

**Ad-Hoc Advisory Group
on the ECTS Users' Guide Revision
6th Meeting**

14th of January 2026
Online

Minutes of the meeting

List of participants

Country/Institution	First Name	Last Name
European Commission (DG EAC) (Chair)	Susanne	Conze
European Commission (DG EAC)	Kinga	Szuly
European Commission (DG EAC)	Sophia	Catsambi
European Commission (DG EAC)	Bulent	Artan
European Commission (DG EAC)	Camille	Odent
European Commission (DG EAC)	Johannes	Gehringer
European Commission (DG EAC)	Yann-Maël	Bideau
European Commission (DG EMPL)	Klara	Engels-Perenyi
Knowledge Innovation Center (Lead expert)	Colin	Tück
Austria (Fachhochschule Technikum Wien)	Agnes	Kriz
Cedefop	Zelda	Azzara
Croatia (Algebra University)	Ana	Tecilazić
Denmark (University of Southern Denmark)	Per	Æbelø
ENQA	Elena	Cîrlan
EQAR	Aleksandar	Šušnjar
ESU	Lana	Par
EUA	Thérèse	Zhang
EURASHE	Ana	Duplava
Finland	Jonna	Korhonen
ICF	Cecile	McGrath
ICF	Elodie	Lafont
ICF	Faridi	Hamad
Ireland (QQI)	Jim	Murray
Italy (University of Pisa)	Ann Katherine	Isaacs
Italy (CIMEA)	Chiara	Finocchietti
Lithuania (Vilnius University)	Raimonda	Markevicienė
The Netherlands (NUFFIC)	José	Ravenstein
The Netherlands (University of Groningen)	Robert	Wagenaar
Poland (Warsaw School of Economics)	Jakub	Brdulak
Ukraine	Andriy	Stavytskyy
EHEA Secretariat	Irina	Duma

Ilona Murphy, Frederik De Decker, Ronny Heintze and Peter Ondreicka were absent.

1. Welcome

Documents: [Presentation](#)

The Chair (Susanne Conze) welcomed everyone to the online meeting and briefly presented the agenda.

2. BFUG update and follow-up

The Chair (Susanne Conze) presented the feedback of the BFUG on the ECTS Users' Guide as very positive, with all delegations taking the floor expressing a high level of agreement and appreciation for the work done. However, she mentioned that a clear point of divergence was on opening the ECTS system to the use outside higher education, with some delegations clearly opposing the proposal. The Chair mentioned that EUA also pointed out in the BFUG that their membership would be divided on this matter. Given the strong division in the BFUG, the Chair noted that opening the system to other sectors would rather be considered in the future, while the text keeps a voluntary wording for those not against. Regarding the topic of grade transparency and grade conversion, the BFUG did not raise any particular issues and expected the Advisory Group to find fair and transparent solutions. Another question raised by BFUG members was related to whether the EQF/QF-EHEA level would have to be mentioned for all ECTS credits, and which type of ECTS credits could be attributed to which EQF level.

EUA asked for further clarification relating to the division of countries on the issue of opening the ECTS system for use outside the higher education sector, noting that not in each and every country the responsibility for VET falls within the responsibilities of the ministers represented in the BFUG. The Chair clarified that, for example, Austria was the first country to express strong reservations on the use of ECTS outside higher education, referring to the question of quality assurance of other learning formats, which was seconded by some other countries. She also mentioned that there was no comment indicating that country representatives would not be able to opine on the topic, but countries clearly stating that they were not prepared for this.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) mentioned that, beside those BFUG representatives which are only responsible for higher education, there might be countries willing to open the system to other sectors, and one should not interfere with those systems, also given that they might have their own quality assurance mechanisms. Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) underlined that in her view at least the idea of opening the ECTS system to other sectors should be an offer rather than an imposition. Therefore, a country should be able to accept that ECTS can be used for other sectors, whether or not it is ready or wishes to extend it in their own country.

