

THE DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT AS A TOOL OF HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

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The DS: official definition

- The **Diploma Supplement (DS)** is a document attached to a higher education diploma aimed at improving international 'transparency' and at facilitating the academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates etc.). It is **designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that have been successfully completed by the individual** named on the original qualification to which this supplement is appended. It should be free from any value-judgements, equivalence statements or suggestions about recognition. It is a flexible non-prescriptive tool which is designed to save time, money and workload. It is capable of adaptation to local needs.
- The DS is **produced by national institutions according to a template** that has been developed by a Joint European Commission - Council of Europe - UNESCO working party that tested and refined it.
- The DS is **composed of eight sections** (information identifying the holder of the qualification, information identifying the qualification, information on the level of the qualification, information on the contents and results gained, information on the function of the qualification, additional information, certification of the Supplement, information on the national higher education system).

“the major issue that hinders the implementation of the Diploma Supplement is an absence of common understanding among users and the labour market stakeholders on what exactly the DS is and what benefits it could provide to its holders”

[Diploma Supplement Revision. Final Report. Work Plan 2015-2018]

Towards a broader understanding of the Diploma Supplement

- **Consider the DS in its co(n)text of emergence**
 - historical development of the European higher education policy
 - how does the DS emerge in this policy framework
 - what broader policy and societal challenges the DS attempts to respond to

- **Discuss the advantages of the use of the DS**

Investment in Higher Education

Since World War II HE is in the forefront of international interest and public policy (Vinokur, 2003; Gumpert, 2007; Clark, 2007)

- as a mass phenomenon (almost one out of two young people 25-34 years old in the OECD countries holds a higher education degree in 2017)
- as a matter with social, but also economic and political relevance for national governments, supranational organisations and economic elites

HE acquires a pivotal role in contemporary knowledge societies, and economies

Relating the DS to European HE policy

Some key dates and main policy texts

1957 – Treaty of Rome establishing the EEC

Policy for the recognition of professional qualifications of workers for encouraging mobility

1987 – Erasmus programme for the mobility of young people in HE

1989 – Directive for the recognition of professional education and training

1989 – ECTS as common system for recognising and transferring credits

1997 – Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention)

“Desire to enable all people of the region to benefit fully from this rich asset of diversity by facilitating access by the inhabitants of each State and by the students of each Party's educational institutions to the educational resources of the other Parties, more specifically by facilitating their efforts to continue their education or to complete a period of studies in higher education institutions in those other Parties (...)

Considering that the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas and degrees obtained in another country of the European region represents an important measure for promoting academic mobility between the Parties'(...)

Article IX.3. 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 Recognition Convention, 1997]

Relating the DS to European HE policy

Some key dates and main policy texts

1998 – Sorbonne Declaration

First intergovernmental declaration for the harmonisation of HE systems in European countries

1999 – Bologna Declaration

Launch of the Bologna process and the project of creation of the EHEA – adoption of DS in participating countries

2000 – Lisbon Strategy

Investment in human capital, education and training in a lifelong learning perspective for ‘knowledge economy’

2003 – Berlin Communiqué

Establishing the right to the DS in the EHEA

2004 – Single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass).

2018 – Paris Communiqué

Adoption of the Revised Diploma Supplement

2018 – Thematic Peer Group B on the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention within the Bologna process

“... 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 Declaration, 1999]

“... Together with mutually recognized quality assurance systems such
arrangements will 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 Communiqué, 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 Communiqué, 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 Communiqué, 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 Communiqué, 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 Communiqué, 2012]

Interrelated areas of policy action of the Bologna process

- **Comparability and recognition of degrees**

Structural reform tools (3-5-8, semesters, ECTS, DS, qualification frameworks)

- **European mobility and internationalisation**

Mobility of students, staff, graduates between countries, for studies and employment

