

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System		
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European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System – Information Guide

Revision History

Revision	Date	Revision Description	Originator
01	22 August 03	Conversion of OP128	Lisa Whelan
02	23 May 05	Updates in accordance with the ECTS users guide August 2004	Noeleen Johnson

1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide an information and reference document to describe the operation and use of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. It should assist ECTS coordinators in guiding students to choose appropriate programmes and plan their studies abroad, and to provide practical information. The document outlines Institutional commitment to the process.

2. Scope

The Institute has prepared this information document as a guide to staff and students of ITB, potential partners and students and staff at partner institutions, to its courses, curricula, academic and administrative arrangements.

3. Reference

3AD02 ECTS Approved institutes and contact individuals for ITB

4FAD13 ECTS Learning Agreement Form

4FAD14 Outgoing Student Application Form

4FAD15 ECTS Transcript of Records Form

4FAD16 Incoming Student Application Form

ITB website www.itb.ie for information on

- The Institute,

- Courses, modules

- General information for students on facilities, supports, accommodation etc.

Institute publications – prospectus and student handbook

4RCD02 Approved Course Schedule

4RCD04 Module Syllabi

Requests for specific information can be made to the international office, contact details are on page 9

4. Introduction

The European Community promotes inter-institutional cooperation as a means of improving the quality of education for the benefit of students and higher education institutions. Student mobility is a predominant element of that inter-institutional cooperation. Studying abroad can be a particularly valuable experience. It is one of the best way to learn about other countries, ideas, languages and cultures. It is also an important element in academic and professional career development. It is the policy of the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown to support opportunities for students to study abroad.

The recognition of studies and diplomas is a prerequisite for the creation of an Open European area of education and training where students and teachers can move

without obstacles. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was developed as a means of improving academic recognition for study abroad.

ECTS provides an instrument to create transparency, to build bridges between institutions and to widen the choices available to students. The system makes it easier for institutions to recognise the learning achievements of students through the use of commonly understood measurements - credits and grades - and it also provides a means to interpret national systems of higher education.

5. Main Characteristics of ECTS

The ECTS system is based on three core elements: *information* (on study programmes and student achievement), *mutual agreement* (between the partner institutions and the student) and the use of *ECTS credits* (to indicate student workload). These three core elements are made operational through the use of three key documents: the information package, the application form/learning agreement and the transcript of records. ECTS is made operational by students, teachers and institutions who want to make study abroad an integral part of the educational experience.

In itself, ECTS in no way regulates the content, structure or equivalence of study programmes. However, full academic recognition is required for student mobility in the framework of the Socrates/Erasmus programmes. Full academic recognition means that the study period abroad (including examinations or other forms of assessment) replaces a comparable period of study at home (including examinations or other forms of assessment), though the content of the agreed study programme may differ.

The use of ECTS is voluntary and is based on mutual trust and confidence in the academic performance of partner institutions. Each institution selects its own partners.

ECTS provides transparency through the following means:

- ECTS credits which are a numerical value allocated to course units to describe the student workload required to complete them.
- The information pack which supplies written information to students and staff of the Institute organisation and structure of studies and course units.
- The transcript of records which shows students' learning achievements in a way which is comprehensive, commonly understood and easily transferable from one institution to another.
- The learning agreement covering the programme of study to be taken and the ECTS credits to be awarded for their satisfactory completion, committing both home and host institutions, as well as the student.

Good communication and flexibility are also needed to facilitate the academic recognition of studies completed or taken abroad. In this respect the ECTS

coordinators have an important role to play as their main tasks are to deal with the academic and administrative aspects of ECTS.

The full range of course units of the Institute using ECTS should be made available to the mobile student. Students should be enabled to follow regular course units, and not courses specifically designed for them.

ECTS also enables further studies abroad. With ECTS, a student will not necessarily return home after the study period abroad. They may prefer to stay at the host institution, or even move to a third institution. The Institute will decide whether or not this is acceptable and what conditions the student must fulfil to obtain a diploma or transfer registration.