3. Revised ECTS Users' Guide – openness for use outside HE

Colin Tück (Lead expert) briefly presented the main concerns and reservations in terms of opening the ECTS system for use outside higher education, namely the reliability of quality assurance arrangements, trust and transferability, and the question of whether EHEA should decide to open the ECTS given the ministers' responsibilities. His suggested approach consisted of linking ECTS credits to national qualifications' frameworks (NQF) and related certification/accreditation processes, and therefore award credits only for learning opportunities that are formally part of NQF. In terms of trust and transferability, it was

emphasized that ECTS should always be linked with an indication of level, and recognition between levels would be fully in the receiving institution or authority's autonomy. Nonetheless, using ECTS outside higher education would be entirely on a voluntary basis.

Ana Tecilazić (Croatia) suggested that the Users' Guide be clear that it would not only give the opportunity to institutions outside higher education to use ECTS, but it would also be a responsibility of higher education institutions to decide on the recognition of that type of education. She believed that another issue would be whether the labour market would accept ECTS awarded from outside higher education, given that traditionally ECTS credits had always been linked to higher education. She also suggested explaining more clearly in the Guide the necessity for upskilling and reskilling throughout individuals' lives, in the current educational and societal landscape.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) highlighted the current developments in lifelong learning, as well as the premise that a strong relationship with the VET sector and the professional world had been developed over time. He recalled the discussions during the 2000-2007 period, when the European Commission's idea was to create a mechanism similar with ECTS for all types of education, but since the EQVET was developed, the two mechanisms were split. He also noted that for VET system, the volume of learning and the outcomes would still be defined under the same philosophy as for higher education, therefore the same mechanism (i.e. ECTS) could be used. He argued that allowing the possibility of using ECTS by other sectors would promote upskilling and reskilling.

Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) emphasised that ECTS was rather a language that could be understood, accepted and converted into stackable credits by the institutions, and the basis for recognition always remained voluntary. Therefore, the institutions would not be forced to recognise credits awarded by other providers. The Chair (Susanne Conze) emphasized that the BFUG had a positive approach towards cooperation with VET and agreed that it would be important how the change would be presented, as well as to give reassurances to the BFUG that opening up the ECTS would not be forcing countries to implement such a change or make them unable to control national developments.

Klara Engels-Perenyi (European Commission, DG EMPL) showed confidence that there would be enough time before the upcoming Ministerial Conference to clarify those issues from the ECTS Users' Guide that might be seen as a threat by some countries.

Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania) showed reluctance to the requirement of learning opportunities to be formally part of the NQF but endorsed the link between ECTS and level indicators. She also provided the Lithuanian example working on developing micro-credentials, mentioning that it would be impossible to place them properly within the NQF, regardless the use of Dublin descriptors and program descriptions.

Jonna Korhonen (Finland) indicated not to be surprised by the BFUG's reaction on opening the ECTS to other sectors. She provided the Finnish example where, even though VET uses competence points, which are not ECTS credits, there is no problem at all for cooperation between the two sectors. Given that in the case of higher education, the monitoring of ECTS implementation is performed through robust QA mechanisms, while for other sectors might not be such mechanisms in place, Jonna noted that the challenge would be on how ECTS would be understood in the future by the society at large and whether there would be different kinds

of ECTS perception by the society. Therefore, the question to be addressed is on how ECTS can be inserted into other sectors which do not have the same kind of arrangements in place.

José Ravenstein (The Netherlands) noted that it is not only a question on how the openness to other sectors would be presented in the ECTS Users' Guide, but also how the threats perceived by the higher education would be addressed.

The Chair (Susanne Conze) emphasized that the previously mentioned issues and questions could be summarised into a matter of trust between the sectors. She noted that, if higher education institutions can decide what kind of learning they recognise, then they should automatically provide feedback to the other sectors on what information and proof of quality provision they expect. Therefore, it would be a process that could not finalise during the next year, and would be developed at different pace depending on each country. She suggested making clear that development had already reached different stages, and the aim of the ECTS Users' Guide would be to encourage further development.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) mentioned that there should be no issue in trusting VET providers in levels 3, 4 and 5 EQF, given that they were the professionals in their fields, and they should take that responsibility of providing such education.

Zelda Azzara (Cedefop), supported by Colin Tück (Lead expert), highlighted that the 2015 version of the ECTS Users' Guide did not preclude VET or other providers from using ECTS. She noted that mentioning in the revised version that it would not be possible for those providers to use ECTS would clearly be going backward instead of moving forward when referring to lifelong learning. Nonetheless, she underlined that the Guide clearly specifies that the opportunity of using ECTS outside higher education is under the decision of national authorities.