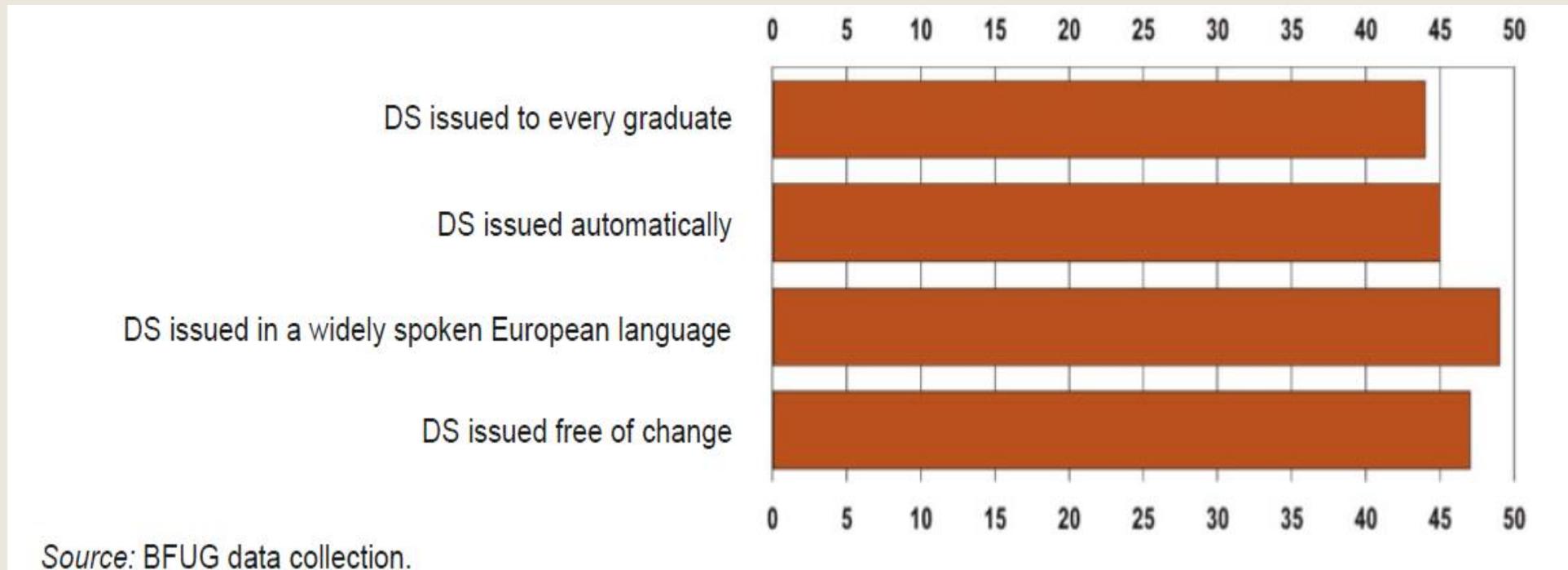
- **Quality-assurance**

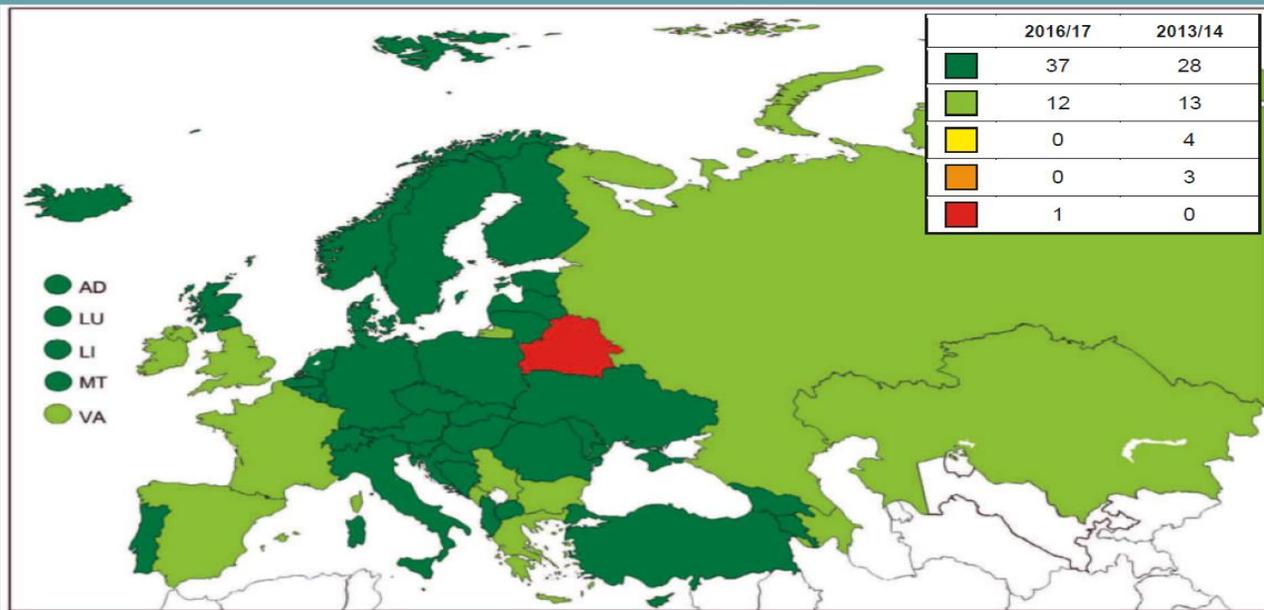
Agencies and mechanisms of evaluation of the quality and efficiency of higher education systems

