ECTS USERS' GUIDE

EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER AND ACCUMULATION SYSTEM

Brussels, 17 June 2007 (draft)
This updated version of ECTS Users' guide replaces all previous versions

TABLE OF CONTENTS (to be corrected)

INTRODUCTION

ECTS is a student-centred way of describing learning by attaching credits to learning outcomes, based on the workload of the average learner in formal education. The same learning outcomes with the same credit value may be obtained through non-formal and informal learning.

ECTS aims to facilitate mobility as well as recognition and validation of qualifications and units of learning, both locally and abroad. ECTS also provides a tool for the design of programmes of study.

This Users' Guide describes the ECTS method and how it can function in practice. It contains basic rules (key features), practical advice, examples of good practice, a glossary and answers to some frequently asked questions.

The guide presents a shared and consistent understanding of ECTS for use by students, staff, institutions and other stakeholders. The implementation of ECTS is the responsibility of institutions and relevant national bodies.

The Diploma Supplement is another important transparency tool, closely linked to ECTS. Information on the Diploma Supplement has therefore been included in this Users' guide.

ECTS is a success story in terms of its Europe-wide acceptance and usage. Many users know how to apply ECTS consistently and they do so on a daily basis. Others still have difficulties with notions like learning outcomes and student workload. We hope that this Guide will be of assistance to all and welcome any comments for future improvements.

From credit transfer for few to credit accumulation for all - a short overview

ECTS is the only credit system which has been successfully tested and used across Europe. It was introduced as a pilot scheme in the Erasmus programme in 1989. Its primary objective at that stage was to facilitate academic recognition for Erasmus students by providing instruments for increased transparency and comparability, to assist recognition and portability of credits obtained in partner institutions. The system facilitated the recognition of periods of study abroad and thus enhanced the quality and volume of student mobility in Europe. Its use expanded from institution to institutions and from country to country.

In the Bologna Declaration of June 1999, Ministers responsible for higher education recognised the usefulness of a system like ECTS for mobility and lifelong learning (recognition of prior learning). Bologna Stakeholders discussed and endorsed the ECTS Key Features at the 2002 Zurich EUA Bologna Conference on Credit Transfer and Accumulation. At their 2003 Berlin meeting, Bologna Ministers stressed the important role played by ECTS in facilitating student mobility and international curriculum development. They noted that ECTS was increasingly becoming a generalised basis for national credit systems and they encouraged further progress towards the goal that ECTS becomes not only a transfer but also an accumulation system, to be applied consistently within the emerging European Higher Education Area.

Most students today use ECTS for local accumulation of credits, moving from a bachelor to a master or from one learning environment to another. Surveys show that ECTS has become an integral part of the national education system in most countries in the wider Europe.

At their 2005 Bergen meeting, Bologna Ministers identified ECTS as one of the key elements of the <u>Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area</u> (Bologna Qualifications Framework), attaching credit ranges to first and second cycle qualifications (bachelor, master). It is expected that ECTS will play a crucial role in the design and development of national and sectoral qualifications frameworks.

Ministers in Bergen also adopted the <u>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area</u>. Applying ECTS contributes to the implementation of the Standards and Guidelines, by providing detailed curriculum information for students and the definition of learning outcomes and their associated student workloads.

In London, in May 2007, Bologna Ministers stipulated that "Efforts should concentrate in future (…) on proper implementation of ECTD based on learning outcomes and student workload."

From the outset, the ECTS Users' Guide stressed the importance of <u>guidance and counselling</u> staff and the importance of <u>documentation</u> produced in a standard and consistent manner. While the whole process was designed for the benefit of students, it also increased mutual understanding and communication between individual academic staff and institutions.

In summary, ECTS makes study programmes easy to read and compare. It can be used for all types of programmes, whatever their mode of delivery, and for lifelong learning. It serves both mobile and non-mobile students: it can be used for credit transfer and credit accumulation. ECTS helps learners to move between countries, within a country, town or region, as well as between different types of learning environment. It also serves as an important tool for the design of programmes of studies and single units and to determine whether these are feasible in terms of student workload.

ECTS KEY FEATURES

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ECTS Key Features

ECTS is a student-centred way of describing learning by attaching credits to learning outcomes, based on the workload of the average learner in formal education. The same learning outcomes with the same credit value may be obtained through non-formal and informal learning.

ECTS aims to facilitate mobility as well as recognition and validation of qualifications and units of learning, both locally and abroad. ECTS also provides a tool for the design of programmes of study.

Learning outcomes express what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. They relate to level descriptors in national, sectoral and European qualifications frameworks.

In ECTS 60 credits are attached to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a typical full time year of formal learning (an academic year) and 30 credits are attached to a semester. Student workload ranges generally from 1500 to 1800 hours per academic year whereby one credit corresponds to learning outcomes which on average require 25 to 30 hours of work. Student workload covers all aspects of learning and is not related solely to formal teaching hours.

Credits are allocated to entire qualifications or study programmes as well as to their units of learning. Credits cover all educational components of a study programme such as attending lectures, seminars, work placements, dissertations, projects, laboratory work, and self study. Individuals receive credits from higher education institutions after successful assessment, recognition or validation of learning outcomes, obtained through formal, informal or non-formal learning. Credits may be transferred to other learning environments and accumulated with a view to obtaining qualifications, locally and abroad.

The effective implementation of ECTS entails the use of ECTS Key Documents (Course Catalogue, Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records) as well as the Diploma Supplement.

ECTS CREDITS

Credit allocation

In ECTS 60 credits are attached to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a typical full time year of formal learning (an academic year) and 30 credits are attached to a semester. Current surveys suggest that the European average workload is between 1500 to 1800 hours for an academic year. One credit corresponds to for learning outcomes which on average require between 25 and 30 hours of work[1].

Credits coverall the educational components of a study programme (such as attending lectures, seminars, work placements, dissertations, projects, laboratory work and self study). They reflect the learning outcomes of the component in relation to the learning outcomes and associated average workload of a full academic year.

Credits are awarded by higher education institutions having assessed the learning outcomes acquired by the individual learner. Average workload in formal learning is used as a reference for the determination of the credit value, but learning outcomes may also be acquired through non-formal or informal learning, inside or outside institution, in a slower or faster pace, during a shorter or longer period of time.

Credits may be transferred to other learning environments and accumulated with a view to obtaining qualifications. Decisions on credit transfer are taken by competent authorities on the basis of reliable information on the level, profile and quality of learning outcomes acquired. Institutions are encouraged to use ECTS Key Documents (Course Catalogue, Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records) as well as the Diploma Supplement in order to facilitate recognition and validation decisions.

Credits may be attached to learning outcomes at all levels of education and training. In higher education they may be attached to the first, second and third cycle (bachelor, master and doctorate) and to levels within these cycles, according to national and institutional rules.

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[1] These numbers are based on surveys that show that in most European countries full-time students work 1500-1800 hours per year. In most cases therefore one credit stands for around 25 to 30 working hours. In practice many students study part-time. Part-time students acquire the same number of credits for a qualification and each credit will on average entail the same average workload.

The level (first, second or third cycle - bachelor, master, doctorate - or levels within these cycles) of a programme, a module or a set of learning outcomes has no influence on the credit value.

The importance (for a degree, for science, for the profession) of a programme, a module or a set of learning outcomes has no influence on the credit value.

The intensity (few lectures or contact hours, many lectures or contact hours, more or less self study) of a programme, a module or a set of learning outcomes has no influence on the credit value.

The only determining factor is the workload of the average learner in formal education, necessary to achieve the specified learning outcomes. Credit value can not be determined by learning outcomes directly, there always is the intermediary reference of the workload of the average learner in formal education. It is acknowledged, however, that the same learning outcomes with the same credit value may be obtained through non-formal and informal learning.

The level of a programme or module or a set of learning outcomes will appear in the Transcript of Records and the Diploma Supplement. The level, importance and intensity may be described in the Course Catalogue (Information Package) of the institution.

The achievement of 60 credits within a normal academic year is a demanding requirement of students, resulting from effective curriculum planning involving all members of the academic team, either in a single subject, multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary degrees. The number of 60 credits is set as the standard and its use ensures consistency and comparability within an institution and between institutions.

Generally, institutions will not, for a range of strong logistical reasons, wish to offer programmes of more than 60 credits or encourage students to take more than 60 credits in an academic year. The following exceptions may, however, occur:

Individual students may achieve fewer credits in a year, due to absence, failure or a deliberate choice to study part-time. Other students may achieve more than 60 credits because they successfully complete more modules than are normally required.

Individual programmes of study may award more than 60 credits when they are exceptionally long. Programmes may contain up to 90 credits in 12 months of full-time study, presuming a student workload of 2250 hours (e.g. 50 weeks of 45 hours). The exceptional length of the study programme and the required student workload must be explained in the Course Catalogue (Information Package) of the Institution.

Credits assisting quality assurance

All programmes of study should be subject to strict quality assurance requirements in conformity with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and should be approved by the relevant institution or national authorities to ensure that, in cases where students plan or are allowed to take fewer credits in an academic year, or conversely a greater number, this is subject to the normal standards and review procedures within the institution.

The allocation of credits to a programme and to units/modules within a programme is indeed an integral feature of quality assurance. According to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, the quality assurance of programmes and awards are expected to include:

- careful attention to curriculum and programme design and content
- specific needs of different modes of delivery (e.g. full-time, part-time, distance-learning, e-learning), and types of higher education (e.g. academic, vocational, professional). [

Hence, the process of allocating credits will require discussion and agreement in the curriculum planning and development group. It will have regard to the overall programme of study, the level of each unit and its intended learning outcomes. Such planning will need to take account of the anticipated workload for students. Finally it will need to be approved formally "by a body other than that teaching the programme."

