

A LIBER Passport?

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SETTING THE CONTEXT

The [Bologna Process](#) started on 19 June 1999, when 29 European Ministers responsible for Higher Education signed the [Bologna declaration](#), in which they undertook to create a European Higher Education Area. The creation of the European Higher Education Area should be completed by 2010. The main objectives of the Bologna declaration are to increase the mobility and employability of European higher education graduates, thus ensuring competitiveness of European Higher Education on the world scale.

The Bologna Process has initiated a number of Action Lines, the most important of which are:

- Introduction of two main cycles for degrees (Bachelors/Masters); the doctoral level is now a third cycle.
- Adoption of a framework of easily understandable degrees with a Diploma Supplement.
- Establishment of a credit system, with both transfer and accumulation, and to promote mobility.
- Promotion of European co-operation in Quality Assurance.
- Promotion of a European dimension to Higher Education.

What are the implications of the process for Higher Education? Take, for example, the Diploma Supplement. The Berlin ministerial summit of 2003 called for '*every student graduating as from 2005 to receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge*'. The Diploma Supplement is a document to be issued to students by their Higher Education institutions on graduation. It aims to describe the qualification they have received in a standard format that is easy to understand and easy to compare. It also describes the content of the qualification and the structure of the Higher Education system within which it was issued. It is not a curriculum vitae and simply acts as a supplementary explanation of the qualification rather than a substitute for it.

By making it easier to compare qualifications gained in Higher Education systems across Europe, the Diploma Supplement attempts to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications and, it is hoped, leads to greater transparency and mobility. It ties in closely with the Bologna Process objective to create a system of easily readable and comparable degrees. The Diploma Supplement is widely used in other Bologna signatory countries. The results of the UK's Europe Unit survey of UK HEIs and European HE developments indicated that around one third of survey respondents currently issue the Diploma Supplement. UK HEIs are being urged to proceed with issuing the Diploma Supplement as soon as possible.

The information contained in the Diploma Supplement is similar to the 'Transcript' element of the UK's Progress Files, which details the final achievements of the student, albeit in a different format. One of the sections of the Supplement requires a description of the national Higher Education system. Working with other UK bodies, the Europe Unit has reached a sector-wide consensus on the wording of this section, which can be used by all Higher Education institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland completing the form. Scotland has produced its own national description.

The Steering Group on Measuring and Recording Student Achievement, chaired by Professor Robert Burgess, Vice Chancellor of the University of Leicester, is consulting the UK HE sector on degree classification and the development of a common higher education credit system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Group will ensure that UK developments in these areas take place in parallel with, and as complementary to, the [Diploma Supplement](#) (and ultimately the [Europass](#)).

THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES

Clearly, the Bologna Process has implications for libraries. In its [Vision statement](#) LIBER recognised that it should help individual libraries in analyzing their role as part of a national and international network. One area, where LIBER feels that it may have a part to play, is in facilitating access to research collections in European libraries by European researchers. On 10 February 2006, a group of LIBER members met at UCL (University College London) to discuss this issue further and to see whether LIBER had a role to play.

Four model schemes were studied as exemplars for mutual access to libraries and their collections:

- Bibliopass scheme in Switzerland
- SCONUL SRX in the UK
- CAUL (Australia) scheme
- CARL (Canada) scheme

It was agreed that the [SCONUL SRX](#) scheme was a model which might potentially be scaled up across Europe for LIBER members. Dr John Hall advised that one aim of the proposed LIBER card or Passport would be to reduce bureaucracy by those wishing to use the services of another LIBER library. Dr Kristian Jensen noted that this could be achieved since all LIBER Passport members would have already been verified as of good character by their home library. Dr Ulrich Niederer explained that the Swiss Bibliopass system stored user details in a central database and that each library controlled the access level of users, with the focus on access rights rather than borrowing rights. However, the concept of a shared database was felt to be too ambitious for a LIBER scheme.

SRX

Under the SCONUL SRX scheme, researchers at any UK Higher Education Library are able to use any other library in the SCONUL system by signing up for an SRX card, with a validity of 3 years. This could be done at any member library by filling in a one-page form, which would also bind users to the local library's rules. The group reasoned that the scheme could be similarly implemented on a European-wide basis, although problems may arise as a result of the international nature of LIBER. However, it was felt that an SRX-style scheme would be accepted across Europe as member libraries effectively retained control of who was granted a LIBER Passport or card. Under SRX, each library decides which access levels are granted to external users.

The group will look further at statistics from the SRX scheme for adaptation to a Europe-wide context. The group noted that in the last year, libraries had reported 95,000 items borrowed under SRX. It was also agreed to check whether the host of [Bibliopass](#), the "[Réseau Romand](#)" has statistics on the use and success of that scheme.

BENEFITS AND POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION

All members agreed that the Passport scheme was one which could be successful in Europe, modelled on the SCONUL SRX scheme, but badged as a LIBER scheme. It was noted, however, that the setup costs to administer the scheme would not be trivial, with smaller recurrent costs for maintenance. The group felt that the major benefits for both researchers and libraries would be:

- that libraries would not lose control of registration procedures;
- that membership of the scheme would be voluntary, open to all LIBER members;
- that users would enjoy easier access to Europe's research collections;
- that it is an added-value service that libraries can advertise to members;
- that it would streamline access for users;
- that the receiving library would have a lighter burden in negotiating access from outsiders;

- that the Passport would be a more easily verifiable letter of identification.

It was felt that LIBER badging would also require representatives from each LIBER member country to assist with representation and implementation. The group noted that further discussion needed to take place on the production of cards and publicity materials in native languages.

NEXT STEPS

The group agreed to produce a draft Constitution and set of Operating Principles which would underpin any LIBER Passport. It was also agreed to discuss the scheme at the Annual General Meeting at the LIBER Conference in Uppsala in 2006.

WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

BibliOpass. <http://www.bibliopass.ch/>

Bologna Process. http://www.aic.lv/ace/ace_disk/Bologna/

Diploma Supplement. http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/qualifications/diploma_supplement.cfm

Europass.

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/04/14&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

RERO - REseau ROmand, Réseau des Bibliothèques de Suisse Occidentale. <http://www.rero.ch/>

SCONUL Research Extra. http://www.sconul.ac.uk/use_lib/srx/

Vision for LIBER's strategy 2003-2006. <http://www.kb.dk/guests/intl/liber/vision/visionstatement.htm>