

1993-2003 “Thoughts on ECTS”

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What is ECTS?

ECTS, the European Credit Transfer System, was developed by the E.U. Commission in order to provide common procedures to guarantee academic recognition of studies abroad.

Full academic recognition is fundamental for student mobility in the framework of the 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 the home university (*including examinations or other forms of assessment*). The content of the study programmes may differ.

ECTS credits are a value allocated to course units to describe the **student workload** required to complete them.

They reflect the quantity of work each course requires (*in relation to the total quantity of work required to complete a full year of academic study at the institution*). Included: lectures, practical work, seminars, private work (in library or at home), and examinations or other assessed activities.

ECTS credits express a relative value.

In ECTS, 60 credits represent the workload of a year of study; normally 30 credits are given for a semester and 20 credits for a term.

It is suggested that no special courses are set up for ECTS purposes, but that all ECTS courses are mainstream courses of the participating institutions, as followed by home students under normal regulations.

But be prepared to be flexible over language and culture courses!

Credits are awarded only when the course has been completed and all required examinations have been taken **successfully**.

ECTS Documents for students involved in ECTS

1. ECTS handbook on WWW
2. Transcript of Record (arriving)
3. Learning Agreement
4. Credits (60 = one year's workload)
5. Transcript of Record (leaving)

Key Documents

The **information package** gives written information to students and staff on the institution, the faculties and departments, the organisation and structure of studies and course units.

The **transcript of record** shows a student's learning achievements in a way that is comprehensive, commonly understood and easily transferable from one institution to another.

The **learning agreement** covers the programme of study to be taken and the ECTS credits to be awarded for satisfactory completion, committing both home and host institutions, as well as the student.

The earlier this is agreed, the better it works.

Credit Transfer

Students participating in ECTS will receive full credit for all academic work successfully carried out at any of the ECTS partner institutions.

They will be able to transfer these academic credits from one participating institution to another on the basis of prior agreement (*on the content of study programmes*) between the institutions involved.

The current state of the ECTS is relatively healthy and buoyant. It is accepted and used by over 1200 higher education institutions.

The tools it uses are tried and tested and have been shown to be effective. The principles on which it is based are sound. However, it does require further embedding within many institutions.

For the current purposes of credit transfer ECTS can be made to work well.

Problems with ECTS

1. Matching of academic levels
2. Overloading
3. Language
4. Award of Grades
5. Communication between tutors
6. Acceptance by “professional bodies”

ECTS solutions

1. Good documentation
2. Contact through e-mail and web pages
3. Teaching staff mobility
4. Experimental/Theoretical projects
5. Directed learning
6. Credits for courses in language/culture
7. **Some courses presented in English**
8. Communication between tutors (trust!)

The future

Where do we go from here?

❖ Internationalisation at home

Only 10% of students are mobile, but the other 90% can benefit from “Internationalisation” and “International Credits”.

- ❖ Teaching Staff Mobility
- ❖ Trans-national collaborative projects
- ❖ E-learning across borders
- ❖ Short institutional visits
- ❖ Intensive courses

ECTS Extension

In the last ten years many European member States have introduced their own different national **credit-based** education innovations. Most have also reformed their education and training systems to adjust them to the global dimension of the education sector. These developments are clearly linked to the creation of a common **European higher education area** envisaged by the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations.

In February 1999 the European Commission (DG EAC) established a steering group to undertake a study on the possible development of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) into a **European Credit System (ECS)** allowing for accumulation and transfer within the Life Long Learning (LLL) perspective.

The Bologna Declaration specifically mentions the establishment of '*a system of credits – such as in the ECTS system*'. It suggests '*Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, providing they are recognised by the receiving Universities concerned.*' A number of adaptations and developments to the existing ECTS tools and procedures will be necessary for such applications. There are opportunities for developing an integrative common European credit framework, derived from ECTS, designed to facilitate:

- ❖ accumulation in higher education programmes.
- ❖ post-school adult and vocational education.
- ❖ different modes of education (part-time, full -time, open and distance etc.).
- ❖ professional education and training.

Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement (DS) is a document (*attached to a higher education diploma*) aimed at improving international 'transparency' and at facilitating the academic and professional recognition of qualifications

It is designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of **all** of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification to which the supplement is appended.

It is a flexible non-prescriptive tool designed to save time, money and workload and is capable of adaptation to local needs. There is an increasing interest in the DS in FRANCE.

The use of the diploma supplement "is recommended to favour mobility and visibility of qualifications".

Some institutions (especially ENSAM) have decided to go for the DS even without central support. A working group was set up to that purpose under the aegis of CDEFI. {Conférence des Directeurs d'Ecoles et Formations d'Ingénieurs – 128 members}

Many Higher Education Institutions are waiting for a signal from the Ministry that would indicate official recognition and backing of the Diploma Supplement.

Something similar to the Diploma Supplement is being introduced in the UK as part of the Student Progress File – known as 'The Transcript'.

The Transcript is not identical to the Diploma Supplement and attempts are being made to ensure their compatibility.

Many Higher Education Institutions are sympathetic to the Diploma Supplement which contains extra information.

Degree Structures

The Bologna process has encouraged actions concerning “harmonisation” of degree structures.

Favoured is the 3-5-8 model :

- ❖ 3 years to a “Bachelor” degree
- ❖ 2 further years of Master level studies
- ❖ 3 further years of Doctoral studies

How does this process affect ICAM and its partners?

European “Master”

At the 2001 Prague Higher Education Summit, the European Ministers of higher education stated: “... Ministers called upon the higher education sector to increase the development of modules, courses and curricula at all levels with ‘European’ content, orientation or organisation. This concerns particularly modules, courses and degree curricula offered in partnership by institutions from different countries and leading to a recognised joint degree.”