

EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM (ECTS)

Introduction

The European Credit Transfer System was initially set up in 1989 as a pilot scheme within the framework of the Erasmus programme. Its aim at that time was to facilitate the recognition of study periods undertaken abroad by mobile students through the transfer of credits. As a transfer system ECTS has expanded to over 30 countries and has been introduced in more than one thousand higher education institutions.

The 40 Signatory States in the Bologna Process have identified ECTS as one of the cornerstones of the European Higher Education Area. A large number of countries have adopted ECTS by law as an accumulation system for their own higher education systems and others are in the process of doing so. In some countries ECTS has become a requirement for accreditation. The Zurich Conference on Credit Transfer and Accumulation, held in October 2002 by the European University Association, endorsed the central role of ECTS in higher education. ECTS will have a fundamental place in the design of a national and European Qualifications Framework. Schemes based on ECTS are being introduced in other continents.

The correct use of ECTS depends on the commitment of thousands of motivated people working in higher education, in very different circumstances and cultures.

Various measures like web-based users' guide, brochures, ECTS Label, ECTS/DS counsellors have been taken in order to assist these persons and to promote the correct and consistent use of ECTS across Europe:

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 purposes. It serves both mobile and non-mobile students: it can be used for accumulation within an institution and for transfer between institutions. ECTS helps learners moving between countries, within a country, town or region, as well as between different types of institutions; it also covers self-study and work experience.

Key Features of ECTS

ECTS Credits

Student Workload

Learning Outcomes and Competences

ECTS Grading Scale

ECTS Credits

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme of study. These objectives should preferably be specified in terms of learning outcomes and competences to be acquired.

- ECTS is based on the principle that 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student during one academic year. The student workload of a full-time study programme in Europe amounts in most cases to around 1500-1800 hours per year and in those cases one credit stands for around 25 to 30 working hours.
- Credits in ECTS can only be obtained after successful completion of the work required and appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes achieved. Learning outcomes are sets of competences, expressing what the student will know, understand or be able to do after completion of a process of learning, long or short.
- Student workload in ECTS consists of the time required to complete all planned learning activities such as attending lectures, seminars, independent and private study, preparation of projects, examinations, and so forth.

- Credits are allocated to all educational components of a study programme (such as modules, courses, placements, dissertation work, etc.) and reflect the quantity of work each component requires to achieve its specific objectives or learning outcomes in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of study successfully.

How to allocate credits?

Credit may be allocated to all types of study programmes, irrespective of their length, composition or nature. Programmes may consist of year-long courses or shorter modules. They may cover work placements and research. They may be first, second or third cycle. Credits can also be used for stand-alone courses, such as modules offered to learners not engaged in a full cycle programme of study.

The correct way:

Base the allocation of credits to the different components of a study year on a realistic estimation of the student workload required for the average student to achieve the learning outcomes established for each of the components. Make sure that the total number of credits for one academic year is 60. Subsequently, check the original allocation of credits on a regular basis by gathering and analysing bottom-up information on actual student workload.

For more information see the section on student workload

One wrong way: linking credits to contact hours.

There is no direct link between contact hours and credits. For example, a lecture hour may require three hours of independent study by the student, while a two-hour seminar might involve a full week of preparation. A student-workload based system like ECTS therefore cannot be based on contact hours, even if a university uses the indication of the number of contact hours for other purposes, such as calculating staff time.

Another wrong way: linking credits to status or prestige.

ECTS credits only express student workload measured in time. They say nothing about the status of a course unit or the prestige of a teacher. For example, an introductory course might require more student time than an advanced one. The specific characteristics of each course unit will be described in the Information Package/Course Catalogue.

Student Workload

Several approaches for determining student workload in higher education programmes are being developed across Europe. A promising approach has been tested in the framework of the university project "Tuning Educational Structures in Europe"¹, supported by the European Commission in the framework of the Socrates programme. This project focuses on learning outcomes and general (generic) competences and subject related competences. It shows that approaches to teaching, learning and assessment have an impact on workload. It identifies a four step approach for determining student workload.

The Four Steps:

To realize the overall objective, namely the development of an approach which leads to a truly valid consideration of a student's workload, implementation of the following steps is recommended.