The Chair (Susanne Conze) proposed identifying the ways to improve the text in the ECTS Users' Guide to address the concerns showed by some countries on opening the system to other sectors. To summarise the discussion, she noted that the Advisory Group agreed to link ECTS with level indication, and that recognition by the receiving institution would be on a voluntary basis.

Colin Tück (Lead expert) clarified that there would still be the provision that national authorities should indicate which institutions and which providers could award credits at which levels.

Chiara Finocchietti (Italy) suggested reinforcing dialogue between the two sectors, to further ensure fair recognition of learning outcomes achieved outside the higher education settings, especially in the context of ECTS credits awarded at level 5 EQF by non-higher education providers. From a practical perspective, when having a qualification awarded by a VET provider which had been accredited as such in the VET sector, the value of that qualification would be trusted. On the other hand, she showed her understanding of the reluctance to recognise by default non-formal providers. She suggested that opening the ECTS to use outside higher education by formal providers as a first step, would be easier in terms of building trust and ensuring transparency and reliability of information, given that a quality assurance framework was already in place.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) considered that all recognised providers, whether formal or non-formal, should be able to award ECTS credits.

4. Revised ECTS Users' Guide – grade transparency and conversion

Colin Tück briefly presented the current proposals to address grade conversion and grade transparency, and suggested to reflect on the continued use of the A-E/F scale in practice.

Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania), seconded by Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy), proposed dropping the use of A-E/F letters in the scale, to reduce bureaucratic burden laying on institutions when it comes to converting the grades. Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) noted that it is important to know whether this scale was still widely used by institutions, to better understand how they operate in practice. Colin Tück (Lead expert) clarified that the research conducted by ICF confirmed its use in practice.

The Chair (Susanne Conze) proposed discussing which method would be most suitable to be offered to institutions, namely either Method A which includes a reference table or Method B which implies a direct distribution comparison and would be the method included in the 2015 version of the ECTS Users' Guide.

Supported by Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania), Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) believed that the initial ambition in dealing with the grades was to make the Users' Guide simple, clear, and more likely to be used by institutions. Knowing that grades are given based on different systems and having different understandings, she suggested offering guidance in the annex of the Users' Guide on concrete grade conversion but, in general, to require that the transcripts of records must include the grades provided by the host institution together with a simple explanation of what those grades mean in the host institution or country. She completed with the suggestion of having "grade information sheets", in which the numerical grades given would be accompanied by the percentage of learners receiving those grades, and the addition of how they are commonly understood in the respective country, namely how many of these grades fit in different levels of achievement of the learning outcomes. Therefore, with such information sheets accompanying grades in the course catalogue, transcripts of records and diploma supplements, conversion would be made only if absolutely necessary. Therefore, she called for the use of Method B, which includes both quality description of the grade and the statistical distribution.

Kinga Szuly (European Commission, DG EAC) agreed that the ECTS Users' Guide should include the necessary information to enhance grading transparency, and it should be available before going on a mobility or even before enrolling to a higher education institution. On how grades can be transferred from one system to another, the study conducted by ICF showed that higher education institutions are usually looking at conversion, as the easiest approach. However, acknowledging that in some countries grade distribution was prevalent, she and Yann-Maël Bideau believed that a good compromise would be to have both methods at disposal.

Yann-Maël Bideau (European Commission, DG EAC) noted that grade distribution does not necessarily define the meaning of a grade, while grades should reflect individual performances with respect to the level of achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Hence, he believed that using the grade conversion reference table would provide stability and visibility for the students to know how their grades would be converted once returned from mobilities, especially when grades count for further study, scholarships and other benefits, while the statistical approach would not be necessarily relevant and would depend too much on the reference cohort. Yann-Maël Bideau also stressed that the statistical distribution methods would face technical and capacity constraints, in particular for joint programmes and small cohorts.

Aleksandar Šušnjar (EQAR) suggested that the ECTS Users' Guide be very precise about the prerequisites for applying any of the methods. Regarding Method A, he proposed using the same principle for grade conversion as the EQF, namely using the conversion tables as translation tools between different systems. This translation approach would be mostly important for the case of joint programmes.