A key factor in the quality assurance, management and enhancement of programmes of study is the ongoing monitoring and review of the curriculum and student performance. Hence if large numbers of students are failing to obtain 60 credits in an academic year, questions must be asked about the reasons for this and the answers may reflect on the curriculum planning, learning outcomes, time required for a normal student to achieve these outcomes. Conversely, if large numbers of students are seeking to obtain and achieving more than 60 credits, similar questions need to be asked.

The requirements for programmes of study (either whole qualifications or units/modules) are the responsibility of the institution and its academic staff. It is up to institutions to set out the detailed programme requirements. The use of ECTS credits facilitates this task. ECTS credits provide a measure of the learning outcomes which can be expected from a normal academic year and pro-rata for part of the year. By indicating the average workload associated with those learning outcomes, ECTS provides an instrument for curriculum planning and discussion, which is particularly valuable for multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary degrees spanning different departments/subjects and/or faculties.

Confidence both at a national and European level in the standards of individual institutions will be in large part determined by the way in which quality assurance is managed and the transparency of this process. It will be manifest in consistent and regular monitoring and evaluation which will include student evaluation reflecting on the learning outcomes and the associated workload.

Credits can be allocated to all kinds of learning – formal, informal, experiential. This is the case because what is being measured is the outcome of learning, however and wherever it may have taken place.

The baseline for calculation is the total number of credits allocated for a normal academic year. While this provides the essential guide, it must always be remembered that duration and workload are not in themselves the determining factors. They must be related clearly to the achievement of specified learning outcomes.

A focus on learning outcomes and the associated workload, should ensure that common misunderstandings such as using contact hours as a measure for the allocation of credits or the status or assumed importance of a particular unit of work will be avoided. Status, importance and level can be described in the Information/Course Catalogue, but not through the allocation of extra credits..

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Frequently asked questions
Examples

Learning outcomes express what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. They relate to level descriptors in national, sectoral and European qualifications frameworks. They can refer to entire qualification or units of learning. In formal higher education, they refer to periods of study for example to a first or a second cycle programme, or to a single course unit or module. The requirements for award of credit are specified in terms of learning outcomes. They are formulated by academic staff. The same learning outcomes with the same credit value may be obtained through non-formal and informal learning. The actual knowledge, skills and wider competences acquired by the individual learner may go beyond the intended learning outcomes.

Learning Outcomes represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and wider competences (abilities and attitudes). They can be subject specific or generic. Fostering these is the object of educational programmes; they will be formed in various modules/course units and assessed at different stages.

Learning outcomes are key elements of the level descriptors in the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Qualifications Framework) and the proposed European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF). Countries and sectors have started to set up national and sectoral qualifications frameworks which relate to the overarching European frameworks.

Higher Education Institutions are in the process of define learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and wider competences) for their qualifications, programmes and course units and relate these to the levels and levels descriptors specified in national, sectoral and European frameworks. An obvious place to publish this information is the institutional Course Catalogue (Information Package). This information will also be used in the other ECTS Key

Documents (Transcript of Records, Learning Agreement) as well as the Diploma Supplement.

Writing learning outcomes is a skill which can be developed. Institutions may wish to exchange experience on using learning outcomes in different languages and cultural settings. More information on this topic can be obtained via the project Tuning Educational Structures[2] in Europe and the web site of the Edinburgh Bologna Seminar on Using learning Outcomes [3].

The use of learning outcomes in describing qualifications related to national, European and sectoral framework levels is expected to facilitate the validation of learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions which is a key element of life-long learning".

The use of learning outcomes reflects an important shift in the way education, training and learning is conceptualised and described. The move to learning outcomes introduces a common language making it possible to compare qualifications according to their content and profile and not according to methods and processes of delivery.

The development and publication of explicitly intended learning outcomes is also part the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted by Bologna Ministers at the 2005 Bergen Conference.

Students and employers will require detailed information about the qualification and the results achieved, both through ECTS Transcripts and the Diploma Supplement. Indeed, the Diploma Supplement becomes a critical instrument for reflecting the learning outcomes entailed in a full programme of study leading to a qualification.

WORKLOAD

Planning Form for an Educational Module (teacher)   Standard form   Completed example
Form for Checking Workload of an Educational Module Standard form   Completed example
(student)
Frequently asked questions
Examples

Student workload refers to the average time required to successfully complete all learning activities to achieve the specified learning outcomes in formal higher education.The same learning outcomes with the same credit value may be obtained through non-formal and informal learning.

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[2] http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/
[3] http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/Bol_sem/Seminars/040701-02Edinburgh/040701-02-Points_for_consideration.pdf. And notably to the conference paper "Linking Levels, Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria" of Jenny Moon of Exeter University: http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/Bol_sem/Seminars/040701-02Edinburgh/040701-02Linking_Levels_plus_ass_crit-Moon.pdf.

Learning activities may include attending lectures, seminars, work placements, dissertations, projects, laboratory work and self study. Student workload covers all aspects of learning and is not related solely to formal teaching hours.

Teachers responsible for planning study programmes, are expected to develop a good understanding of what the workload for a particular programme or unit/module may entail and to relate this workload to the learning outcomes to be achieved.

A variety of approaches to determine student workload in higher education programmes are in use across Europe. One of such approach has been developed in the university project "Tuning Educational Structures in Europe"[4], involving over 200 Higher Education Institutions. For further information see the Tuning approach to workload[5].

RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS AND PERIODS OF STUDY

Recognition decisions are taken by competent authorities (universities, ministries, employers). These competent authorities are better informed through the use of the ECTS Key Documents (Course Catalogue, Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records) as well as the Diploma Supplement. These documents refer to the levels in the Bologna Qualifications Framework and the EQF. Recognition decisions may also be informed by quality evaluation reports, increasingly available on the internet. Universities and other competent authorities are encourages to apply the principles for fair recognition laid down in the Lisbon Recognition Convention[6]. For difficult cases they may call in the help of the ENIC-NARIC recognition information Centres.

All these transparency tools do not solve recognition problems, but they may help to install confidence and correct false misgivings about level or quality of studies carried out elsewhere.

ECTS contributes to the recognition by:

- the use of credits as an expression of achieved learning outcomes. This improves curriculum comparability and hence contributes to mutual recognition of qualifications by participating countries;

- Transcript of Records documenting the performance of a student over a certain period of time by recording the course units or modules taken, the credits gained, the local grades awarded and preferably the corresponding ECTS "indicator".

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[4] More information about the Tuning project can be found on the Europa Internet server: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/Tuning.html; or on the servers of the coordinating institutions:
University of Deusto, Bilbao, Spain (http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu)
University of Groningen, The Netherlands (www.rug.nl/let/tuningeu) .

[5] http://www.tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=174
[6]

Qualifications frameworks and quality assurance may also help to inform the establishment of national, regional or sectoral credit frameworks and (collective) recognition agreements, which would help to enhance 'recognition predictability' for the individual learner. Universities, enterprises and public authorities are encouraged to engage in partnerships, creating such frameworks and agreements in the interest of lifelong learning.

ECTS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

ECTS can be used for lifelong learning purposes through credit transfer, through credit accumulation and through the recognition of prior learning, be it formal, informal and non-formal. Qualifications frameworks at national, sectoral and European level provide reference for recognition and validation of prior learning by universities and other competent authorities. The combined use of these instruments may help students and their counsellors to define suitable and flexible study paths and progression routes.

Credit accumulation

ECTS key documents
Frequently asked questions
Examples

ECTS was originally developed for international transfer and accumulation of credits (Erasmus type mobility). Nowadays most learners use ECTS primarily for the local accumulation of credits leading to the award of a qualification of diploma. ECTS helps learners to move from one learning environment to another: from the first to the second cycle, from work-based learning to taught courses, from informal learning to formal learning and vice-versa.

ECTS key documents were originally developed for international credit transfer (Erasmus type mobility) but they are equally useful for credit accumulation in local learning environments, whether formal, non-formal or informal[7].

Using ECTS for accumulation purposes requires having regard to qualification descriptors and the detailed national or institutional regulations which govern progression through and towards a qualification. These may be expressed in terms of numbers of credits at levels within a qualification, particularly true of first cycle qualifications (but applying equally to second and third cycle) or detailed prescriptions on what units modules can be taken at what stage and what the pre-requisites, co-requisites and recommended units/modules are for that

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[7] Lifelong Learning (LLL) comprises all types of learning and training within any type of institution, company or outside in the field, i.e. formal, non-formal and informal learning. Whereas formal learning takes place in education and training institutions and leads to recognised diplomas and other types of documented qualifications, non-formal learning occurs outside mainstream education and training and does not aim at formalised certificates. Informal learning is a natural consequence of everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and may not be recognised by the individuals concerned as contributing to their knowledge and skills.

particular qualification. The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area specifies, for example, that for a second cycle qualification, the minimum requirement should be 60 ECTS credits at Second cycle level (and 90 to 120 credits being typical for that type of qualification).

Recognition of prior learning - Higher Education Institutions as open learning centres

Regional recognition agreements   Examples
Sectoral recognition agreements   Examples

Credits are awarded by institutions having assessed the learning outcomes acquired by the individual learner. The learning outcomes acquired from formal learning are used as a reference for the award of credits, but learning outcomes may also be acquired through non-formal or informal learning, inside or outside institutions, in a slower or faster pace, during a shorter or longer period of time[8].

