

ECTS USERS' GUIDE 2027

Draft 2.1 – for BFUG consultation

(November 2025)

The ECTS Users' Guide is the officially approved description of the European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System. Its key features and basic rules are defined in sections 1 & 2. The following sections 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7 offer guidelines for implementing ECTS. They also include links to useful supporting documents and references.

The Guide uses the following wording to denote different levels of requirement:

- **must / required:** mean that the statement is an absolute requirement of ECTS;
- **should / recommended:** mean that there may exist valid reasons in particular circumstances to choose a different course, but the full implications must be understood and carefully weighed before doing so;
- **may / can / optional:** mean that a statement is truly optional.

The whole Guide is submitted for approval by ministers, but the following modalities for future changes are proposed:

- **Principles and Objectives**, and **Key Features** can only be changed by Ministers;
- Changes to **explanatory chapters** can be commissioned and approved by the BFUG;
- Changes to **“further reading” boxes** can be made by the European Commission and EHEA Secretariat, while informing the BFUG.

Note: the final format of publication might be different from a classical PDF document, or there might be several formats. For example as a website.

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0. Introduction

The European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS) is a key tool for defining, organising and delivering learning experiences, as well as recording, certifying, accumulating and recognising them. It makes learning opportunities more transparent, learner-centred and enhances their quality.

ECTS was first introduced in 1989, within the Erasmus programme, so that the credits students earned during their studies abroad could be recognised and counted towards their degree after returning to study in their home institution. Since 2004, ECTS has been used not only for transferring credits but also for accumulating them in institutions' degree programmes.

The education landscape has been changing with the development of more diversified and flexible learning opportunities, including short stand-alone learning opportunities that lead to micro-credentials or similar formats, in a lifelong learning perspective. A growing number of learners follow such learning opportunities without necessarily pursuing a full qualification.

Following the request by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Ministers in Tirana (Tirana Communiqué, 2024), the ECTS Users' Guide of 2015 has been revised to clarify the key features of ECTS and show how to adapt them to current developments, including the growing importance of micro-credentials. This revised Guide takes into account these and other recent developments in the EHEA.

Starting with the current version of the Guide, ECTS is explicitly open for use in all education sectors, fields and levels. That is, ECTS is a universal credit system for lifelong learning, suitable for learning at all levels and in all contexts. References to education institutions in this Guide refer to any education provider at any level, incl. higher education institutions, VET providers, schools, etc.

Some parts of this Guide refer to *higher* education (institutions) where specific provisions or guidance apply. This reflects that ECTS is a key commitment of the EHEA and thus obligatory in higher education, as opposed to other sectors.

In vocational education and training (VET), ECTS has been increasingly used since the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) was repealed in 2020.

ECTS was developed for the European region, but it has also inspired the development of credit systems in several other parts of the world. While ECTS credits can only be awarded by education providers quality-assured in line with the respective provisions in this Guide, the principles and features of ECTS may be used to develop national or regional credit systems outside Europe, or directly by education providers worldwide.

The revision has been informed by a study on the current use and implementation of ECTS. An Advisory Group, chaired by the European Commission and including experts from EHEA countries

as well as stakeholder organisations, was consulted on the draft versions of the Guide. The Guide was submitted to the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and has been adopted by Ministers for Higher Education of the EHEA in 2027 at the Iasi-Chisinau Ministerial Conference.

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1. Principles and Objectives

The European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS) is based on the principles of learner-centred and active learning, rooted in the Student-Centred Learning (SCL) concept that underpins the EHEA. While ECTS was originally developed for higher education, it can be used across all education levels and sectors.

ECTS offers an effective and transparent approach for documenting learning in a lifelong learning context. Learning is described in terms of learning outcomes and associated learner workload.

ECTS is used in higher education in line with the EHEA key commitments. Furthermore, ECTS can be used for all types of learning, regardless of the level, the mode of delivery, the status of the learner or the learning context (formal, non-formal and informal). The use of ECTS in other education sectors can strengthen permeability between sectors and support the development of a flexible lifelong learning system.

ECTS supports the planning, design, implementation, delivery and evaluation of learning opportunities, e.g. course units, modules, degree programmes and micro-credentials. ECTS is an instrument for certifying, transferring and recognising learning in formal as well as non-formal or informal contexts. ECTS credits are awarded by formally recognised education providers and accompanied by level indicators.

ECTS supports the organisation of national and international learner mobility, and the automatic recognition of learning between education providers.

By using learning outcomes and workload in curriculum design and delivery, ECTS places the learner at the centre of the educational process. Moreover, using ECTS credits facilitates the creation and documentation of flexible learning pathways, thus allowing learners greater autonomy and giving them greater responsibility.