6. General Conditions for the use of ECTS

ECTS can only succeed when there is voluntary participation, transparency, flexibility and a climate of mutual trust and confidence. Staff need to be informed and trained to apply the principles and mechanisms of ECTS. The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown is committed to the following :

- The appointment of an ECTS institutional coordinator;
- The appointment of ECTS coordinators by subject area/discipline in all schools intending to use ECTS;
- The allocation of ECTS credits to course units;
- The production of an Information package in all subject areas/disciplines in which ECTS will be used.
- The use of student application forms, transcripts of records and ECTS learning agreements.

7. 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 competencies 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.

To realise 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 More information about the Tuning project can be found on the Europa Internet server:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/tuning/tuning_en.html

I. 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.

II. 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.

III. 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.

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. In a modularized model it will be necessary to adjust the amount of learning material and/or the types of teaching, learning and assessment activities, because the number of credits (e.g., in our example, 5 or a multiple of 5) is fixed. In a non-modular model also the number of credits can be changed, but this will, of course, have an effect on other units, because the total number of credits of the programme

of study is fixed (e.g. 30 per semester, 60 per year etc.). 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.

8. 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 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.

Competencies 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). Learning outcomes and competences should be described for each course unit.

9. ECTS Credits

ECTS credits are a numerical value (between 1 and 60) allocated to course units to describe the student workload required to complete them. They reflect the quantity of work each course unit requires in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of academic study at the institution, that is, lectures, practical work, seminars, tutorials, fieldwork, private study - in the library or at home - and examinations or other assessment activities. ECTS is thus based on a full student workload and not limited to contact hours only.

- ECTS credits are a relative rather than an absolute measure of student workload. They only specify how much of a year's workload a course unit represents at the Institute.
- ECTS is based on the principle that 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student during one academic year.
- 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.

10. ECTS Credit Allocation

Allocation of ECTS Credits to Course Units

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. Credits can also be used for stand-alone courses, such as modules offered to learners not engaged in a full cycle programme of study.

ECTS credits will be allocated on a “top-down” basis. The starting point is be the full programme structure and the normal pattern of courses a student would have to take in an academic year to complete the qualification in the official length of study.

The process of ECTS credit allocation requires description of their curricular structures in a common currency but does not require any changes to those structures. The overall philosophy of ECTS is to allow for flexibility and this applies to the allocation of credits.

ECTS credits will be allocated to all the course units available - compulsory or elective courses. Credits will also be allocated to project work, thesis and industrial placements where these “units” are a normal part of the validated degree programme as long as the learning achievements are assessed.

Allocation of credits – 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 for each of the components. Making sure that the total number of credits for one academic year is 60. The original allocation of credits will be monitored against actual student workload.

11. Relationship between ECTS credits and contact hours

ECTS credits are not based on the contact hours themselves, but on the total workload which the contact hours generate. When a year of a course in an institution consists entirely of traditional lectures, tutorials and examinations, it is quite likely that the contact hours are directly related to the student workload, and so to the ECTS credits for each course unit. The exact nature of the relationship

may change as the course progresses; this will be evident if successive years of a course have different totals of contact hours, though each year should total 60 ECTS credits. A laboratory hour will be valued at between a quarter and half of a lecture hour. When project work is largely unsupervised, it is easiest to consider what proportion of the year would be needed to complete the project on a full-time basis. Optional or elective units must be allocated credits along the same lines as for a core or compulsory course unit, that is, on the basis of the proportion of workload it represents in relation to the overall workload of a year's study.

12. The Award of ECTS Credits to Students

ECTS credits are allocated to course units but are only awarded to students who successfully complete the course by satisfying the assessment requirements. Students do not get ECTS credits simply for attending classes or spending time abroad. They must satisfy the assessment regulations specified at the host institution to demonstrate that they fulfilled the stated learning objectives for the course unit. The assessment procedure may take various forms: written or oral examinations, coursework, a combination of the two or other means such as presentations at seminars.