- **Connection with the economy, enhancing the employability of graduates**

Revision of programme design and descriptors in terms of learning outcomes and closer links with the labour market

NUMBER OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS ISSUING THE DS ACCORDING TO THE AGREED PRINCIPLES, 2016/2017





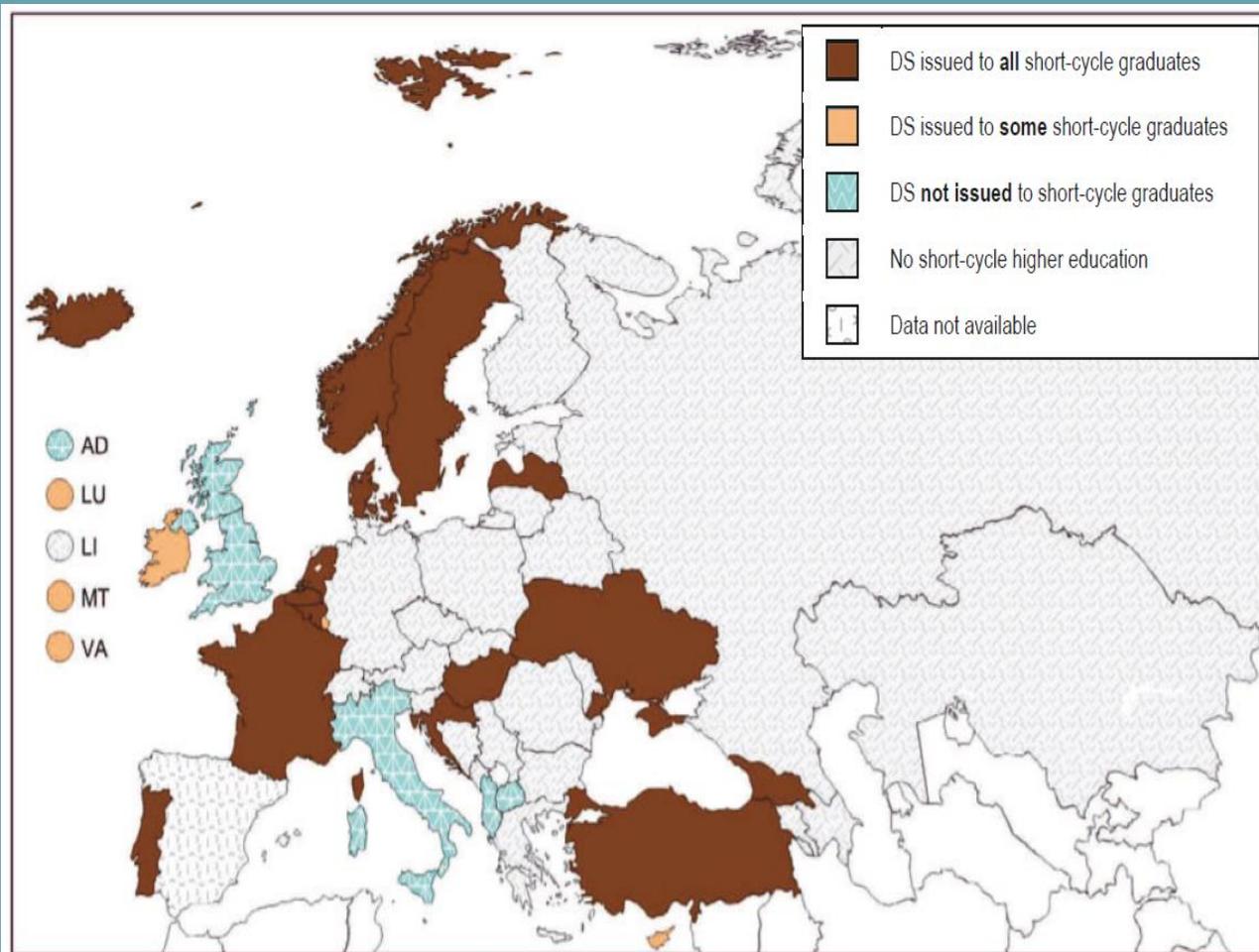
Source: BFUG data collection.