Due to its outcomes-based approach, the use of ECTS:

- makes learning pathways more flexible, allowing for learners' choices and meeting different learners' needs;
- enhances interaction with all stakeholders;
- establishes a closer link between learning opportunities and societal requirements, including those of the labour market;
- facilitates mobility within an institution or country, from institution to institution, from country to country, and recognition between different educational sectors, modes of learning (e.g. on site, online, hybrid) and contexts of learning (i.e. formal, non-formal, and informal);
- supports the design and delivery of joint educational offers by different institutions;
- facilitates the recognition of prior learning and experience. It encourages wider participation in lifelong learning and a higher level of completion.

Developments in information technology have a profound impact on education. Generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools have the potential to support the use of ECTS in the design of learning opportunities, the formulation of learning outcomes, and to improve transparency, consistency, and efficiency in the allocation and recognition of credits. AI tools, however, must not be used as a substitute for academic judgment or peer review and must remain guided by principles of human oversight to maintain trust, fairness, and respect for academic freedom. Any use of AI tools should be transparent, clearly explained, and non-discriminatory, and learners should be informed of its role in decisions that affect them.

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2. Key Features

The European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS) is characterised by the following key features:

Learner-centred: ECTS is founded on the educational paradigm of outcome-based and active learning; it is a learner-centred system for educational credit accumulation and transfer based on transparency of learning outcomes, workload and learning experiences.

Learning outcomes are statements of what the learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. Learning outcomes must be defined for all learning opportunities, that is individual educational components such as course units, modules or micro-credentials as well as programmes leading to a qualification.

Learning outcomes must be easily understandable, measurable, and achievable within the estimated workload. The achievement of learning outcomes must be assessed using reliable methods suitable to the described learning outcomes and based on clear criteria.

ECTS credits express both the achievement of learning indicated by defined learning outcomes and the associated workload needed to achieve them. ECTS credits are expressed in whole numbers; only in exceptional cases (e.g. 7.5 ECTS to divide a semester into 4 modules) can half credits be used.

Indication of Level: ECTS credits awarded must be accompanied by an indication of the education level with reference to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) or the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF). This regards not only full qualifications such as degrees, but also standalone learning opportunities such as micro-credentials.

Workload is an estimation of the time the learner would need to complete all learning activities (e.g. lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, traineeships¹ and individual or self-directed study, including exam preparation) to achieve the learning outcomes. One credit represents a learner workload of 25 to 30 hours.

60 ECTS credits correspond to a year of full-time learning in formal education. That is, the workload for a year of full-time learning ranges from 1.500 to 1.800 hours.

Monitoring of Workload: In formal education the actual workload must be regularly monitored using appropriate instruments, such as learner surveys. Discrepancies between the allocated credits and the actual workload must be addressed by reviewing either the allocation of credits or the design of the educational component(s).

¹ This Guide uses “traineeship” to emphasise that work periods contribute to achieving learning outcomes. The terms « work placement », « placement », « training period » and « internship » are often synonyms.

Learning, teaching and assessment methodologies and approaches need to be suitable and fully aligned to facilitate the achievement of the defined learning outcomes.

Allocation of credits is the process of assigning credits to learning opportunities. Higher education institutions must allocate ECTS credits to all learning opportunities, e.g. courses, modules or standalone learning opportunities such as micro-credentials. Other education providers may allocate ECTS credits to all learning opportunities. The number of credits allocated to a single educational component must respect the workload necessary to achieve its defined learning outcomes.

For full programmes, credits must be allocated to all components, such as course units, dissertations, work-based learning and traineeships. As a result, learning outcomes need to be formulated for all these components. The allocation must be based on 60 credits per full-time year.

For higher education degrees, the total number of credits must be within the ranges established by the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

Course Catalogue: To ensure transparency and clarity for learners, in particular mobile learners, as well as other stakeholders, such as recognition bodies or employers, ECTS includes a standard format to describe learning opportunities. Education providers must publish in an easily identifiable place on their website, and in a timely manner, a Course Catalogue that includes accessible information on all learning opportunities offered.

Awarding credits is the act of formally granting learners the credits assigned to the learning opportunity they have completed, e.g. an educational component of a programme or a standalone learning opportunity such as a micro-credential. Credits must be awarded to learners after they have achieved the defined learning outcomes, evidenced by appropriate assessment.

If learners have achieved learning outcomes in non-formal or informal learning contexts, credits should be awarded based on validation of such learning.