Full academic recognition implies not only that the period of study abroad replaces a comparable period of study at home but also that the foreign examination (or other form of assessment) replaces the home examination. In those cases, the home institution will give a guarantee to the student that the foreign examination will be taken into account in the fullest possible way.

In the case of assessments of projects, mini-theses and industrial placement, credits will not be awarded for good marks. The amount of credit for a course is fixed and is the same for all students who succeed in the assessments.

13. ECTS Credit Transfer

Home and host institutions will prepare and exchange transcripts of records for each student participating in ECTS before and after the period of study abroad. Copies of these transcripts will be given to the student for their personal file. The home institution recognises the amount of credit received by their students from partner institutions abroad so that the credits for the course unit passed replace the credits which would otherwise have been obtained from the home institution. The Learning Agreement gives the student a guarantee in advance that the credits for the approved programme of study will be transferred.

The learning agreement between the institutions and the student will show a block of course units chosen to replace the year or the semester at the home institution. The successful student, on return will receive a block of credits, which may be shown as such on the student record rather than a list of individual course unit. Thus full academic recognition will be given.

14. Partial Failure

The award of credit is the responsibility of the host institution. When the host's procedures are at the end, the matter of the student's progress rests with the home institution, in accordance with its rules. The Institute will arrange repeat examinations at the next available examination opportunity for students who return home without the necessary credits completed. This process might require exemption from the normal regulation of not progressing to the next level until the current level of examinations are passed in full.

In the event of serious failure, the student may need to repeat the period of study at the home Institution, lengthening the student's course. Credit should be transferred for any course units in which the student has succeeded.

Can an unsuccessful student receive credits for course units failed?

Students need to be successful and be awarded a passing grade in order to receive credits for the course unit concerned. Within a condoning procedure the institution might exempt a student from getting credits in a specific module by stating that overall the student has achieved the objectives of that particular year of the programme the student has registered for because of their overall performance.

15. ECTS Co-ordinators

The Institute is committed to appointing an ECTS institutional coordinator and an ECTS School coordinator for every participating school. Their role will be to deal with the administrative and academic aspects of ECTS and to advise students.

16. The ECTS Institutional Coordinator

The essential role of the institutional coordinator is to ensure the commitment of the Institution to ECTS principles and mechanisms.

Their general duties will be to promote ECTS both within the Institution and outside, eg. within international cooperation programmes, to facilitate the practical implementation of ECTS principles and mechanisms within the context of the transfer and accumulation of credits, to supervise the mechanisms of the correct use of ECTS tools and to provide support to school coordinators. Their more specific tasks will be to inform students about ECTS and coordinate the preparation, production and distribution to partners of the information package(s)/ *course catalogue* with the school coordinator(s). The institutional coordinator will also be responsible for contractual arrangements with the European Commission and with the National Grant-Awarding Authority.

Contact details: International Office Phone 353-1-8851000 ext 1334

Email: International.Office@itb.ie

17. The ECTS School Coordinator

The school coordinator will usually be the contact person of students and academic staff within the Institute and deal with most practical and academic aspects of the implementation of ECTS.

They will inform students about ECTS in more practical details. They will provide students with the information packages available from partner Institutions, help students to fill in the student application form, explain the academic recognition procedures and documents (learning agreement, transcript of records). The school coordinator will guide the student to devise a programme of studies combining academic requirements with individual interests.

Communication between home and host Institutions is normally conducted by school coordinators who will exchange application forms and signed copies, discuss programmes of studies, prepare transcripts of records for outgoing students before their study period abroad as well as for returning students at the end of their study period in the institution.

School coordinators will inform their colleagues about ECTS and its implications in terms of allocation of credits to all courses of the school. They will prepare the part of the information package which deals with their school.

Both coordinators will ensure smooth integration of incoming students within their Institution. They will also ensure that their outgoing students are making progress at the host Institution by being in regular contact with them.

Contact details: International Office Phone 353-1-8851000 ext 1334

Email: International.Office@itb.ie

18. Student Application Form and Learning Agreement

The student application form

After having chosen a host institution, looked carefully at the host institution's information package and consulted their ECTS school coordinator, the student will fill in a student application form. Application Form 4FAD14 Outgoing student application form (to be completed by ITB students wishing to study abroad), 4FAD16 Incoming Student Application Form (to be completed by external students wishing to study at ITB) are on the institutes website www.itb.ie under international studies.

