

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

Key Features

What is a credit system?

A credit system is a systematic way of describing an educational programme by attaching credits to its components. The definition of credits in higher education systems may be based on different parameters, such as student workload, learning outcomes and contact hours.

What is ECTS?

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

How did ECTS develop?

ECTS was introduced in 1989, within the framework of Erasmus, now part of the Socrates programme. ECTS is the only credit system which has been successfully tested and used across Europe. ECTS was set up initially for credit transfer. The system facilitated the recognition of periods of study abroad and thus enhanced the quality and volume of student mobility in Europe. Recently ECTS is developing into an accumulation system to be implemented at institutional, regional, national and European level. This is one of the key objectives of the Bologna Declaration of June 1999.

Why introduce ECTS?

ECTS makes study programmes easy to read and compare for all students, local and foreign. ECTS facilitates mobility and academic recognition. ECTS helps universities to organise and revise their study programmes. ECTS can be used across a variety of programmes and modes of delivery. ECTS makes European higher education more attractive for students from other continents.

What are the key features of ECTS?

- 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.
- The performance of the student is documented by a local/national grade. It is good practice to add an ECTS grade, in particular in case of credit transfer. The ECTS grading scale ranks the students on a statistical basis. Therefore, statistical data on student performance is a prerequisite for applying the ECTS grading system. Grades are assigned among students with a *pass grade* as follows:

- A best 10%
- B next 25%
- C next 30%
- D next 25%
- E next 10%

A distinction is made between the grades FX and F that are used for unsuccessful students. FX means: “fail- some more work required to pass” and F means: “fail – considerable further work required”. The inclusion of failure rates in the Transcript of Records is optional.

What are the key documents of ECTS?

- The regular Information Package/Course Catalogue of the institution to be published in two languages (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 the items of the checklist attached to this document, including information for host students from abroad.
- The Learning Agreement contains the list of courses to be taken with the ECTS credits which will be awarded for each course. This list must be agreed by the student and the responsible academic body of the institution concerned. In the case of credit transfer, the Learning Agreement has to be agreed by the student and the two institutions concerned before the student’s departure and updated immediately when changes occur.
- The Transcript of Records documents the performance of a student by showing the list of courses taken, the ECTS credits gained, local or national credits, if any, local grades and possibly ECTS grades awarded. In the case of credit transfer, the Transcript of Records has to be issued by the home institution for outgoing students before departure and by the host institution for incoming students at the end of their period of study.

How to obtain the ECTS Label?

- An ECTS label will be awarded to institutions which apply ECTS correctly in all first and second cycle degree programmes. The label will raise the profile of the institution as a transparent and reliable partner in European and international cooperation.
- The criteria for the label will be: an Information Package/Course Catalogue (online or hard copy in one or more booklets) in two languages (or only in English for programmes taught in English), use of ECTS credits, samples of Learning Agreements, Transcripts of Records and proofs of academic recognition.
- An application form has been published on the Europa web site of the European Commission. The application deadline is Nov 1st, annually. The label will be valid for three academic years. The list of institutions in possession of the label will be published on the Europa web site.

What is the Diploma Supplement?

The Diploma Supplement is a document attached to a higher education diploma providing a standardised description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the graduate. The Diploma Supplement provides transparency and facilitates academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates). A Diploma Supplement label will be awarded to institutions which deliver a Diploma Supplement, to all graduates in all first and second cycle degree programmes, in accordance with the structure and recommendations to be found on the Europa web-site of the European Commission.

Where to find more information on ECTS and the Diploma Supplement?

More information on ECTS and the Diploma Supplement can be found on the Europa web site of the European Commission, including the ECTS Users’ Guide and a list of ECTS/DS Counsellors.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/ects_en.html

Checklist for the Information Package/Course Catalogue

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

Information on degree programmes

General description

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

Description of individual course units

- Course title
- Course code
- Type of course
- Level of course
- Year of study
- Semester/trimester
- Number of credits allocated (based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives or learning outcomes)
- Name of lecturer
- Objective of the course (preferably expressed in terms of learning outcomes and competences)
- Prerequisites
- Course contents
- Recommended reading
- Teaching methods
- Assessment methods
- Language of instruction

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

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