Colin Tück (Lead expert) emphasised that the A-E/F scale is still widely used as a purely translation tool and could be complemented with national definitions of each grade, thus being very close to having a table of the national grades and their definitions. Then, only one additional step would be necessary to match those definitions with a European reference scale.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) considered that firstly grade transfer would be enough between two partner institutions, while grade conversion would only be needed in exceptional cases. He agreed that grade distribution related to a small cohort would indeed lead to statistical issues, but claimed that comparison against a larger cohort such as that of an entire faculty, would provide reliable results.

Irina Duma (EHEA Secretariat) noted that a difference between the aims of grade distribution should be made. On one hand, grade distribution would be applied for transparency reasons, while on another hand it would be fed into grade conversion process. However, she noted that including grade distribution information for each grade in the diploma supplement would automatically impose a supplementary burden on institutions, which may result into a minimum positive change in terms of objectiveness and fairness for the students. At the same time, she recalled students' view on grade distribution as not necessarily being seen a fair and objective tool, because it would be too dependent on the type of cohort, class or even teaching staff.

Yann-Maël Bideau (European Commission, DG EAC) noted that the fairness of the statistical method depends on the relevance of the cohort used for statistical distribution. He noted that Method A providing a qualitative assessment of the meaning of a grade, summarized through a letter from A to E/F, would be more understandable for the users. From the European Universities' alliances, it was observed that there is an interest of having a reference base to use. Therefore, he suggested that Method A would be used primarily, while Method B could serve as a complementary one to support quality assurance and monitoring of grade inflation.

Colin Tück (Lead expert) emphasised that none of the methods proposed would be unfair to students. Given the wide use of the A-E/F scale he suggested using it as a translation tool.

The European Commission asked the Advisory Group whether there is strong opposition for the proposal of keeping both methods in the revised ECTS Users' Guide, given the different opinions expressed so far.

Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) reiterated her proposal of making grade convergence as simple as possible, while showing strong reservations over the argument that the A-E/F scale is perceived as simple by universities. On the other hand, she acknowledged that there is no technical way to put statistical distribution and quality understandings together, and this would have to be done by each institution for each cohort.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) noted that the compromise would imply finding a solution to simplify current practices. He suggested focusing on the transfer of grades as they stand,

claiming that the real result would be sought for by other institutions or employers, and not necessarily the conversion that has been made by the home institution.

The Chair (Susanne Conze) suggested proposing two methods which can be used by institutions depending on their context, acknowledging that the challenge would be to formulate the level of achievement of learning outcomes and link it to the A-E/F scale.

Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania) noted that it would be a matter of re-educating institutions which use the A-E/F scale, while identifying the issues leading to reluctance of using other approaches.

Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) showed confidence that the Advisory Group could manage to develop a proposal taking into account all the reservations and difficulties expressed so far. She suggested to include concrete examples of how universities could use both methods complementary.

Jakub Brdulak (Poland) reflected on the detail level of the ECTS Users' Guide, which might impose further complexity of its use. He noted that in some systems where percentages related to the achievement of learning outcomes are used, it might be difficult to use the extra layer of A-E/F scale and its meaning, then perform an extra step in translation of those grades to link them with the grading scales. Therefore, he proposed referring to percentages of learning outcomes achievement to simplify communication between institutions.

Chiara Finocchietti (Italy) built on Robert Wagenaar's proposal of focusing more on the recognition of the grades rather than conversion and agreed with Ann Katherine Isaacs regarding the necessity of having more transparency on the respective grading scale and grading system. She also underlined that grade conversion is needed for public competition, and students need to know how the grades received in a system would translate into their home system. In terms of openness of the ECTS system, she noted that it would not only be about recognition of credits and qualifications but could also serve as an inspiration for other sectors. Nonetheless, she appreciated the current formulation in the Users' Guide related to the digital dimension, and suggested that from a forward-looking perspective, it would be useful to include grade-related information in the digital ecosystem of data.