In order to fill in the form, the student must already have a precise idea on the programme of study they wish to follow at the host institution, elaborated in conjunction with the home institution's ECTS school coordinator and with the agreement of the home institution's ECTS institutional coordinator.

The student may also wish to include a second or even third choice of host institution in the application form, should the first choice of destination not be accepted. In this case, the student, with the approval of the coordinator, will have to prepare a learning agreement for each intended destination.

The learning agreement

When the three parties involved – the student, the home institution and the host institution – agree about the study programme abroad, they sign a learning agreement. The learning agreement contains the list of course units or modules which the student plans to take. For each course unit/ module, the title, code number and the ECTS credit are indicated. This agreement, which describes the programme of study abroad, must be signed by the student and the coordinators of the home and host institutions before the student leaves for the host institution. Reference 4FAD13 The ECTS Learning Agreement Form can be found on our website www.itb.ie under the heading international studies.

The student agrees to undertake the programme of the study at the host institution as an integral part of their higher education. The home institution provides the student with a guarantee that the home institution will give full academic recognition in respect of the course units listed on the agreement. It is good practice that the institution also gives the student a written record showing exactly how the academic recognition will be carried out. If the programme of study is to receive only partial recognition, or if the home institution is to award some of the credits itself, this must be made clear on the learning agreement.

The host institution confirms that the programme of study is acceptable and does not conflict with the host institutions rules. However, it is recognised that a modest proportion of the course units may conflict on the final timetable, if timings are not known at the time of signing. Similarly, it may not be known whether sufficient students will register for course units with a minimum registration requirement, but in signing the learning agreement the institution allocated a place on a course unit with a maximum permitted number of students, provided that a place is available at the time of signing.

A copy of the signed learning agreement should be given to all parties involved, the home institution, the host institution and the student.

19. Changes to agreed programme of study

Students may have to modify the agreed programme of study upon arrival at the host institution for a variety of reasons. For example, timetable clashes, unsuitability of chosen courses (in level or content), may prevent the student taking the previously agreed module. The learning agreement form therefore provides for changes to the originally agreed study programme/learning agreement.

Agreement to the changes by all parties must be obtained in order to guarantee full academic recognition of all course units followed abroad. It is important that the student knows that the courses and programme of study finally selected must be approved by the sending and receiving institutions in order to be fully recognised. Changes to the originally agreed programme of study will be indicated on the

learning agreement and duly counter-signed by the student and the coordinators of both the home and host institutions.

It must be stressed that changes to the originally agreed programme of study should be made within a relatively short time after the student's arrival at the host institution. A copy of the new learning agreement should be given to the student and the coordinators of the home and host institutions.

20. The Transcript of Records

Credit transfer in ECTS operates by means of exchange of transcripts of records between home and host institutions and vice versa.

Transcripts of records describe the learning achievements of each ECTS student prior to and after the period of study abroad. Every course taken by the student is recorded on the transcript of records with not only the ECTS credits but also with the grade awarded according to the local grading scale and, possibly, the grade awarded according to the ECTS grading scale. The combination of grades and ECTS credits represents the performance of the student in qualitative and quantitative terms respectively.

A signed copy of the transcripts of records should be given to all parties involved, the home institution, the host institution and the student.

Transcripts of records are produced by the home institution for outgoing students prior to their period of study abroad. Transcripts of records for outgoing ECTS students will include full details of previous higher education study and should be attached to the student application form sent to the intended host institution(s). Some of the items which cannot yet be filled in at the time of the application (e.g. grades for the current academic year) can be supplemented at a later stage.

The availability of a transcript of records before the student goes abroad makes their insertion into a foreign programme of study easier. It helps the ECTS coordinators of the host institution to determine if the level of all course units in the programme of study proposed in the application form is appropriate and if all prerequisites have indeed been fulfilled.