ECTS credits with a QF-EHEA level (short, first, second and third cycle level, including small standalone learning opportunities at those levels that do not lead to a degree) must be awarded by **institutions that are subject to external quality assurance in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG)**, at institutional or programme level².

For ECTS credits not linked to the QF-EHEA, national authorities can designate which education providers are allowed to award ECTS credits and at which EQF levels. National authorities must ensure that transparent and reliable quality assurance arrangements are in place for those education providers, in line with the principles set out in Annex IV to the EQF. For credits at EQF levels 6, 7 and 8, the quality assurance arrangements should be in line with the ESG. For credits in

² External quality assurance carried out by quality assurance agencies listed on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) is aligned with the ESG, <https://www.eqar.eu/register/> - quality assured institutions and programmes can be found in the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR) at <https://www.deqar.eu/>

VET, the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) should be applied.

The award of ECTS credits must be certified in a verifiable digital format³. The education provider awarding the credits must be clearly identifiable.

Accumulation of credits means collecting credits awarded for achieving learning outcomes in formal, non-formal or informal contexts. A learner can accumulate credits in order to:

- stack⁴ them to obtain a qualification or larger credential based on the requirements of the awarding body;
- gain admission to a further learning opportunity based on the prerequisites and admission requirements;
- document achievements in a lifelong learning context.

Transfer of credits is the process by which credits awarded by one education provider are included (i.e. accumulated) in the learner's record at another provider, in a learner's personal wallet, or in a learner's account/profile in a national database or repository. Any ECTS credits awarded in line with the provisions above must be accepted as validly achieved (at the indicated level) and thus eligible for transfer by any other European education institution or other organisation concerned.

Recognition of credits is the process of having transferred credits accepted to be stacked, i.e. counted towards a qualification. For example, credits transferred after a mobility period are counted towards the credits required for obtaining a qualification, replacing credits usually acquired through a course or module that is part of the programme. Credit recognition is necessary for successful mobility.

Automatic recognition of credits is the recognition of credits without delay, additional work or assessment. Automatic recognition is guaranteed by the use of the relevant ECTS documents for individual learner mobility (i.e. Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records) or equivalent arrangements (e.g. consortium agreements in the case of joint programmes or mobility pathways). Automatic recognition must be ensured for all credits acquired⁵ at another education provider in line with a previously agreed Learning Agreement or other general agreement.

Grade transparency: Given the different grading systems and cultures in Europe, transparent information is needed for the understanding and interpretation of grades by those not familiar

³ For example, using the European Digital Credentials for Learning (EDC) standards. EDC is underpinned by an accreditation database that reflects the rules for awarding credit. Hence any ECTS credits awarded in an accredited EDC-credential are validly awarded.

⁴ This reflects the EU Council Recommendation 2018/C 444/01.

⁵ A European Digital Credentials for Learning (EDC) credential contains the same information as and thus serves in lieu of an ECTS Transcript of Records document.

with the grading system. If education providers award grades these must be accompanied by an ECTS reference grade. In addition, education providers should make grade distribution information available to ensure transparency.

Grade conversion means translating a grade part of a different grading scale (e.g. from another institution in another country) to a grade part of the institution's grading scale. Conversion should be performed when requested by the learner or when necessary, e.g. according to the education provider's policies to calculate average grades. Grade conversion can be based on the direct conversion methodology using grade distribution information or based on the ECTS reference grade. Grade conversion methodology must be transparent and the information should be readily available for the learners.

Standard formats for mobility: ECTS facilitates agreed individual inter-institutional learner mobility and automatic recognition by defining the necessary procedures and standard formats. Next to the Course Catalogue (see above), the standard formats include Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records, and Traineeship Certificate. Education providers must use these formats in digital records or documents when organising and documenting mobility experiences.

3. Planning, Design and Delivery of Learning Opportunities

ECTS can be used for all learning opportunities, applying the same principles for credit allocation, award, accumulation, transfer, and recognition. In the same way as credits are allocated to component parts of programmes, credits are allocated to stand-alone learning opportunities, such as micro-credentials, based on the workload typically needed to achieve the defined learning outcomes.

Education institutions should use ECTS with the same transparent mechanisms as described in this Guide for all their education provision, regardless of the mode, setting or target group of learners. This will greatly facilitate transition between different modes of learning, recognition and transfer, while increasing learner and stakeholder confidence in the outcomes of learning, and ultimately supporting lifelong learning.

The correct use of ECTS requires understanding of the system by each member of the teaching and training staff as well as the administrative staff concerned.

Education providers should foster this understanding by ensuring regular training on ECTS for staff members and by providing appropriate information for learners. Education providers using ECTS should designate a central unit/office as responsible for coordinating internal trainings and assembling information material for learners and staff.