1. Introducing modules/course units

There are non-modularized systems and modularized systems. In a non-modularized system each course unit can have a different number of credits although the total for one year will still be 60. In contrast, in a modularized system the course units/modules have a fixed workload, 5 credits for example, or a multiple of this number. The workload of a module is based on the total amount of tasks a student is expected to do as part of the overall programme of study. These tasks are defined with a view to the learning outcomes to be achieved, and the time (work hours) a student needs to achieve them. For example, a module of 5 credits allows for around 125 hours of work of a typical student.

2. Estimating student workload

Each module is based on a number of educational activities. They can be defined by considering the following aspects:

- *types of courses:* lecture, seminar, research seminar, exercise course, practical, laboratory work, guided personal study, tutorial, independent studies, internship, placement or 'stage', fieldwork, project work, etc.

- *types of learning activities:* 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, etc.

- *types of assessment:* oral examination, written examination, oral presentation, test, paper, portfolio, thesis, report about an internship, report on fieldwork, continuous assessment, etc.

Teachers estimate the time required to complete the activities foreseen for each course unit / module. The workload expressed in time should match the number of credits available for the course unit. Teachers must develop suitable strategies to use to best advantage the time available.

3. Checking the estimated workload through student evaluations

There are different methods to check whether the estimated student workload is correct. The most common method is the use of questionnaires to be completed by students, either during the learning process or after the completion of the course.

4. İş yükünün ve/veya öğrenme aktivitelerinin ayarlanması

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. An adjustment of workload and/or activities is required anyway when the monitoring process reveals that the estimated student workload does not correspond to the actual workload.

Tuning offers two forms that can be helpful in making decisions on and adjustment of the student workload. The first form is for the teacher to plan the educational module and estimate the student working hours involved. 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.

Learning outcomes and competences

Learning outcomes are sets of competences, expressing what the student will know, understand or be able to do after completion of a process of learning, whether long or short. They can refer to a period of studies, for example to a first or a second cycle programme, or to a single course unit or module. Learning outcomes specify the requirements for award of credit. They are formulated by academic staff. The actual competences acquired by the individual learner may of course go beyond the stated learning outcomes.

Competences represent a dynamic combination of attributes, abilities and attitudes. They can be subject specific or generic. Fostering competences is the object of educational programmes; they will be formed in various modules/course units and assessed at different stages.

Study programmes are divided into blocks or clusters of units, which should correspond to specified learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and understanding). Universities are encouraged to describe learning outcomes and competences for each course unit. There is a clear need for guidance and exchange of experience on writing and using learning outcomes in different languages and cultural settings.

AKTS Notlandırma Sistemi

Grading is an essential and sensitive part of the learning process. It is strongly rooted in the diverse pedagogical and cultural traditions of the various educational systems in Europe. There is a need, however, to make national grading systems more transparent, to allow a smooth transfer of grades from one system to another, in order to serve mobile learners and graduates.

In the framework of ECTS a grading scale has been developed to facilitate the understanding and comparison of grades given according to different national systems. It has no national reference point and aims at an objective evaluation of student abilities relative to those of other students within the same system. It was not designed to replace national systems, but to enhance the understanding of them in other countries.

The ECTS grading scale is based on the rank of a student in a given assessment, that is how he/she performed relative to other students. The ECTS system classifies students into broad groups and thus makes interpretation of ranking simpler. It is this grouping that lies at the heart of the ECTS grading system.

The ECTS system initially divides students between pass and fail groups, and then assesses the performance of these two groups separately. Those obtaining passing grades are divided into five subgroups and those who have not achieved a performance sufficient to allow a passing grade are divided into two subgroups: This distinction allows differentiation between those students who have been assessed as almost passing and those who have clearly lacked the required knowledge and skills.

The ECTS grading scale can be represented in tabular fashion:

ECTS Grade	% of successful students normally achieving the grade	Comment
A	10	
B	25	
C	30	
D	25	
E	10	
FX	--	Fail
F	--	Fail

The main requirements for establishing ECTS grades are: the availability of sufficiently detailed primary data, cohorts of sufficient size to ensure validity, proper statistical methods, and regular quality control of the results obtained through the use of the scale.

Key Documents of ECTS

[Information Package/Course Catalogue](#)

[Student Application Form](#)

[Learning Agreement](#)

[Transcript of Records](#)

Information Package/Course Catalogue

The [Information Package/Course Catalogue](#) is the most important ECTS document. It should make study programmes easy to understand and compare for all students and staff – local and foreign – and provide them with essential institutional, academic and practical information.