The transcript of records is produced by the host institution for returning students at the end of their period of study abroad. The transcript of records constitutes the main document for supporting the student's claim for full academic recognition and transfer of ECTS credits, and provides evidence of studies abroad to future prospective employers.

Transcripts of records will be produced as quickly as possible after the student has been assessed on all course units of the programme of study, in order to facilitate full academic recognition and proper insertion into the next academic year if need be, either at the home institution if the student returns there or at a new host institution.

Reference 4FAD15 ECTS Transcript of Records form can be found on our website www.itb.ie under the heading international studies.

21. Further Studies Abroad

An ECTS student may either return to the home institution, stay at the host institution - or move to another host institution. The institutions themselves will decide whether or not this is acceptable and what conditions the student must fulfil in order to transfer registration. The transcript of records will be a particularly useful means of helping institutions to make these decisions since it provides a detailed history of the student's academic achievements.

22. The ECTS Grading Scale

The ECTS grading scale is not currently used by ITB. The following paragraph describes the accepted ECTS grading scale across Europe.

ECTS guarantees academic recognition of studies abroad by providing a way of measuring and comparing the student's learning achievements, and transferring them from one institution to another. A distinction must be made between credits, which reflect the quantity of work and grades, which represent the quality of work.

The ECTS grading scale has been developed in order to help institutions translate the grades awarded by host institutions to ECTS students. It provides information on the student's performance additional to that provided by the institution's grades; it does not replace the local grade.

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 in five subgroups: the best 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 allow a passing grade are divided into two subgroups: 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 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	<i>The use of words like “excellent” or “good” is no longer recommended as they do not fit with percentage based ranking of the ECTS Grade Transfer Scale.</i>
B	25	
C	30	
D	25	
E	10	
FX	-	<i>FAIL- some work required to pass</i>
F	-	<i>FAIL- considerable further work is required</i>

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.

The degree of differentiation shown in marks varies greatly not only from country to country, but in many cases within a single country, or indeed within a single institution. Expression in terms of ECTS grades is simple where the local marks are highly differentiated. However a sizable number of instances exist where the local marks are less differentiated than those of the ECTS grading scale. These cases fall into two categories depending on whether the primary assessment data allows establishment of a ranking list or not. Where the original assessment can provide a ranking list, this ranking may be used directly to provide the appropriate ECTS grade. Where a valid ranking 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 grades is of great importance. When large numbers of students are being assessed for the same course unit/module at the same time, the situation is straightforward as the results of the assessment can be used to arrive directly at ranking and therefore to ECTS grades. A cohort of student where at least 30 individuals achieve passing grades is suggested as the minimum number necessary for meaningful ranking, although larger numbers are to be preferred.

A variety of strategies are open 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 in a variety of ways to arrive at suitably sized cohorts. For instance experience shows that:

- the marks over several course units/modules of similar level often follow a similar distribution
- the distribution of marks over a five year period is likely to produce a balanced result.

Higher education institutions should strive to provide ECTS grades for all of their students and to take into account the ECTS grades awarded by other institutions. A certain amount of flexibility is always advisable since the ECTS grading scale was designed to improve transparency of a variety of grading systems and cannot, by itself, cover all possible cases.

23. **Frequently Asked Questions**

All learners are different. Some learn slowly, others quickly. Why base credits on “the average learner”?

Of course, individual learners might need more or less time to achieve the same learning outcomes. However, basing a programme on a reasonable and realistic estimate of the time required by an average learner protects all students from unrealistic and overloaded programmes or from excessively light and undemanding ones. It helps academic staff to design and deliver realistic curricula.

Are credits recognised automatically by universities?

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

Does a university have to accept students with ECTS credits wishing to enter later years of study?

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

Is there a minimum number of credits that must 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.

Would the same module utilised in different programmes of the same institution carry the same number of credits for all students?

Yes, if the module is truly the same, it would carry the same credit weight, independent of the programme in which it is situated. However, it may happen that modules having similar learning outcomes might require different amounts of time from students in different programmes because of differences in their previous knowledge and in the choice of materials to be studied. These characteristics will be clarified in the course descriptions contained in the Information Package/Course catalogue.