Scorecard categories

Dark Green	Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format is issued to first- and second-cycle graduates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to every graduate automatically in a widely spoken European language free of charge.
Light Green	Three of the above criteria are met.
Yellow	Two of the above criteria are met.
Orange	Only one criterion is met.
Red	None of the above criteria is met.

STATE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DS IN 2016/2017

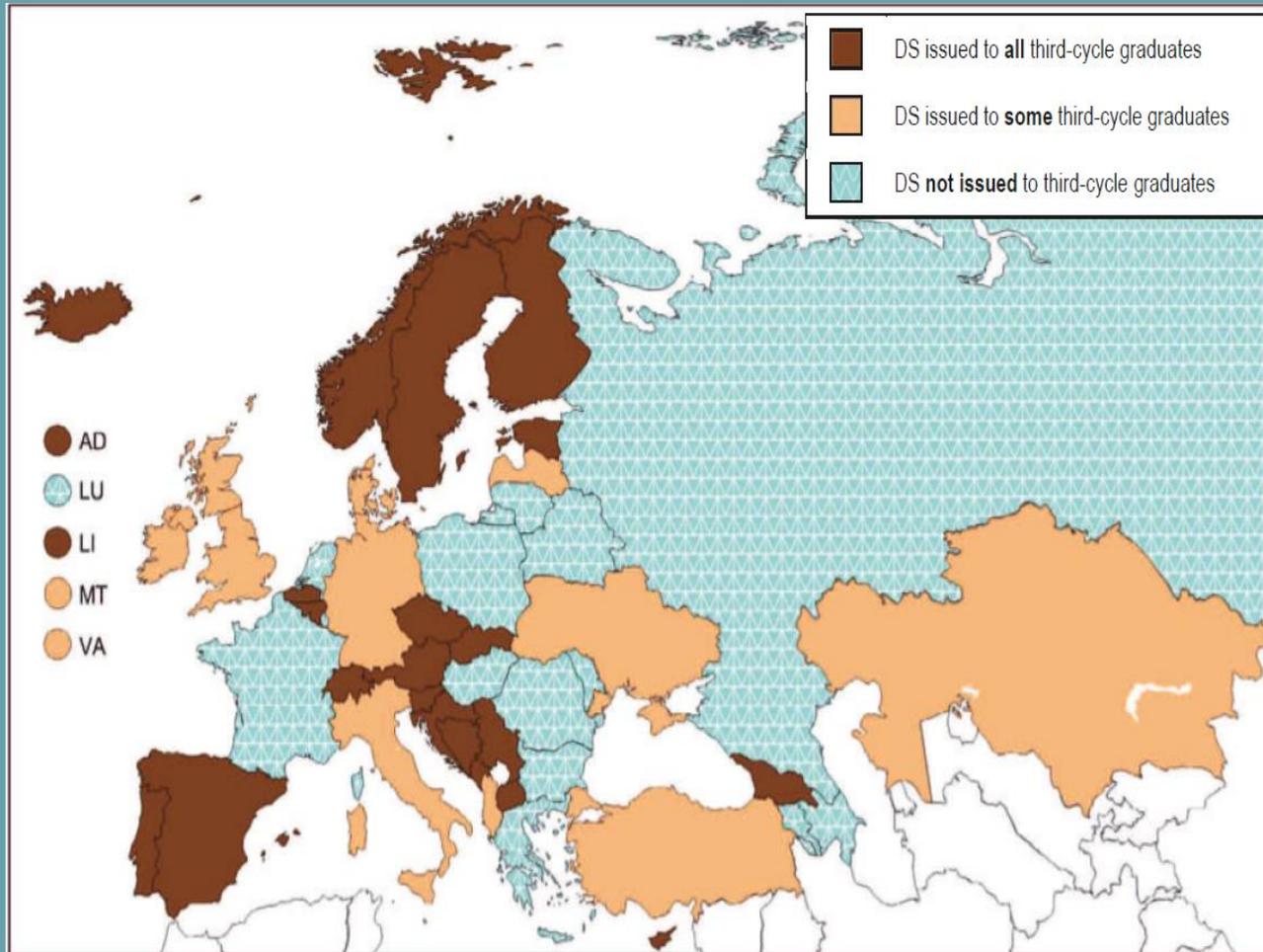
FIRST AND SECOND CYCLE



Source: BFUG data collection.

STATE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DS IN 2016/2017

SHORT-CYCLE



Source: BFUG data collection.

STATE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DS IN 2016/2017

THIRD-CYCLE

“We will work to implement the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention and its Recommendations, in particular on the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation. We also urge the adoption of transparent procedures for the recognition of qualifications, prior learning and study periods, supported by interoperable digital solutions.

We approve the proposed **revised Diploma Supplement** and commit to working for its adoption in identical versions within the respective frameworks of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Europass. To further promote student and graduate mobility, we welcome and support initiatives such as the digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement, and commit to support higher education institutions to pursue further student data exchange in a secure, machine-readable and interoperable format, in line with data protection legislation.”

[Paris Communiqué, 2018]

- establishing the legal framework to allow the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention
- establishing the distribution of work and responsibilities among the competent institutions that have the right knowledge and capacity to carry out recognition procedures,
- achieving automatic recognition, recognition of alternative pathways, qualifications held by refugees,
- optimising the potential of digital technology for the recognition agenda and the Diploma Supplement.

[Action plan of the Thematic Peer Group B on the Lisbon Recognition Convention, 2019]

The use of the DS for stakeholders

- **For students**

Easy readable description of individual qualifications which can enhance opportunities

- **For HEIs and national HE systems**

Helpful tool for the functioning of HEIs, increasing visibility, attractiveness and cooperation