Higher education institutions are in a unique position to validate learning outcomes achieved outside the institution and to associate and/or link these with comparable learning outcomes acquired in their formal degree programmes. In other words: they can award credits for experiential and other learning using their formal programme as a reference point.

Higher Education Institutions are encouraged to create "assessment facilities" for the recognition of prior learning, be it formal, informal or non formal. The objective is for higher education institutions to become open learning centres for their region and to increase access for learners from professional life and a range of non-traditional learning environments. The assessment facilities may take any shape or form. The assessment task may be outsourced or carried out collectively with other institutions or other interested parties. Institutions are encouraged to publish their recognition policy and practices and make them widely known

Institutions may decide to set up credit frameworks and conclude collective recognition agreements with other training institutes and with employers in their region or sector in order to increase predictability of credit transfer and recognition for individuals moving between different types of learning environments, be they formal, non-formal or informal.

A commitment to life-long learning entails a recognition that learning does not begin or end with formal qualifications. It can be achieved through a variety of routes and means and over significantly different periods of time. Here the strength of focusing on learning outcomes is manifest most clearly since students may acquire their learning at a different time and pace, and in different ways.

Not all learners are full time students enrolled in regular degree programmes. A growing number of adult learners follow 'stand-alone' courses or modules, which may or may not be

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[8]   Whereas formal learning takes place in education and training institutions and leads to recognised diplomas and other types of documented qualifications, non-formal learning occurs outside mainstream education and training and does not aim at formalised certificates. Informal learning is a natural consequence of everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and may not be recognised by the individuals concerned as contributing to their knowledge and skills.

linked to formal qualifications, such as courses for Continuous Professional Development. Many people possess valuable generic and subject specific competences acquired outside higher education institutions, through self study, work or life experience. There is no reason why non-traditional learners should not benefit from the transparency and recognition provided by ECTS.

Qualifications frameworks - levels – flexible study paths and progression routes

Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area	EQF for EHEA
European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong learning	EQF for LLL
Level descriptors of the EQF for EHEA	Dublin descriptors
Level descriptors of the EQF for LLL	EQF for LLL descriptors
Level descriptors per sector	Tuning level descriptors
National Qualifications Frameworks	Examples
Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks	Examples
Frequently asked questions	
Examples	

In Bergen, in May 2005, Higher Education Ministers adopted the Framework for Qualifications ofr the European Higher Education Area, including guidelines for the range of ECTS credits typically associated with the completion of each cycle:

- First cycle qualifications typically includes 180 to 240 ECTS credits.
- Second cycle qualifications typically include 90 to 120 ECTS credits – with a minimum of 60 ECTS credits at the level of the second cycle.
- Third cycle qualifications do not necessarily have credits associated with them.

To these three cycles were attached descriptors known as the Dublin Descriptors. The Dublin Descriptors are framed in terms of learning outcomes and competences: knowledge and understanding; applying knowledge and understanding; making judgments; communication skills; learning skills.

With the formal adoption of this framework it is now possible at national and institutional level to relate credits formally to the qualification levels and their descriptors.

In 2006, the European Commission has published a proposal for a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) involving eight levels of qualification, of which levels 6, 7 and 8 correspond with the three cycles of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Qualifications Framework). The proposed EU framework does not use the Dublin descriptors but a set of similar descriptors also based on knowledge, skills and wider competences[9]. European frameworks provides an additional basis for using credits in a cumulative way towards the award of a qualification.

Countries and sectors have started to define national and sectoral qualifications frameworks which relate to the overarching European frameworks. Sectoral Qualifications frameworks are being developed for specific areas of academic or professional competence, such as

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[9] http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html

health sciences, ICT, chemistry or history. The project <u>Tuning Educational Structures</u> in Europe is mapping the level descriptors for more than 20 subject areas.

<u>Higher Education Institutions</u> are in the process of defining learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) for their own qualifications, programmes and course units and relate these descriptions to levels and level descriptors specified in the national, sectoral and European frameworks. While institutions using ECTS may not previously have defined levels they will, within the context of the new Qualifications Frameworks, now need to incorporate the relevant qualification levels and explain this in their <u>Course Catalogue (Information Package)</u> and use the notion of level the other ECTS Key Documents <u>(Transcript of Records, Learning Agreement)</u> as well as the <u>Diploma Supplement</u>.

Intermediate levels

National Qualifications Frameworks may contain more levels to cover the range of post-school qualifications, linking vocational training and education and facilitating a clearer understanding of progression and transfer between qualifications. It is not unusual to have <u>levels within qualifications</u>, particularly within the first cycle. Levels and level descriptors within cycles can be particularly valuable and supportive for life-long learning and the accreditation of prior learning and experience.

Flexible study paths and progression routes

Using ECTS for accumulation purposes requires having regard to qualification descriptors and the detailed <u>national or institutional regulations which govern progression through and towards a qualification</u>. These may be expressed in terms of numbers of credits at levels within a qualification, particularly true of first cycle qualifications (but applying equally to second and third cycle) or detailed prescriptions on what units modules can be taken at what stage and what the pre-requisites, co-requisites and recommended units/modules are for that particular qualification. The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area specifies, for example, that for a second cycle qualification, the minimum requirement should be 60 ECTS credits at Second cycle level (and 90 to 120 credits being typical for that type of qualification).

The award of credits for achievement of the required learning outcomes is integral to <u>progression</u> within a qualification. Levels and their descriptors, in conjunction with specific subject requirements, help to make the process more transparent and coherent. The use of level descriptors within a qualification can be a helpful way of ensuring academic growth and development as well as regulating progression, in particular for multi-disciplinary and/or inter-disciplinary programmes of study. Ultimately, progression is a matter to be resolved and regulated either nationally or by each institution.

In the past, it might have been true that there was relatively little flexibility in the programmes of study which students might undertake and therefore the precise regulations expressed in terms of credits and progression paths, did not need to be fully explained and documented. Increasingly, however, as students look for a <u>more flexible curriculum</u> and the possibility of transferring between courses, either within or between institutions, progression routes become increasingly important. Students and those <u>counselling</u> them want to

understand the regulations governing progression and how credits and levels operate together.

Progression may be determined in a range of ways.

In the classic full-time three/four year first cycle qualification, students may be required to satisfy examiners and prove that they have achieved the required learning outcomes for the courses/units/modules which they have taken. This may be at the end of each full-time academic year or, indeed, at the end of each semester. Students who do not satisfy assessment requirements may not be allowed to progress or may be required to re-take the examinations/assessments and achieve the specified learning outcomes before they can do so.

While ECTS does not provide detailed guidance on this (it would be inappropriate for it to do so) its instruments (credits, learning outcomes, documentation) apply with equal force. Quality of information, guidance and counselling provided for students in an accumulation system are as important as in a transfer system. Counsellors should fully understand the qualification, the levels required at each stage, and advise students on their choice of course.

ECTS MAIN ACTORS

The ECTS main actors are:

Higher education institutions
These may be Universities, Colleges, Institutes or Schools delivering higher education, at first, second or third cycle levels. Higher education institutions are responsible for curricula design, the allocation of credits and the definition of the learning outcomes to be achieved.

Other Competent authorities
Other bodies competent to recognise validate learning outcomes and credits according to national legislation, such as ministries or qualification bodies.

ECTS coordinators
These are Institutional and Departmental Coordinators within institutions. They have important responsibilities in ensuring the institution's commitments to ECTS, in the production and dissemination of the Information/Course Catalogue, the Transcript of Records, and they are the contacts for students and other academic staff. Their functions are further described in the chapter on Guidance.

ECTS/DS Counsellors
At national level, they advise higher education institutions in their country on the use of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement. Further information is in the chapter on Guidance.

Students
This users' guide refers as "students" to learners within higher education institutions.

THE ECTS GRADE INTERPRETATION SCHEME (EGIS)

Assessment and grading are an essential and sensitive part of the learning process. They are strongly rooted in the diverse pedagogical and cultural traditions of the various educational systems in Europe. There is a need to make national and institutional grading systems more transparent, to facilitate the transfer of grades from one system to another, in order to serve mobile learners and graduates. As the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area states:

"Students should be clearly informed about the assessment strategy being used for their programme, to what examinations or other assessment methods they will be subject, what will be expected of them, and the criteria that will be applied to the assessment of their performance." For mobile students this must entail information about how the grades/marks which they obtain during their study in the host institution will be used by their home institution.

While the ECTS Grade Interpretation Scheme has been designed and developed to support mobile Erasmus students, its integration in Higher Education Institutions' transcripts for all students can be helpful for institutions and employers who are reviewing applications from graduates either for further study or for employment.

It is designed to promote understanding and transparency but never to replace the initial grades awarded by the institution at which the programme of study/course/unit/module was taken.

In the framework of ECTS an interpretation system has been developed to facilitate understanding and comparison of grades given according to different national and institutional systems and national and institutional grading cultures. It has no national reference point and aims to help the interpretation of student performance relative to those of other students within the same system. It is not designed to replace national or institutional systems, but to enhance the understanding of them in other countries. In other words, the local grading scale remains and establishes the standard which a student has achieved.

The ECTS interpretation scheme is based on a statistical distribution of grades. This is undertaken by the host institution and interpreted by the home institution in the context of its own grading system. The use of the ECTS grade interpretation system is also of relevance if a student changes institutions so that the grades obtained (at another institution) may be understood and recognized.