Can an academic programme contain more than 60 credits per year?

In exceptional cases, when a programme of study clearly exceeds the European average of around 1500/1800 hours per year, an academic year could contain more credits. These cases must be well documented and justified in the Information Package/Course Catalogue. A programme designed to require 52 weeks of full-time study (no holidays), would normally lead to 75 credit points. The 'high intensity' or 'special quality' of a course is not a reason to give more credits.

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

A full time student would normally acquire 60 credits per year, 30 per semester or 20 per trimester because study programmes are designed to this purpose. A successful mobile student might, exceptionally, acquire a few more or less credits as a result of the complexity of designing a programme of study abroad which fits his/her curricular needs. Such small differences would be foreseen and approved in the Learning Agreement.

Can an unsuccessful student receive credits for course units failed?

Students need to be successful and be awarded a passing grade in order to receive credits for the course unit concerned. Within a condoning procedure the institution might exempt a student from getting credits in a specific module by stating that overall the student has achieved the objectives of that particular year of the programme the student has registered for because of his/her overall performance. Details of this process have clearly to be stated.

Can a student who studies abroad and sits exams abroad be obliged to sit exams (during or after the stay abroad, in person or electronically) at the home university, covering the same period of study?

No, the period of study undertaken abroad (including examinations or other forms of assessment) replaces a comparable period of study (likewise including examination or other forms of assessment) at the home institution.

Must a university recognise courses successfully taken by the student, but not

listed in the Learning Agreement?

No, the university is not under such an obligation. All courses followed should be listed in the Learning Agreement. The Learning Agreement may be amended and such an amended version must be signed again by the three parties concerned: the home university, the host university and the student.

Are work placements covered by ECTS?

Yes, ECTS is not limited to taught courses. It also covers work placements. Work placements can be described in terms of learning outcomes and work time expressed in ECTS credits. The award of credits, of course, can only take place after appropriate assessment.

May the doctoral cycle carry credits?

Yes, ECTS can be applied both to taught courses and to research. Hence it can be applied to the doctoral cycle. The learning which takes place in the doctoral cycle, as in any other, can be described in terms of learning outcomes and work time expressed in ECTS credits.

What is the point of describing course units / modules and study programmes in terms of learning outcomes rather than in terms of contents in the traditional way?

In final analysis the aim of education is to prepare learners for an active and positive role in society. Learning outcomes place the emphasis on the results of the learning process for the learner in terms of knowledge, understanding and abilities rather than on the means the teaching staff employs to obtain those results. In other words, the use of learning outcomes represents a shift in thinking from a staff-based input-oriented system to a student-centred output-oriented approach.

What is the connection between learning outcomes and competences?

Learning outcomes of a specific study programme or a course unit / module are expressed in terms of competences.

Is the use of the ECTS Grade Transfer Scale obligatory under ECTS?

The use of the scale is strongly recommended. The scale is, however, not obligatory for the award of the ECTS label.

How should we handle systems which provide only pass – fail assessment?

Obviously local systems where assessment is aimed at only pass/fail or threshold criteria cannot provide ranking. In these cases a pass should be indicated, for example by inserting the letter P or the word ‘pass’ in the column for grades. Such institutions which award only pass/fail or threshold criteria should indicate this very clearly in their Information Package/Course Catalogue as this fact may have recognition consequences for visiting students returning to an institution with a more differentiated grading system.

Is it necessary to indicate the percentage of students who failed a course

unit/module?

It is not obligatory, but transparency is increased if the percentage failure rate is given for each of the courses graded. It is recommended that these rates be included in the Transcript of Records.

What should one do when the national system has fewer passing marks than the five letters (for successful students) in the ECTS grading scale?

The closer an institution can get to a one-to-one relationship between its own marks and the ECTS grading scale, the easier the grading process will become. In other cases decisions must be made according to the distribution pattern of local grades trying to avoid injustice to students.