The Information Package/Course Catalogue is not a special guide solely for mobile students. It should be a document used by all students – local and visiting students alike. The university decides on the format and whether to publish it as a single documents or in parts. It is strongly recommended that its entire content should be available on the web and easily accessible from the institution's home page with a minimum number of clicks. It should be systematically updated at least every year.

The Information Package/Course Catalogue not only lists and describes the study programmes and their course units and modules, but also supplies all the information which a student needs to make up his/her mind as to whether or not to study at a certain institution, in a specific programme, or to take certain modules. The Information Package/Course Catalogue is essential because it provides all the

necessary information on study programmes and it must be available before students undertake their studies.

The Information Package/Course Catalogue of the institution is to be published in the local language of instruction and in English (or only in English for programmes taught in English) on the Web and/or in hard copy in one or more booklets.

The Information Package/Course Catalogue must contain all the items in the checklist below.

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
Main university regulations (notably recognition procedures)
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 (60 per year)
Final examination, if any
Examination and assessment regulations
ECTS departmental co-ordinator

B) Description of individual course units

Course title
Course code
Type of course
Level of course
Year of study
Semester/trimester
Number of credits
Name of lecturer
Objectives of the course (preferably expressed in terms of learning outcomes and competences)
Prerequisites
Course contents
Recommended reading
Teaching methods
Assessment methods
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

Student Application Form

The ECTS Student Application Form has been developed for mobile students, who will spend a limited study period at a university in another country. Students who intend to take their degree at another university 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, etc.) from its incoming students it should request this on a separate form.

Learning Agreement

The ECTS Learning Agreement has been developed for mobile students, spending a limited period of time at a university in another country as is the case in the Erasmus programme. The Learning Agreement 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 credit are indicated.

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.

Of course, it may happen that a programme of study must be modified after the arrival of the mobile student. In such cases, the Learning Agreement must be amended as soon as possible and signed again by the three parties concerned: the home university, the host university and the student. Only in this way can complete recognition of study results be guaranteed.

It is recommended that, in parallel with the Learning Agreement, institutions approve a "Recognition Sheet" for each outgoing student stating from which course units or modules he/she will be exempted at the home institution after successful completion of the study abroad.

Institutions are free to use their own version of the Learning Agreement provided that it contains the elements and follows the sequence suggested in the standard ECTS form.

Transcript of Records

The ECTS Transcript of Records is used to document the performance of a student 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.

The Transcript of Records is used for mobility students at two separate moments. First it must be issued and sent to the host institution by the home institution for all outgoing students before their departure in order to provide information about the course units/modules that they already have completed and the results obtained. Secondly it must be 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 provides a standard format for recording all study activities carried out by students. It is an essential tool for academic recognition.

Institutions are free to use their own version of the Transcript of Records provided that it contains the elements and follows the sequence suggested in the standard form provided.

ECTS Coordinators

Institutions are expected to designate an ECTS Institutional Coordinator, and an ECTS Departmental Coordinator for each department or faculty as appropriate.

Although the precise division of roles between institutional and departmental coordinators may vary from institution to institution, the responsibilities are generally as follows:

ECTS Institutional Coordinator

The ECTS Institutional Coordinator ensures the commitment of the institution to and the implementation of ECTS principles and mechanisms within the context of the transfer and accumulation of credits. He/she supervises the mechanisms for the correct use of ECTS tools. He/she, along with the Departmental Coordinators, is responsible for ensuring the coordination, preparation, production and dissemination of the institutional Information Package/Course Catalogue, and also that the transfer/accumulation of credits is managed in a consistent manner throughout the university in all departments or faculties.

ECTS Departmental Coordinator

The ECTS Departmental 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 there. He/she should ensure that potentially mobile students have access to the Information Packages/Course Catalogues from partner institutions, that they fill in the Student Application Form and Learning Agreement properly and that they understand the academic recognition procedures.

He/she ensures that a proper 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.

It is up to the institution to decide the division of tasks between the ECTS Institutional and Departmental Coordinators and, according to their own organisation, which are the binding signatures which must be placed on the ECTS documents (Application Form, Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records). The decision must be indicated clearly on the forms, to guarantee validity and transparency.