The ECTS grade interpretation scheme places students in broad groups to facilitate interpretation of the mark awarded by the host institution.

The ECTS Grade Interpretation Scheme divides students between pass and fail groups. Those obtaining passing grades are divided into five groups: the top 10% are awarded an A-grade, the next 25% a B-grade, the following 30% a C-grade, the following 25% a D-grade and the final 10% an E-grade.

Those who have not achieved a performance sufficient to achieve a pass grade are divided into two groups: FX (Fail – some more work required before credit can be awarded) and F (Fail – considerable further work is required). This distinction allows differentiation between those students who have been assessed as "almost passing" and those who have clearly not achieved the learning outcomes (knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities).

The ECTS Grade Interpretation Scheme can be represented in tabular fashion:

ECTS	% of successful students normally awarding the grade	Comment
A	10	The use of quality descriptors such as "excellent" or "good" is not appropriate as they express a value judgment whereas the ECTS grades are meant solely to interpret the local grade.
B	25	
C	30	
D	25	
E	10	
FX	--	Fail – some work required to pass
F	--	FAIL – considerable further work required

The main requirements for establishing the ECTS interpretation grades are: the availability of detailed data on the assessment results in a given programme/institution, cohorts of sufficient size to ensure validity, proper statistical methods and regular quality control of the results obtained through the use of the system.

The degree of differentiation shown in marks varies greatly from country to country, within a country, and within a single institution. The calculation or ECTS grades is straightforward where the local marks are highly differentiated. Where the local marks are less differentiated than the ECTS scale cases fall into two categories Where the original assessment can provide a profile of grades awarded, this may be used to allocate the appropriate ECTS grade. Where a valid profile cannot be obtained from the primary assessment data, only an ECTS pass or fail should be recorded.

The size of the cohort used as a basis for arriving at the ECTS 'grade' is of great importance. When large numbers of students are being assessed for the same course unit or module at the same time, the situation is straightforward and the results of the assessment can be used to establish ECTS grades. A cohort of students where at least 100 individuals achieve passing grades is suggested as the minimum number necessary for a meaningful use of the ECTS system.

A variety of strategies are available to institutions where cohorts are not of sufficient size. Grades obtained at different sessions or in different, but related modules at the same session may be compiled to arrive at suitably sized cohorts. For instance, experience suggests that:

- the marks over several course units/modules of similar level in the same subject field often follow a similar distribution
- the distribution of marks over a rolling three year period is likely to produce a balanced and equitable result.

In such cases the profile should be based on:

a. all grades awarded for the same cohort or class in a discrete subject area in one academic year or,
b. all grades awarded for several succeeding academic years for the same set of examinations, or
c. a combination of both.

Higher education institutions should strive to provide ECTS grades for all their students and to take into account the ECTS grade scale in conjunction with the local grades. A flexible approach is always advisable since the ECTS grade is designed to improve the transparency of a variety of grading systems and cannot, by itself, cover all possible cases.

ECTS KEY DOCUMENTS

Information/Course Catalogue		Examples
ECTS Learning Agreement	Standard form	Completed example
ECTS Transcript of Records	Standard form	Completed example
Frequently asked questions		
Examples		

The effective implementation of ECTS is underpinned through the use of ECTS Key documents. These key documents were originally developed for international credit transfer (Erasmus mobility) but are equally useful in local learning environments, whether they are formal or informal..

Course Catalogue (Information Package)

Checklist for the Information/Course Catalogue

Frequently asked questions

Examples

The Information/Course Catalogue of the institution provides students with essential institutional, academic and practical information. The Information/Course Catalogue must be available and up to date before students undertake their studies. It should not be a special guide solely for mobile students but a document used by all students.

The Information/Course Catalogue lists and describes study programmes and their course units and modules and their intended learning outcomes, together with other information which a student needs to study at a certain institution, in a specific programme, or to take certain modules.

The format and whether it should be published as a single document or in parts is a matter for each institution to determine in the context of its own policy and needs. The entire content should be available on the web and accessible for the visually impaired. The Web version should be user-friendly, easily accessible and highlighted on the institution's home page. The Information/Course Catalogue should be systematically updated every year.

The Information/Course Catalogue is published in the local language of instruction and. For mobility and transparency purposes it is recommended to publish this document also published in another widely used language (and in English for programmes taught in English). The Information Package/Course Catalogue should contain all the items listed in the checklist.

By producing up-to-date, impartial and objective information about the programmes and awards offered by institutions, they are fulfilling part of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted by Bologna Ministers at the 2005 Bergen Conference.

Student Application Form

Frequently asked questions
Examples   Standard form   Completed example

The ECTS Student Application Form has been developed for mobile students, who will spend a limited study period at an institution in another country. Students who intend to take their degree at another institution will enrol according to the regular procedures of the institution concerned and will fill in other types of application forms.

The Student Application Form contains all the essential information about a mobile student that is needed by a prospective host institution. If an institution requires further information (for example regarding housing, special health requirements.) from incoming students it may request this separately.

Institutions may use their own version of the Student Application Form for their outgoing students, provided that it contains the elements and follows the sequence suggested in the standard form provided. The use of the standard ECTS application form is recommended.

Learning Agreement

ECTS Learning Agreement   Standard form   Completed example
Frequently asked questions
Examples

Many institutions use a Learning Agreement as part of their own credit accumulation system. The Learning Agreement as it is used for mobile students contains the list of course units or modules which the student plans to take. For each course unit/module the title, the code number and the ECTS credits are indicated. For each semester or year of study a Learning Agreement is drawn up and signed by the institution and the student. Such agreements have proved particularly useful in preventing conflict where students have a choice of teaching units within a study programme. The use of Learning Agreements helps to guarantee that the student is making a choice of teaching units which fully satisfies the programme requirements for the degree, which he or she wishes to obtain.

In case of student mobilty, the Learning Agreement has to be signed by the student, the person who has formal authority to commit the home institution, and by an equivalent

authority in the receiving institution who thereby guarantees that the incoming student can study the planned course units/modules.

The Learning Agreement helps to guarantee the recognition/transfer of credit for courses passed successfully by the student. The competent body or authority of the home institution grants the recognition on the student's return. The student does not need to negotiate recognition with individual professors. The Learning Agreement, together with the Transcript of Records is designed to guarantee full recognition.

A programme of study may need to be modified after the arrival of the mobile student. In such cases, the Learning Agreement should be amended as soon as possible and signed again by the three parties: the home institution, the host institution and the student. Only in this way can complete recognition of study results be guaranteed.

Institutions may adapt the Learning Agreement provided that it contains the elements and follows the sequence suggested in the standard ECTS form. However, for mobility purposes, the use of the standard form is recommended

Transcript of Records

ECTS Transcript of Records   Standard form   Completed example
Frequently asked questions
Examples

The ECTS Transcript of Records is used to document the performance of a student over a certain period of time by recording the course units or modules taken, the credits gained, the local grades awarded and preferably the corresponding ECTS "indicator".

In the case of student mobility, he Transcript of Records is issued twice. It is issued and sent to the host institution by the home institution for all outgoing students before their departure to provide information about the course units/modules that they have already completed and the results obtained. It is also issued and sent by the host institution to the home institution for all incoming students at the end of their period of study.

The Transcript of Records is an essential tool for academic recognition. It is therefore crucial to determine who is responsible for producing it and how it is issued and delivered. Institutions should pay special attention to training academic and administrative staff in the use of the Transcript of Records and the interpretation of grades. The process of grade interpretation can be supported by the use of the ECTS grade indicators of the ECTS Grade Interpretation Scheme.

The achievements of all students, not only mobile students, can be handled systematically within a single computerised system in the Transcript of Records format. This will make it possible to insert an ECTS Transcript of Records in the Diploma Supplement issued to all graduating students, whether they were mobile or not.

Institutions may develop their own version of the Transcript of Records provided that it contains the elements and follows the sequence suggested in the standard form provided. However, the use of the standard ECTS Transcript of Records is recommended.

ECTS Recognition Sheet

In addition to the Learning Agreement, it is recommended that home institutions sign a "Recognition Sheet" for each outgoing student stating from which course units or modules he/she will be exempt at the home institution after successful completion of the study abroad. In this way it is clear from the start that the study abroad replaces a comparable period of study at home (including examination and/or other forms of assessment). The learning experience abroad, however, does not need to be identical to the learning experience at home.

OTHER KEY DOCUMENTS

Erasmus Student Charter

The Erasmus Student Charter is a one-page document designed by ECTS/DS Counsellors, which explains the rights and duties of the Erasmus student.

The Charter makes reference to the Learning Agreement and the Transcript of Records as the proper use of these key documents guarantees that the mobile student will gain full academic recognition.

A copy of the Charter must be given to all Erasmus students, incoming and outgoing, so that each is fully informed about what he/she can expect as an Erasmus students and also about his/her responsibilities in order to be sure of obtaining full recognition for the study period abroad.

European Quality Charter for Mobility

Is a proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on trans-national mobility within the Community for education and training purposes. The Charter establishes a code of good practice for the mobility of young people or adults who go abroad to study or for other types of mobility, in particular professional mobility.

The ten core arrangements are:

- Guidance and information

- Learning plan

- Personalisation

- General preparation

- Linguistic aspects– evaluation of abilities (before departure) and linguistic support (during)

- Logistical support -

- Mentoring

- Recognition

- Reintegration and evaluation

- Commitments and responsibilities

The final proposal can be found here: http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11085.htm

Europass

Europass consists of five documents which describe an individual's qualifications and working experience in a consistent manner. It is designed for mobile citizens, for purposes of study, work or exchange abroad.