- **For credential evaluators and employers**

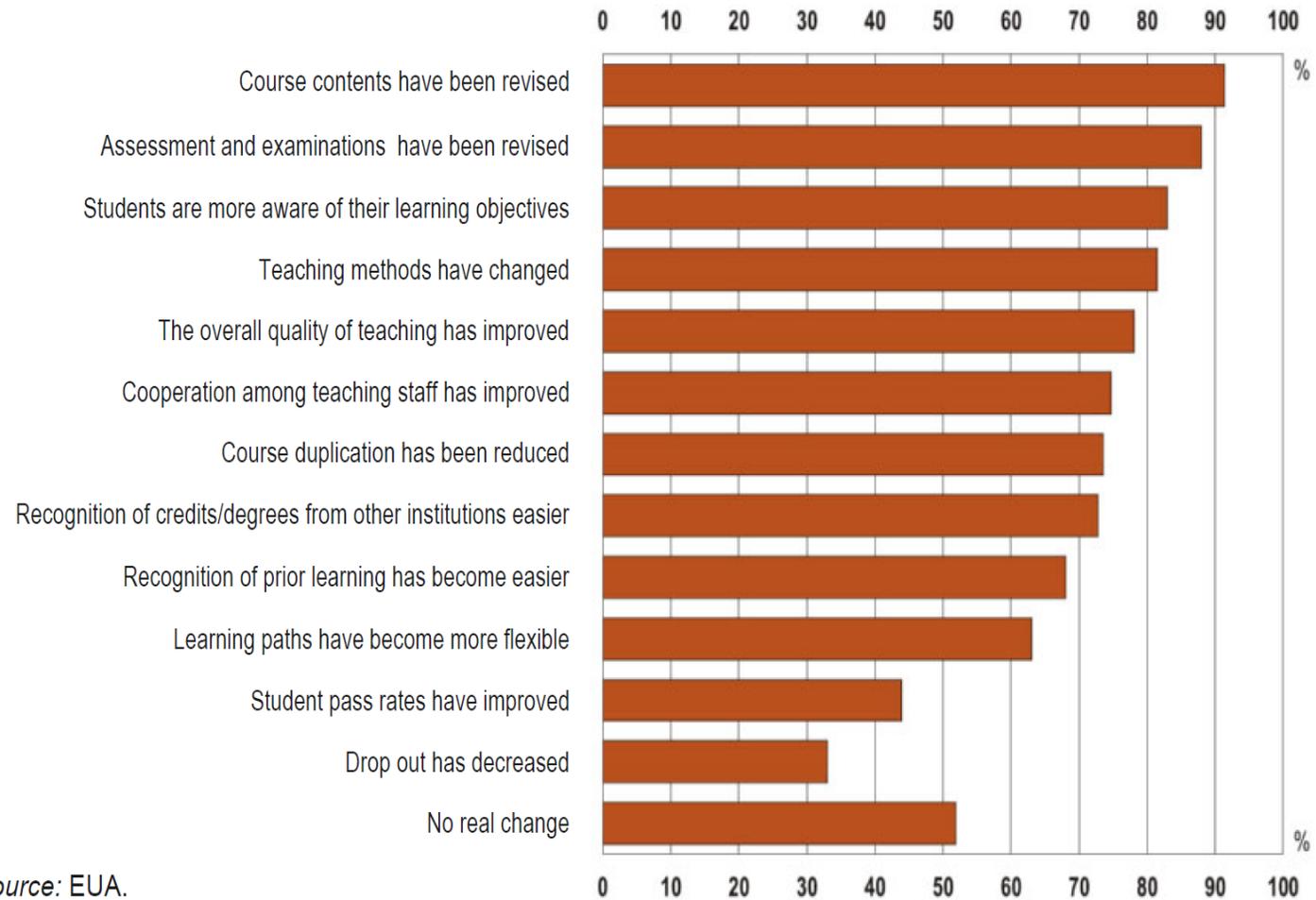
Source of information for assessing the content and value of particular qualifications

The use of DS: Opportunities

- Transparency and lisibility of higher education qualifications, especially from foreign countries, enabling informed judgment about qualifications
- Avoid value-judgement about qualifications and HEIs
- Considering diversity of qualifications, flexibility and rapid changes in educational structures and their degrees
- Enable the elaboration of stronger information systems and processes that contribute to the overall quality of HE activity (challenge of digitization)
- Facilitate mobility, access to further education and lifelong learning and employability (learning outcomes approach)
- Operate as communication tool between stakeholders even within the same country (graduates, HEIs, employers, quality-assurance agencies)
- Limit misunderstandings regarding higher education degrees and institutions in the labour market

THANK YOU for listening!

Figure 2.8: Impact of the learning outcomes approach in higher education institutions (% of institutions), 2017



Source: EUA.