



Diploma Supplement

Outcomes of DEST activities

July 2006

Under the Lisbon Convention, Australia has an obligation to promote the widespread use of the Diploma Supplement by Australian higher education institutions. In 2005, DEST commissioned a study to review the 2002 pilot projects and identify good practice in developing and implementing the Diploma Supplement in Australia. This paper details the findings of that consultancy.

Background and overview

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.

The Diploma Supplement is a useful tool for achieving transparency, recognition and mobility of qualifications.

The value of a Diploma Supplement equivalent in Australia would be in promoting employability and academic recognition in ways similar to those expected in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

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. This was undertaken by a small sample of Australian higher education institutions.

DEST commissioned a further trial of the Diploma Supplement in 2005, to identify further issues related to system requirements and costings.

Terms of reference

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

Six features of good practice – the European context

With the Diploma Supplement being widely used in Europe, data was collected and reviewed on the progress made to date in the EHEA. A thorough literature review was undertaken which included background research findings, implementation reports by countries and economies in the higher education sector, and other reference material.

Six features of good practice were identified in the European implementation actions taken for the Diploma Supplement.

- *Effective communication to all stakeholders, including strategies to engage institutions, students and employers.* In addition to print and electronic media, other strategies have included seminars, conferences and presentations to key organisations, and the establishment of working parties of stakeholders to guide the implementation process.
- *Building partnerships involving important stakeholders' organisations to facilitate implementation.* In some instances, this was successfully undertaken where legislation was not used as the basis for promoting the take-up of the Diploma Supplement. Some countries established partnerships between organisations representing heads of universities, partnerships with organisations with accreditation roles or policy forums where the government and stakeholders worked in collaboration.
- *Linking the Diploma Supplement to broader objectives to clarify potential benefits.* This has made the rationale for the Diploma Supplement and the benefits in terms of objectives, such as increased mobility, clear to all stakeholders.
- *Consistency versus flexibility.* There has been some discussion on maintaining consistency in the structure of the Diploma Supplement, and the adaptation of it to suit local conditions. The general view in Europe appears to be that local variations should be kept to a minimum.
- *Ongoing updating of documentation.* A need has been identified for periodic updating as some aspects of information included in the Diploma Supplement could become dated due to changes in policies and institutions.
- *Facilitating access to information and materials.* Access to online information and materials has been facilitated in a number of countries in the EHEA. These have included designated websites hosting tool kits comprising items such as translations of the Diploma Supplement, expanded explanatory notes, an overview of the country's higher education system and a template of the model Diploma Supplement.

Central to the ongoing development and implementation process was the active involvement of an inclusive working or steering group, where representatives of key stakeholders could:

- address reasons for development and implementation
- develop options for incorporating information considered useful in a Diploma Supplement
- consider issues such as the relationship between testamurs, transcripts and supplements, administrative/computer system implications, communications/information strategies and financing of the initiative.

The Diploma Supplement in Australia

Consultation with key stakeholders on their views and experiences with the Diploma Supplement was an important component of the consultancy project.

Stakeholders explained that the Diploma Supplement was competing against other priorities, and a convincing rationale for an Australian iteration, bearing in mind the existence of testamurs and transcripts, would be necessary, especially if significant costs would be associated with producing a Diploma Supplement.

While many groups indicated a limited familiarity with the scope or development of the Diploma Supplement, they also expressed a willingness to play an appropriate role in its development once the benefits for Australian education services had been established.

A view was also expressed that much of the driving force behind the Diploma Supplement in Europe came not from the higher education institutions, or students, but from the Ministries who have been encouraged by employer bodies to seek meaningful statements on the programmes of studies completed in other jurisdictions by potential and current employees.

While some bodies could see how a Diploma Supplement issued overseas might help the recognition of international educational qualifications of Australian immigrants, less consideration was given to the situation of Australians seeking the mobility of their qualifications overseas.

However, other bodies held the view that if Australia found it needed to develop a Diploma Supplement to maintain its strong position in international education provision, such a document should be similar to the version used in Europe.

Central to the views of many stakeholders, including employer, professional, student and industry bodies, was an agreement that the Diploma Supplement required further promotion within Australia, notably of the benefits of the Diploma Supplement to these groups.

In April 2006, DEST released a discussion paper on the Bologna Process and its implications for Australia. A copy of the report can be found at http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/Bologna_Process_and_Australia.htm. The report contains an annexure on the Diploma Supplement.

The Diploma Supplement pilot project

In 2002 and subsequently in 2005, DEST funded pilot projects to determine the implications for Australian institutions issuing Diploma Supplements.

The pilot projects identified a number of issues that merit further consideration, including:

- possible overlap in content with current testamurs and transcripts issued automatically on graduation
- the description of academic programmes, including the level of detail at different award levels
- processes and costs of developing multi-institution and in-house software systems capable of producing Diploma Supplements
- privacy considerations
- achieving a reasonable cost-per-graduate for issuing a Diploma Supplement.

The institutional pilot project reports indicated no reluctance to participate in developing and issuing a Diploma Supplement which graduates, employers, professional associations and institutions would find meaningful and useful. However, the project also found that the message of the Diploma Supplement's usefulness has not yet been received and understood by stakeholders, and further consideration should be given to widely disseminating this message.

Factors that would be conducive to the uptake of the Diploma Supplement initiative were identified as:

- demonstrating an advantage to institutions in issuing Diploma Supplements, such that
 - it is recognised as an indicator of quality
 - institutions issuing them are more competitive in the international student marketplace than those that do not
 - graduates with a Diploma Supplement have an advantage over graduates without a mobility-enhancing Diploma Supplement.
- the resource requirements for issuing Diploma Supplements in relation to the advantages accrued.

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