The core documents are:
- Europass CV
- Europass language passport
  - These two documents can be filled in by individuals
- Europass Certificate supplement
- Europass Diploma supplement
- Europass Mobility
  - The three latter documents are delivered by competent authorities

Further details can be found on Europass website:
http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/preview.action?locale_id=1

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Institutional "Assessment Centres"
ECTS Institutional and Departmental Coordinators
ECTS/DS Counsellors
PLOTEUS
Frequently Asked Questions

Institutional "Assessment Centres"

Institutions are encouraged to create "assessment centres" for the recognition of prior learning, be it formal, informal or non formal. The objective is for higher education institutions to become open learning centres for their region and to increase access for learners from professional life and a range of non-traditional learning environments. The

assessment centres may take any shape or form. The assessment task may also be outsourced or carried out collectively with other institutions or interested parties. Institutions are encouraged to publish their recognition policy and practices and make them widely known.

Credits are awarded by institutions having assessed the learning outcomes acquired by the individual learner. Formal learning is used as a reference for the award of credits, but learning outcomes may also be acquired through non-formal or informal learning, inside or outside institution, in a slower or faster pace, during a shorter or longer period of time[10].

Higher education institutions are therefore in the unique position to link learning outcomes achieved outside the institution to credits which they award to comparable learning outcomes acquired in their formal degree programmes. In other words: they can award credits using their formal programme as a reference point.

Institutions may also decide to conclude recognition agreements with other training institutes and with employers in their region or sector in order to increase the predictability of credit transfer and recognition between different types of learning.

ECTS Institutional and Departmental Coordinators

Frequently asked questions
Examples

Most learners appreciate named contacts with whom they can discuss their programme of study. It is particularly important that these should be identified for mobile students and that the named individuals should be readily available for students. For this reason it is recommended that each institution should have an institutional and departmental ECTS coordinators. In some cases, the institutional and departmental coordinator may be the same person.

The responsibilities of the institutional and departmental coordinators may vary from institution to institution, but would normally correspond to the following profiles:

- the ECTS Institutional Coordinator ensures the commitment of the institution to the implementation of ECTS principles and mechanisms. He/she will be responsible for the overall quality of the operation of ECTS.

    Together with the Departmental Coordinators and relevant Institution officers, the Institutional Coordinator ensures the coordination, preparation, production and dissemination of the institutional Information/Course Catalogue, and that the transfer and accumulation of credits is managed in a consistent manner throughout the institution.

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[10] Whereas formal learning takes place in education and training institutions and leads to recognised diplomas and other types of documented qualifications, non-formal learning occurs outside mainstream education and training and does not aim at formalised certificates. Informal learning is a natural consequence of everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and may not be recognised by the individuals concerned as contributing to their knowledge and skills.

- **-** The ECTS Departmental/(Subject) Coordinator is the contact person for students and academic staff within the department or faculty, and deals with the practical and academic aspects of ECTS. He/she should ensure that potentially mobile students have access to the Information/Course Catalogues from partner institutions, that they fill in the Student Application Form and Learning Agreement correctly and that they understand the academic recognition procedures.

- **-** Either the Departmental or the Institutional coordinator should ensure that an accurate and authentic Transcript of Records is issued for outgoing students (before their period of study abroad) and for incoming students when they have completed their studies at the host department or faculty.

The institution must determine the division of tasks between the ECTS Institutional and Departmental Coordinators and, in particular, who is authorised to sign the ECTS documents (Application Form, Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records) on behalf of the institution.

ECTS/DS Counsellors

Frequently asked questions
List of ECTS/DS Counsellors

ECTS/DS Counsellors advise higher education institutions in their country on the use of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement. They also carry out site-visits to institutions in their own and other countries. They advise institutions on how to implement the Diploma Supplement and how to use ECTS for credit transfer and accumulation. Counsellors are higher education personnel who have 'hands-on' experience in the field: they are therefore able to give ''peer-to-peer' advice to higher education staff, complementary to that of ministries, national agencies, rectors' conferences, ENIC/NARICs.

The ECTS/DS Counsellors are part of a broader team of Bologna Experts established in each country to provide advice on the implementation of the various aspects of the Bologna process, such as quality assurance, curricular reform, and the recognition of degrees and periods of study.

PLOTEUS

Frequently asked questions
http://europa.eu.int/ploteus/portal/home.jsp

The PLOTEUS (http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/portal/home.jsp) online portal on learning opportunities provides up to date and easily accessible information of institutions and programmes of study across Europe.

It is an online inventory which provides:
- **-** Descriptions education and training systems in European countries.
- **-** Information on scholarships and grants available from Community mobility programmes

- Inventory of web site links higher education, vocational education and training, adult education providers, per level, per country and per sector/discipline.

Ploteus was designed to provide information to students, job seekers, workers, parents, guidance counselors and teachers.

DIPLOMA SUPLEMENT

Diploma Supplement Standard form   Completed example
Diploma Supplement Checklist
Explanatory Notes to the Diploma Supplement
Examples
Europass
Frequently asked questions

Frequently asked questions
Examples

The Diploma Supplement is an annex, an explanatory note attached to a diploma awarded by a higher education institution. It helps to explain the diploma which may often be understood only within the country concerned. When fully completed this document provides all the information necessary to make a valid assessment of any degree or qualification.

The Supplement should be issued to every student of every type of degree programme, upon graduation, together with their official diploma, free of charge, in a widely spoken European language.

Institutions should disseminate information regarding the purpose and content of the Diploma Supplement among their own students as well as to local organisations, employers and other interested persons.

In this connection, the EUROPASS initiative[11] of the Commission should be noted. The Commission proposes to integrate the different transparency instruments developed for vocational training (like the European Portfolio and the European CV) and bring them together in a single European Framework for Transparency of Qualifications and Competences, which would include the Diploma Supplement.

Check list for the Diploma Supplement

(see separate attachment)

Checklist for the Information/Course Catalogue

Part One: Information on the Institution
- Name and address
- Academic calendar
- Academic authorities
- General description of the institution (including type and status)
- List of degree programmes offered
- Admission/registration procedures
- **Relevant** institution regulations (notably recognition procedures, also for prior learning)

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[11] http://www.lex.unict.it/cde/documenti/vari/2004/040107europass_en.pdf

- ECTS institutional co-ordinator

Part Two: Information on degree programmes

A) General description
- Qualification awarded
- Admission requirements
- Educational and professional goals
- Access to further studies
- Course structure diagram with credits (**normally** 60 per year)
- Final examination, if any
- Examination and assessment regulations
- ECTS departmental co-ordinator

B) Description of individual course units
- Course unit title
- Course unit code
- Type of course unit (lecture, seminar etc.)
- Level of course unit
- Year of study
- Semester/trimester
- Number of credits
- Name of lecturer
- Aims of the course unit
- **Learning outcomes and competences**
- Prerequisites
- Course contents
- Recommended reading
- Teaching methods and criteria
- Assessment methods **and criteria linked to learning outcomes**
- Language of instruction

Part Three: General information for students
- Cost of living
- Accommodation
- Meals
- Medical facilities
- Facilities for special needs students
- Insurance
- Financial support for students
- Student affairs office
- Study facilities
- International programmes
- Practical information for mobile students
- Language courses
- Internships
- Sports facilities
- Extra-mural and leisure activities

- Student associations

GLOSSARY

ASSESSMENT
The total range of written, oral and practical tests/examinations, projects and portfolios, used to evaluate the student's progress in the course unit or module, form an assessment. Assessments may be used by students to evaluate their own progress (formative assessment) or by the institution to judge whether the student has achieved the learning outcomes of the course unit or module (summative assessment).

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
Descriptions of what the learner is expected to do, in order to demonstrate that a learning outcome has been achieved.

COHORT
The group of students that started a particular degree programme in the same year is known as a cohort.

COMPENSATION
See condoning.

COMPETENCES
Competences represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities. Fostering these competences is the object of educational programmes. Competences are formed in various course units and assessed at different stages. They may be divided into subject-area related competences (specific to a field of study) and generic competences (common to any degree course).

CONDONING
Condoning is the term used when an examination board exempts a student from reassessment in a failed module if the other related modules are passed with sufficiently high marks.

CONTACT HOUR
A period of 45-60 minutes of teaching contact between a staff member and a student or group of students is defined as a contact hour.

CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT
Continuous assessment refers to assessment which takes place within the normal teaching period and contributes to the final assessment.

CONVERGENCE
Convergence involves the voluntary adoption of suitable policies for the achievement of a common goal. Convergence in the architecture of national educational systems is pursued in the Bologna process.

COURSE UNIT
A self-contained, formally structured learning experience. It should have a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes, expressed in terms of competences to be obtained, and appropriate assessment criteria. Course units can have various number of credits. (See also Module).

COURSEWORK
Coursework defines required tasks within a course unit or module.

CREDIT
A quantified means of expressing the volume of learning based on the achievement of learning outcomes. To facilitate the establishment of the credit currency they are associated with the workload (expressed in time) that an "average" student at the relevant level might be expected to require to achieve the outcomes.

CREDIT ACCUMULATION

In general terms, credit accumulation is a process by which the credits obtained for separate parts of a programme of study are accumulated or added together and lead to the award of the full qualification. Credit accumulation systems also normally have regulations relating to progression (see Progression below).

