

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 learning outcomes and competences to be acquired.

How did ECTS develop?

ECTS was introduced in 1989, in 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 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 convention 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 36/40 weeks per year, which implies that one credit stands for 25 to 30 working hours.
- The allocation of ECTS credits is based the official length of a study programme cycle. The total workload necessary to obtain a first cycle degree lasting officially three or four years is expressed as 180 or 240 credits.
- Student workload in ECTS includes the time spent in attending lectures, seminars, independent study, preparation for and taking of examinations, etc.
- 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 in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of study in the programme considered.
- Credits in ECTS can only be obtained after completion of the work required and appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes achieved.
- The performance of the student is documented by a local/national grade and - according to good practice - by an ECTS grade. The ECTS grading scale ranks the students on a statistical basis.

Therefore, elaboration of 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 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. The Course Catalogue must contain the items of the checklist attached to this document, including information for host students from abroad.
- The Learning Agreement, to be agreed upon before the student’s departure and to be updated immediately when changes occur. A Learning Agreement contains the list of courses to be taken and agreed upon by the student and the responsible academic bodies of the two institutions concerned.
- The Transcript of Records, 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. A Transcript of Records documents the performance of a student by showing the list of courses taken, the credits gained as well as the local grades and ECTS grades awarded.

How to obtain the ECTS Label?

- An ECTS label will be awarded to institutions which apply ECTS the proper way 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: a Course Catalogue (online or hard copy) 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 will be published on the web site of the Socrates, Leonardo & Youth TAO in June 2003 (www.socleoyouth.be) The application deadline will be Nov 1st, 2003 (and annually thereafter). The label will be valid for three academic years, starting 2004/2005. 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 etc.). 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.

Where to find more information on ECTS?

Additional information on ECTS and the Diploma Supplement can be found on the Europa web site of the European Commission, including the list of ECTS/DS Counsellors.
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/ects.html>.

Checklist for the Course Catalogue

Information on the Institution

- Name and address
- Academic calendar
- Academic authorities
- General description of the institution
- List of degree programmes offered
- Admission/registration procedures

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 test, if any

Description of individual course units

- Course title
- Course code
- Type of course
- Level of course
- Year of study
- Semester/trimester
- Number of credits allocated
- Name of lecturer
- Objective of the course (expected learning outcomes and competences to be acquired)
- Prerequisites
- Course contents
- Recommended reading
- Teaching methods
- Assessment methods
- Language of instruction

General information for students

- Accommodation
- Meals
- Medical facilities
- Facilities for special needs students
- Insurance
- Financial support for students
- Student affairs office
- Study facilities
- International programmes
- Internships
- Sports facilities
- Extra-mural and leisure activities
- Student associations

More details on how to make good course descriptions can be found in the ECTS User's Guide on the Europa web site. <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/usersg.html>