitments”

Additional remarks

- These terms of reference may be reviewed in the light of progress of the work, in agreement with the BFUG.

IV. List of the Advisory Group 4 on the diploma supplement revision members

Co-Chairs of the Advisory Group 4

ALBANIA	Linda Pustina
ROMANIA	Cezar Mihai Haj
ROMANIA	Antonela Toma

Members of the Advisory Group 4

ARMENIA	Krisitna Tsaturyan
AUSTRIA	Nicole Guthan
BELARUS	Valentina Simkhovich
BFUG Secretariat	Fabien Neyrat
BFUG Secretariat	Françoise Profit
BUSINESSEUROPE	Irene Seling
COUNCIL OF EUROPE	Jean-Philippe Restoueix
EC	Mette Moerk Andersen
EC	William O'Keefe
EC	Klara Engels-Perenyi
EI/ETUCE	Agnes Roman
ENIC NARIC	Claudia Gelleni
ENIC NARIC	Wafa Triek
ESU	Tijana Isoski
ESU	Blazhe Todorovski
EUA	Hanne Smidt Sodergard
EURASHE	Michal Karpisek
FINLAND	Susanna Kärki
FRANCE	Jean Louis Gouju
ITALY	Maria Sticchi Damiani
Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee	Allan Bruun Pedersen
UNESCO	Liliana Simionescu
UNESCO	Lene Oftedal
UNITED KINGDOM	Huw David Landeg Morris

V. References to the Diploma Supplement in official EHEA documents

„The Parties shall promote, through the national information centres or otherwise, the use of the Unesco/Council of Europe Diploma Supplement or any other comparable document by the higher education institutions of the Parties.“ (Lisbon convention, 1997)

„... objectives ... in order to establish the European area of higher education ... : Adoption of a system of easily and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement,“ (Bologna, 1999)

“... facilitate students' access to the European labour market and enhance the compatibility, attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education. The generalized use of such a credit system and of the Diploma Supplement will foster progress in this direction.” (Prague, 2001)

„They [the ministers] set the objective that every student graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge. It should be issued in a widely spoken European language.

They appeal to institutions and employers to make full use of the Diploma Supplement, so as to take advantage of the improved transparency and flexibility of the higher education degree systems, for fostering employability and facilitating academic recognition for further studies.“ (Berlin, 2003)

“There has been progress in the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), ECTS and diploma supplements, but the range of national and institutional approaches to recognition needs to be more coherent.” (London, 2007)

„Moreover, the Bologna Process has promoted the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System to further increase transparency and recognition.“ (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, 2009)

“We will strive for more coherence between our policies, especially in completing the transition to the three cycle system, the use of ECTS credits, the issuing of Diploma Supplements, the enhancement of quality assurance and the implementation of qualifications frameworks, including the definition and evaluation of learning outcomes. [...] The development, understanding and practical use of learning outcomes is crucial to the success of ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance – all of which are interdependent. [...] We [the ministers] will ensure that qualifications frameworks, ECTS and Diploma Supplement implementation is based on learning outcomes.” (Bucharest, 2012)

VI. DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT Explanatory notes tracked changes