CREDIT FRAMEWORK
A system that facilitates the measurement and comparison of learning outcomes achieved in the context of different qualifications, programmes of study and learning environments on the basis of student workload measured in time.

CREDIT LEVEL
Credit level is an indicator of the relative demands of learning and of learner autonomy. It may be based on the year of study and/or on the type of course content (for example, Basic/Advanced/Specialised).

CREDIT TYPE
Credit type provides an indicator of the status of a course unit or modules in the study programme. It can for example be described as Core (major course unit), Related (unit providing instrument/support) or Minor (optional course unit).

CYCLE
A cycle is a course of study leading to an academic degree. One of the objectives indicated in the Bologna Declaration is the "adoption of a system based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate." Doctoral studies are now generally referred to as the third cycle.

CYCLE DESCRIPTOR
Generic statements of the expected outcomes of a period of study that equals one of the three cycles as identified in the Bologna Process. Such a descriptor provides clear points of references that describe the outcome of a degree programme.

The Bergen Bologna follow-up meeting approved a Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area which contained the cycle descriptors known as the Dublin Descriptors (see above). The European Qualifications Framework proposed by the European Commission contains level descriptors which map on to the European Higher Education Area descriptors (see above).

DEGREE / DIPLOMA

Degree describes the qualification awarded by a higher education institution after successful completion of a prescribed study programme. In a credit accumulation system the programme is completed through the accumulation of a specified number of credits awarded for the achievement of a specific set of learning outcomes.

DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT
The Diploma Supplement is an annex to the official degree/qualification designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the holder of the degree/qualification. It is based on the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. It improves international transparency and the academic/professional recognition of qualifications.

DOCTORATE or DOCTORAL DEGREE
A high level qualification which is internationally recognised as qualifying someone for research or academic work may be designated as a doctorate or doctoral degree. It will include a substantial amount of original research work which is presented in a thesis. It generally refers to the degree awarded after completion of third cycle studies.

DUBLIN DESCRIPTORS

The Dublin Descriptors are an integral part of the EHEA. They have "been developed as a set and are intended to be read with reference to each other. They are primarily intended for use in the alignment of qualifications and hence National Frameworks. National Frameworks may themselves have additional elements or outcomes and may have more detailed specific functions. The Dublin Descriptors offer generic statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of each of a Bologna cycle. They are not meant to be prescriptive; they do not represent threshold or minimum requirements and they are not exhaustive. The descriptors seek to identify the nature of the whole qualifications. Descriptors are not subject-specific nor are they limited to academic, professional or vocational areas. For particular disciplines the descriptors should be read within the context and use of language of that discipline. Wherever possible they should be cross-referenced with any expectations/competences published by the relevant community of scholars and/or practitioners".

The Dublin Descriptors (December 2004) can be found at:
http://www.jointquality.nl/content/descriptors/CompletesetDublinDescriptors.doc

ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System)
The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a student-centred European credit system.

ECTS is based on the principle that 60 credits represent the quantity of learning outcomes achieved in a normal full-time academic year together with the workload that this entails.

ECTS helps to increase the transparency of educational systems. It facilitates the mobility of students across Europe through credit accumulation and transfer.

Credit transfer is guaranteed by explicit agreements signed by the home institution, the host institution and the mobile student.

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a proposal by the European Commission for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council. The proposed recommendation establishes the EQF as a reference tool for the comparison of qualification levels in national qualification systems as well as qualification systems developed by international sectoral organisations.

The EQFs main components are a set of European reference levels described in terms of learning outcomes and mechanisms and principles for voluntary co-operation. These eight reference levels will act as a common and neutral reference point for education and training authorities at national and sectoral level. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education and training to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional and vocational education and training. As an instrument for the promotion of Life-long learning, the EQF encompasses general and adult education, vocational education and training, as well as Higher Education. Levels 5 to 8 contain a clear reference to the levels defined in the Framework for the European Higher Education Area in the context of the Bologna process.

The description of the eight EQF reference levels is based on learning outcomes.

The complete text of the proposal can be found at:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html

EXAMINATION (EXAM)

The term examination normally refers to a formal written and/or oral test taken at the end of a course unit or module or later in the academic year. Other assessment methods are also in use. Tests within the course unit or module are classed as continuous assessment if they contribute to the final assessment.

FIRST CYCLE DEGREE

A first cycle qualification, as defined by the Bologna Declaration, is normally awarded after successful completion of a minimum of three years or 180 ECTS credits and is designated as a first degree.

GRADE [MARK]

Grade and mark may be used as synonyms. If an institution attaches different and/or specific meanings to the term it must make this clear in its Information/Course Catalogue. A final evaluation based on the overall performance within an individual course unit or module in the study programme. It is important to recognise that grading/marking scales will normally be designed with three objectives:

(1)   To determine those who have passed – i.e. achieved the learning outcomes.

(2)   To determine those who have failed – i.e. not achieved the learning outcomes.

(3)   To provide an indicator of merit or quality in those who have passed – achieved the learning outcomes. Marking/Grading systems which seek to do this often use a ranking scale with attached merit descriptors.

GRADUATE STUDIES
A course of study normally undertaken after completion of a first degree.

HIGHER EDUCATION
Higher education applies to programmes of study that may be entered by students holding either an appropriate school leaving certificate from an upper secondary school after, in general, twelve years of schooling or other relevant professional qualifications or other approved prior learning and/or prior experience. Providers may be universities, universities of professional studies, higher education institutions, colleges, polytechnics.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning. Learning outcomes express levels of competences obtained by the student. Learning outcomes must be accompanied by appropriate assessment criteria which can be used to judge that the learning outcomes have been achieved.

Learning outcomes, together with assessment criteria, specify the requirements for the award of credit. Credit accumulation and transfer is facilitated if clear intended learning outcomes are available to indicate with precision the achievements for which the credit will be awarded.

LEARNING TIME
The number of hours an average student will need to achieve specified learning outcomes and gain credits to be awarded after assessment.

LEVELS
Represent a series of sequential steps (a development continuum) expressed in terms of range of generic outcomes, against which typical qualifications can be positioned.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS
Level descriptors describe expected outcomes of qualifications at each described level. Some level descriptors function as common denominators for qualifications at the particular level i.e. as minimum standards. Other level descriptors describe a whole range of outcomes and it is not envisaged that every qualification will, or should, have all of the characteristics set out in the level descriptor.

MARK (see note under GRADE)

MODULE
In ECTS, the term module refers to a course unit in a modularized system, that is a system based on course units carrying a uniform number of credits. In this guide it is suggested that 5 might be the basic unit but institutions may determine to use a different number.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS
(See qualifications frameworks). The description at national level, which is internationally understood and through which all qualifications and other learning achievements may be

described and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relation between qualifications.

OPTIONAL COURSE
A course unit or module that may be taken as part of a study programme but is not compulsory for all students is referred to as optional.

PROGRAMME
See study programme

PROGRESSION
Progression relates to a student movement or transfer from one stage of a qualification to the next. At its simplest students may not be able to progress to the next stage of a qualification which may be expressed in terms of a level, unless they have satisfied examiners that they have acquired the learning outcomes from the previous stage. This may be expressed in a credit accumulation system in terms of having to have x number of credits at the particular level within the qualification before being allowed to proceed to take further credits at the subsequent level.

In degree programmes where there is little or no choice and which have embedded a structured approach to student development, progress may be determined by the regulations for the programme of studies which will not allow a student to enter the next stage until he/she has satisfied the examiners in relation to the learning outcomes of the previous stage.

QUALIFICATION
Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a recognised programme of study.

QUALITY ASSURANCE
The process adopted nationally and institutionally to ensure the quality of programmes of study and the qualifications awarded. (See also Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area).

RECOGNITION
Recognition within ECTS requires that the credits achieved by a student through successful completion of course units or modules as described in the Learning Agreement at the host institution must replace an equivalent number of credits at his/her home institution.

RESIT EXAMINATION (EXAM) or ASSESSMENT
Students who have not been able to take or pass an Examination or assessment on the first date scheduled may be offered the opportunity to take a resit examination or assessment at a later date.

SECOND CYCLE DEGREE
A second cycle degree is a higher education qualification awarded after the successful completion of second cycle studies and may involve some research work. A student normally takes it after completion of a first degree.

SKILLS

Skills are abilities formed in learning activities which can be divided into 'subject specific' and 'generic'.

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

A report prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) approved at the Bologna Follow-up meeting in Bergen in 2005.

STUDENT WORKLOAD

A quantitative measure of learning activities (e.g. lectures, seminars, practical work, information retrieval, private study, independent research, examinations) that may reasonably be required for the achievement of the learning outcomes in the given timeframe.

The Tuning Education Structures in Europe project suggests that the average European student workload is c1500 hours per academic year the range being between 1200 – 1800 hours.

STUDY PROGRAMME

An approved set of course units or modules recognised for the award of a specific degree form a study programme and can be defined through the set of learning outcomes to be achieved for the award of a specified number of credits.

THESIS

A thesis is a formally presented written report, based on independent research work, which is required for the award of a degree (generally second degree or doctorate).

TRANSCRIPT

A Transcript documents the performance of a learner over a certain period of time by listing the course units or modules taken, the credits gained, the local grades awarded and preferably the corresponding ECTS grades. It reflects both the quantity of work and the quality of achievement.