Camille Odent (European Commission, DG EAC) clarified that the proposed reference table in Method A also included the percentage of the achievement level of learning outcomes, thus making it possible for students to understand where they stand with respect to the intended learning outcomes. On the other hand, Method B shows the percentages of the student population which achieved the respective grade. She emphasised that one method should not exclude the other, because they cater to different needs, and including them both in the ECTS Users' Guide would be the proposed compromise by the European Commission. Kinga Szuly (European Commission, DG EAC) added that two philosophies are up to discussion, the first related to ranking students based on their learning outcomes level achieved, and the second related to ranking students based on their peers' performance.

The Chair (Susanne Conze) summarised the discussion by highlighting the agreement that more transparency upfront is needed and wished for, through including the information on the institutions' grading culture and meaning in the course catalogue. Moreover, grade conversion should be rather the exception than the rule, and the original grade of the host institution should be reflected also in the diploma supplement but, when needed for calculating average of all grades, the Users' Guide should propose the two options for grade conversion which could

be used either together or only one of them by the home institution. For grade conversion, the discussion would be on which kind of description is needed in qualitative terms.

Kinga Szuly (European Commission, DG EAC) opined that it would be more complicated to institutions to use both methods in parallel, and the easiest approach would still be to use a reference scale, regardless of the letters or numbers used for defining it. Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) believed that the A-E/F scale would still not simplify the conversion of grades, and believed that having the two kinds of information proposed would not make administrative work more complicated.

Colin Tück (Lead expert) emphasised that it has not been very helpful mixing the statistical distribution and the qualitative definition into the same reference table. In this regard, the suggestion was to leave the reference table purely qualitative and have the statistical distribution separately. He suggested discussing the qualitative definitions in detail, and identifying where these could be revised.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) proposed the compromise of requiring the provision of information from institutions related both to their grading system and the quality descriptors of each grade.

Jim Murray (Ireland) emphasised that regardless the agreement of the proposal, the challenge would be to convince institutions to provide such information, given that the smaller ones are usually less developed in terms of data management capacities. He also noted that the issue of grade meanings in any particular context has been contentious and was often much debated in the society. However, the revision of the ECTS Users' Guide would be an opportunity to reaffirm some basic principles and to convince institutions on the way forward.

Jonna Korhonen (Finland) reflected on the different philosophies of awarding grades, noting that, in the future, grades obtained through traditional tests might not be as relevant as those other ways to assess the level of learning achieved.

5. Revised ECTS Users' Guide – next steps

Colin Tück (Lead expert) noted that the initial intention was to circulate a new draft of the ECTS Users' Guide to the BFUG by the 20th of January, yet considering the complexity of the discussion it might take longer to revise the parts related to grading. Therefore, the new draft would firstly be circulated to the Advisory Group, and then sent to the BFUG as soon as possible before the 23rd of February, to support the preparation of discussions for the BFUG meeting to be held between 9th-10th of March.

The Chair (Susanne Conze) noted that, if the written comments would not be able to cover all issues addressed, then a quick online meeting would be organised for further exchange before sending the draft document to the BFUG.

6. Any other business

Chiara Finocchietti (Italy) asked whether the group would be expected to also comment on minor points like references and links, or leave those kinds of comments for the consolidated final version of the Users' Guide. Colin Tück (Lead expert) encouraged the group to indicate whether some references need to be updated.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) suggested to include clear definitions on certain terms such as student-centred learning and micro-credentials, to avoid misunderstanding by the users or other interested parties.

Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania) recalled the discussion on the virtual mobility and emphasised the necessity of defining it, especially in the context of European universities alliances. The Chair (Susanne Conze) clarified that the Working Group on Internationalisation and Mobility had been working on a list of definitions, and underlined that the definitions should be coherent across different documents. Colin Tück (Lead expert) clarified there would be a coordination meeting with the working structures responsible for revising different documents, with the aim to ensure coherence of definitions.

Jonna Korhonen (Finland) suggested that the ECTS Users' Guide explain those references that might not be familiar to readers who are not directly involved in the working structures of the EHEA, such as those pertaining to tools, digital instruments or projects mentioned in the Users' Guide. The Chair (Susanne Conze) encouraged to flag those references that might raise confusion to users.

7. Closing of the meeting

The Chair (Susanne Conze) closed the meeting by thanking the Advisory Group members, Colin Tück and the entire ICF team on behalf of the European Commission for their work and contributions from the past year.