TUNING

To 'tune' means to synchronise a radio on the desired frequency; it means 'tuning' the various instruments in an orchestra so that music can be played without unwanted dissonance. In the case of the Tuning Project, it means creating agreed reference points for the organisation of higher education structures in Europe, recognising that the diversity of traditions is a positive factor in the creation of a dynamic common higher education area.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES

Undergraduate studies are defined as those normally carried out prior to the award of a first degree.

WORKLOAD

See student workload

DOWNLOADABLE STANDARD FORMS + EXAMPLES OF COMPLETED FORMS

Information/Course Catalogue		Examples
ECTS Student Application Form	Standard form	Completed example
ECTS Learning Agreement	Standard form	Completed example
ECTS Recognition Sheet	Standard form	Completed example
ECTS Transcript of Records	Standard form	Completed example
Diploma Supplement	Standard form	Completed example
Planning Form for an Educational Module (teacher)		
	Standard form	Completed example
Form for Checking Workload of an	Standard form	Completed example
Educational Module (student)		
Proof of Recognition		Completed example

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Allocation of Credits

Are credits recognised automatically by other institutions?

ECTS does not guarantee academic recognition. The degree awarding institution has to decide what credits to accept for a specific programme. Recognition is obligatory in the case of agreed student mobility when there is a prior <u>Learning Agreement</u>, between the home institution, the host institution and the student as is the case in the Erasmus programme. The <u>ECTS Transcript of Records</u> and the <u>Diploma Supplement</u> facilitate swift and informed recognition decisions.

Does an institution have to accept students with ECTS credits awarded elsewhere who wish to enter subsequent and higher years of study?

No, the degree awarding institution decides what credits to accept or not to accept. The learner has a right to careful consideration of his/her previous studies. ECTS transparency tools provide the supporting information.

Institutions must also have regard to the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. This Convention states that each higher education institution shall facilitate recognition of periods of study when:

a) there has been a previous agreement between, on the one hand, the higher education institution or the competent authority responsible for the relevant period of study and, on the other hand, the higher education institution or the competent recognition authority responsible for the recognition that is sought; and

b) the higher education institution in which the period of study has been completed has issued a certificate or transcript of academic records attesting that the student has successfully completed the stipulated requirements for the said period of study.

Must a minimum number of credits be obtained at the degree awarding institution?

That is entirely up to the degree awarding institution to decide, within the legal framework in which it operates.

Should the same module offered in different programmes in the same institution carry the same number of credits for all students?

Yes, if the module is truly the same and with the same learning outcomes, it should carry the same number of credits, independent of the programme in which it is offered. If the learning outcomes are different because of the nature of the programme in which they are located or because of the academic background of the students then they may carry a different number of credits. These characteristics should be explained in the course descriptions in the Information/Course catalogue*.*

Can an academic programme contain more than 60 credits in a normal academic year?

Credits are allocated on the basis of a study programme designed by the institution. It is possible if a study programme exceeds the normal length of an academic year that more than 60 credits could be allocated. These must, however, always be related to the achievement of the learning outcomes and there must be a commitment to transparency and quality assurance as safeguards for students and stakeholders.

Generally, institutions will not, for a range of strong logistical reasons, wish to encourage students to take more than 60 credits in an academic year. However, there may be cases where exceptionally long programmes of study are scheduled within one academic year.

Individual programmes of study may award more than 60 credits when they are exceptionally long. Programmes may contain up to 90 credits in 12 months of full-time study, presuming a student workload of 2250 hours (e.g. 50 weeks of 45 hours). The exceptional length of the study programme and the required student workload must be explained in the Course Catalogue (Information Package) of the Institution.

Should a student acquire exactly 60 credits a year or 30 per semester or 20 per trimester?

The answer to this question is essentially the same as the previous question.

It should be expected that a full-time student would normally acquire 60 credits per year, 30 per semester or 20 per trimester because the curriculum is designed for this purpose.

Experience tells us that, for a variety of reasons, students may acquire fewer credits in the anticipated period of time. If this becomes a widespread phenomenon, it should certainly be the subject of a monitoring review.

Equally some students may acquire more credits. In such cases, the learning agreement either for a mobile or non-mobile student should be discussed fully with the student (and in the case of the mobile student) the home institution, in order to ensure that the student is not overloaded and does not thereby jeopardise his or her chances of obtaining at least 60 credits or the equivalent pro-rata in the time allowed.

Best practice suggests that all institutions should have academic counsellors to help and advise students who, for whatever reason, wish to work at a different pace but the norm will be 60 credits for a full academic year and pro-rata for part of the year.

Can an individual student obtain more than 60 credits in a year?

A full calendar year programme might have more than 60 credits depending on the learning outcomes and associated workload. This must be subject to the approval of the relevant institutional and/or national authorities and should have regard to assuring the quality and international standing of the credits and the award to which they lead. The transparency which the ECTS mechanisms provide helps to guarantee the quality and external recognition of credits.

Can an unsuccessful student receive credits for course units failed?

In order to receive credits for a course/unit/module a student must demonstrate that he/she has achieved the required learning outcomes. In certain circumstances, which must be defined and regulated, an institution may 'condone' failure in an individual component if a student is deemed to have achieved the learning outcomes for the programme as a whole. This process must be transparent and subject to written procedures. The transcript of records for the student should reflect the decision so that there is no potential for misunderstanding.

Can the third/doctoral cycle carry credits?

The use of credits for the third/doctoral cycle is a subject of continuing discussion and debate in Europe. A number of studies are being undertaken most notably those by the EUA. A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area states:

"Third cycle qualifications do not necessarily have credits associated with them".

Nevertheless, in a number of institutions and countries, credits are awarded for doctoral study. Normally these are doctorates which entail elements of coursework. The same principles for allocating credits apply to courses at the doctoral level.

Credits are also awarded for dissertations, projects, theses, which contribute to first and second cycle qualifications. It follows that in principle credits can be awarded to research at the third cycle.

As with all other aspects of the award of credits for a full qualification, the precise way and the number of credits awarded, will be subject to institutional and/or national approval and regulation.

Can credits be awarded for re-sit examinations?

Yes if a student demonstrates that he/she has acquired the relevant learning outcomes and the institution permits re-sit examinations, then there is no reason why credits cannot be awarded. Re-sit examinations are normally subject to detailed Institution or national regulations designed to protect the ultimate quality of the qualification. Hence, students may only be allowed to re-sit on a limited number of occasions or within a specified time limit. This is particularly relevant in subjects where the pace of change in the subject and consequently the curriculum are factors to be taken into account.

All aspects of re-sit examinations should be covered in the information/course catalogue and the procedures should be no less demanding than for students sitting for the first time. Re-sit examinations should also be included in the quality monitoring of the institution.

Is modularisation necessary for implementing ECTS?

No. Credits can be allocated to a full study programme or a stand-alone course unit. Good practice in credit allocation suggests that institutions should use a common standard number of credits (for example 5 or 6) which will make it easier to combine credits from different departments and/or Faculties.

Is there an ideal number of credits for a course unit/module?

This is up to the institution, its regulations and the teaching staff. It is helpful for an institution to establish a standard number of credits to facilitate course planning. To avoid fragmentation of a student's programme of study experience suggests that the standard number of credits should not be too low. On the other hand, to ensure that the curriculum is manageable for students as well as academic staff, units should not be too large as there is a danger that they can become major obstacles to progression. These issues must be discussed within the curriculum planning team and will be subject to institutional and national regulation in the context of issues relating to qualifications frameworks, national and European and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance at European and national level.

The number of credits allocated to a unit may vary significantly between cycles. Hence, at the second cycle the number of credits allocated to a unit may be higher than at the first cycle because students are tending to specialise in a narrower area and consequently have fewer units/modules to study.

The same learning outcomes with the same credit value may be obtained through formal non-formal and informal learning. Hence short continuing professional development units may, because of the intensive nature of such courses and their learning outcomes, attract more credits than comparable couses in formal education. Equally adult courses may attract fewer credits because the learning outcomes and pace of learning have to be adapted to the situation and background of the learner.

Workload

How is it possible to establish what the workload of a course will be?

Any consideration of student workload must recognise that it is not an absolute or precise science and is concerned with the normal or average student and most importantly, must be related to the learning outcomes to be achieved. Nevertheless, it is helpful for students and academic colleagues, particularly in planning programmes, to develop as good an understanding as possible of what the workload for a particular programme or unit/module may entail.

A variety of approaches to determine student workload in higher education programmes are being developed across Europe. One such approach has been developed in the university project "Tuning Educational Structures in Europe"[12], supported by the European Commission in the framework of the Socrates programme and involving over 135 Higher Education Institutions. The project focuses on learning outcomes and general (generic) competences and subject related competences. This project demonstrates how approaches to teaching, learning and assessment have an impact on workload and identifies an approach to help establish student workload.

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[12] More information about the Tuning project can be found on the Europa Internet server: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/Tuning.html; or on the servers of the coordinating institutions: University of Deusto, Bilbao, Spain (http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu
University of Groningen, The Netherlands (www.rug.nl/let/tuningeu).

The Tuning approach to workload

To realize the objective, namely a valid evaluation of a student's workload, the following steps are suggested.

I. Introducing modules/course units
The term 'module' is used to mean different things in different countries. In ECTS the term means a course unit that carries a specified number of credits. In a non-modularized system each course unit may have a different number of credits although the total for one year will still normally be 60. In a modularized system the course units/modules have a fixed number of credits (5 credits for example) or a multiple of this number.

The workload of a course unit is based on the total amount of work a student is expected to do as part of the overall programme of study. This work is defined with a view to the learning outcomes to be achieved, and the time (work hours) which a student needs to achieve them.

II. Estimating student workload
Each module is based on a number of educational activities. The following list is not exhaustive but designed to give a sense of the range of activity which is possible and to demonstrate that the objective is to identify the total requirements for a student formal and informal, public and private:

- *type of course:* lecture, seminar, research seminar, exercise course, practical, laboratory work, guided personal study, tutorial, independent studies, internship, placement, fieldwork, project work.
- *type of learning activity:* attending lectures, performing specific assignments, practising technical or laboratory skills, writing papers, reading books and papers, learning how to give constructive criticism of the work of others, chairing meetings.
- *type of assessment:* oral examination, written examination, oral presentation, test, paper, portfolio, thesis, report about an internship, report on fieldwork, continuous assessment.

Teachers determine which activities are appropriate and necessary for a student to acquire the learning outcomes for the course and the time required to complete these activities. If the amount of work is too great or conversely too little then the learning outcomes and credits should be reviewed in consultation with the curriculum team. Teachers should develop suitable strategies to use to best advantage the time available.

III. Checking the estimated workload through student evaluations
There are different methods to check whether the estimated student workload corresponds to the student experience. The most common is the use of questionnaires, either during the learning process or after the completion of the course.

IV. Adjustment of workload and/or educational activities
The outcome of the monitoring process or an updating of the course content might lead to an adjustment of the workload and/or the type of educational activities of the course unit/module and/or the learning outcomes.

In a modular system it will be necessary to adjust the amount of learning material and/or the types of teaching, learning and assessment activities, provided that account is always taken of the learning outcomes because the number of credits (e.g. 5 or a multiple of 5) is fixed.

In a non-modular system the number of credits may also be changed. This will have an impact on other units, because the total number of credits for the programme of study is fixed (e.g. 30 per semester, 60 per academic year).

An adjustment of workload and/or activities is required when the monitoring process reveals that the estimated student workload does not correspond to the actual workload. Here again it is vital that any review of workload is associated with the learning outcomes for the course.

Tuning offers two template forms (see Annex 4) that may be helpful in making decisions on and adjustment of the student workload. The first is for the teacher to help in planning the module or course unit and estimating the student working hours. The second is for the student to indicate the actual amount of time spent on the module, thus providing an opportunity to check whether the estimated workload corresponds to reality.

Levels and Level descriptors

What does an Institution have to do about levels and level descriptors?

National Authorities are in the process of developping ational qualification frameworks which are consistent and compatible with the European Frameworks Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Qualifications Framework) and the proposed European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF).. Sectoral Qualicications Frameworks will emerge at national and European level. At higher education level, the preparation of sectoral EQFs has started by groups of academics working together in the project Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Institutions will be expected to develop individual qualifications which relate to these level descriptors in these frameworksNational Authorities and/or Institutions may also prescribe levels and level descriptors within a qualification to help structure the process of credit accumulation and to contribute to an understanding of progression within a qualification.

Transcripts of records

Who should be responsible for the production of transcripts?

Since a transcript is a formal and official document which will be used by students its authority, accuracy and authenticity must be assured. It should form part of the official student record and hence would normally be produced by the Institution student record office or its equivalent.

Is there a European format for transcripts?

ECTS provides a model transcript. Institutions may amend or develop this to suit their own requirements but the basic information contained in the ECTS model should be included.

What is the difference between a Transcript of Records and a Diploma Supplement?

The Diploma Supplement is linked to a degree/qualification. It supplements an official diploma certifying the award of a degree/qualification. It covers an entire degree programme (for example a first, second or third cycle degree). It is issued according to a standard international format and reports all activities carried out to obtain the degree. In that sense it is the sum of all Transcripts of Records received by a student within a study programme.

It is good practice to include a final ECTS Transcript of Records in the Diploma Supplement under point 4.3.

The Diploma Supplement follows a precise format agreed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO and endorsed by the Bologna Signatory States.

Learning outcomes and competences

Can you give a concrete example of how to express learning outcomes in terms of competences?

Here are some brief examples.

An example of a subject specific competence in the field of <u>History</u>:
At the end of the course unit/module the learner is expected to demonstrate his/her ability to comment on and annotate texts and documents correctly according to the critical canons of the discipline.

An example of a subject specific competence in the field of <u>Physics</u>:
At the end of the course unit/module the learner is expected to be able to describe and explain the function of the basic devices of optoelectronics; optical fibres; liquid crystal displays; bi-polar and surface field effect transistors and MOS light emitting diodes.

An example of a <u>generic competence</u>:
At the end of the course unit/module the learner is expected to be able to demonstrate the use of information-retrieval skills effectively, in relation to primary and secondary information sources, including information retrieval through on-line computer searches.

Information/Course Catalogue

Should the entire Information/Course Catalogue of an institution be published in one book?

Institutions are free to decide on the format and whether to publish it as a whole or in parts provided that all the information is accessible for all students – local and foreign as long as the information is easily accessible on the web The decision will be influenced by the arrangements which already apply for the publication of student information. Hence**,** some institutions publish separate Institution, Faculty and departmental information. Provided that all the items on the checklist are covered in one or more publications, ECTS does not prescribe the form, size or number of publications. Its objective is the availability of detailed, transparent, accessible and up-to-date information.

Is it acceptable to publish the entire Information/Course Catalogue on the web only?

Again this is an institutional decision but the website must be accessible and user-friendly. It is good practice for previous versions of the Information/Course Catalogue also to be accessible on the web for a reasonable period of time to provide information and facilitate recognition of credits obtained in previous years.

Are all elements of the checklist essential?

Yes. The Information /Course Catalogue should contain information to guide, inform and support current and potential students and partners within your country and from abroad.

What is meant by "relevant institution regulations" (notably recognition procedures)?

Institutions must try to put themselves in the place of a new student either local/national or from another country. Students need to know about the basic regulations covering student life and registration for courses of study. These should be brief and may refer those who wish for more detail, to the full regulations. It is expected that they will cover administration, registration, the procedure for recognising credits from another institution or from informal learning or experience. They should explain what appeal mechanisms there are. All ECTS documents and procedures should be clearly explained and identified. The Course Catalogue must state that credits are based on student workload.

Is it necessary to translate the whole publication if the original is not in English?

It ist strongly recommended to publish the document in a widely used language. This might seem a burden, but the aim of ECTS is to provide accessible information to current and potential students and partners in your country and abroad. Try to imagine yourself in the position of professors in 30 other countries having to judge the relevance, level, content, nature of assessments and general structural organisation of your courses for his or her mobile students and you will understand why it is crucial for your Information/Course Catalogue to be translated into English. The same is true for foreign students who are considering enrolling in your institution to study for a degree (first, second or third cycle) and who may wish to learn your language eventually. They too need translated information in order to make an informed decision on where to study. It is important in your catalogue to make clear what the language of instruction will be because the translation into another language may mislead students.

Is it not too much work and too expensive to translate all the information every year?

Part One (Information on the institution) and Part Three (General information for students) will need to be translated once and then updated regularly for the whole institution.

Part Two A (General description of degree programmes) will normally only be a few pages for each cycle (bachelor/master/doctorate) and will change infrequently.

Part Two B (Description of individual course units) will normally be a maximum of one page per course unit, and will need to be updated and translated once a year. This task should be feasible for the departments concerned. It is in their interest that their programmes be well presented and understood.

ECTS and Erasmus, work placements and Grade Interpretation Scheme

Is ECTS essential for institutions participating in Erasmus?

No, but Erasmus does requires full transparent academic recognition**.** The use of ECTS provides a recognised, widely used and understood way to ensure that recognition.

In the case of mobile students full academic recognition means that the home institution guarantees that the period of study undertaken abroad (including examinations and/or other forms of assessment) will be recognised as replacing a comparable period of study (including examination and/or other forms of assessment) at the home institution even though the content may differ.

It is essential that the students should be able to access accurate, clear, up-to-date and helpful information about the content of the courses to be followed, whether they are local/home or incoming , in order to create an appropriate study programme. For mobile students, the institution must provide the student and the home institution with a transcript confirming that the agreed programme of study has been completed and credits awarded and listing the student's courses/modules and the detailed results.

What is the Erasmus Student Charter?

The Erasmus Student Charter is a one-page document designed by ECTS/DS Counsellors and endorsed by the European Commission to explain the rights and duties of the Erasmus student.

A copy of the Charter must be given to all mobile Erasmus students, incoming and outgoing, so that each is fully informed about what he/she can expect as an Erasmus student and also about his/her responsibilities in order to be sure of obtaining full recognition for the study period abroad.

The Charter makes reference to two of the main ECTS mechanisms – the Learning Agreement and the Transcript of Records. The ECTS process guarantees that the mobile student will gain full academic recognition.

Is the use of the ECTS Grade Interpretation Scheme essential?

The use of the ECTS Interpretation System is strongly recommended but is not a requirement. The local grading system must be explained. The ECTS "grades" help to make more transparent how it works and thus facilitate grade transfer and interpretation both within and outside the Institution.

Are work placements covered by ECTS?

Yes, there should always be a learning agreement for a work placement which states the objectives and the learning outcomes for the work placement. This should be agreed between the home institution, the host institution (placement) and the student before the start of the placement.

There should be an assessment at the end of the placement to confirm that the student has achieved the learning outcomes and hence can be awarded the appropriate credits. These credits should be fully recognised by the home institution and should be included in the transcript and the Diploma Supplement.

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