3.1 Learner-Centred Design

Learner-centred: ECTS is founded on the educational paradigm of outcome-based and active learning; it is a learner-centred system for educational credit accumulation and transfer based on transparency of learning outcomes, workload and learning experiences.

In a learner-centred system the learning opportunity should be **relevant** for the learner and society, meeting academic or professional standards. This aim is served best by outcome-based learning, a pedagogical approach based on putting the outcomes of the learning process.

This approach requires open dialogue and reflective feedback between learners, teachers, trainers and other relevant staff, through which their needs and aspirations can be expressed and discussed. All stakeholders should be involved in constructive discussion of programme profile, design and delivery.

Learner representatives should participate in such discussions with full voting powers. Institutions should consult relevant external stakeholders (such as social partners, employers or graduates) when designing the programme profile.

Further information

Student-Centred Learning

Student-centred learning is an educational approach that positions the learner at the centre of the

learning experience, focusing on their needs and interests. It considers the learners as active participants and involves the learners in decision-making processes about what and how to learn.

Unlike traditional teacher-centred methods, it promotes communication and innovative pedagogies. It thus shifts the role of the teacher from a lecturer to a facilitator who supports each learner in creating their personalised learning path.

This approach encourages learners to be active, responsible partners in their own learning, fostering skills and competences such as critical and reflective thinking, communication, collaboration, and lifelong learning.

Student-centred learning is an approach that originates from higher education, but that can be translated to and used in other sectors as well. The importance of a learner-centred approach was underlined in the Tirana Communiqué (2024):

"Students need access to high-quality, learner-centred and innovative learning and teaching, in line with their needs and interests, to develop competences needed to tackle global challenges. This requires that they develop transversal and future-proof skills, capacity for creative and critical thinking, as well as civic competencies, to support their active participation in a democratic society and a rapidly changing labour market. Amidst these developments, we need to ensure student-centred learning is a reality for all students, empowering individual learners through research-based learning, effective support and guidance and cross-disciplinary teaching approaches."

Resources:

- Mapping and analysis of student-centred learning and teaching practices – Usable knowledge to support more inclusive, high-quality higher education – Analytical report (2020), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/67668>
- ESU Statement on the Future of Student-Centred Learning (2022), <https://esu-online.org/executive-summary-statement-on-the-future-of-student-centred-learning/>
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Standard 1.3 “Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment”, [URL to add – double-check when ESG are final](#)

a) Profile

The design of any learning opportunity – whether a programme, a component of a programme or a standalone one – starts with defining its profile. The profile should be based on a needs analysis resulting in the presentation of its distinctive features ([Lockhoff et al., 2010](#)). The profile will make it clear to learners and stakeholders what competences will be developed.

The field(s) of study should be expressed in [ISCED-F codes](#). In the case of inter-, trans- or multidisciplinary learning opportunities, more than one ISCED-F code can be identified.

If the learning opportunity leads to a professional qualification, the relevant regulations and requirements (e.g. based on EU Directive 2013/55/EU) need to be reflected in the profile, learning outcomes and programme structure.

b) Curriculum, components and progression

Designing a learning opportunity involves defining learning outcomes and associated workload, learning activities and teaching methods, and assessment procedures and criteria. The design processes should meet the needs of a variety of learners and support inter-, trans- and multidisciplinary approaches.

In the case of full programmes, the design involves planning a curriculum and its components with credits allocated to them.

It is important that all parts of a learning opportunity/experience be allocated credits, including obligatory and elective modules, traineeships, work on a dissertation, and social and community activities (for example, tutoring and mentoring). (see 4.3).

Learning outcomes should be defined for each educational component (see 3.2). Learning and teaching activities, as well as assessment, are designed on that basis (see 3.3).

The flexible organisation of learning, teaching and assessment activities is essential for accommodating different learning styles and opening up opportunities for learners with different profiles or needs.

The learning outcomes of a learning opportunity and of its educational components should be systematically mapped – e.g. as a matrix – to demonstrate how these contribute to the programme learning outcomes.

In programmes, progression requirements must be explicit and transparent so that learners can navigate the programme successfully. Progression requirements should clearly indicate what learning outcomes or other educational components need to be achieved before enrolling in an educational component, to ensure that learners can reasonably succeed in their learning. They should be adequate to ensure learner success, but not be excessive so as not to constrain flexibility.

3.2 Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are statements of what the learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. Learning outcomes must be defined for all learning opportunities, that is individual educational components such as course units, modules or micro-credentials as well as programmes leading to a qualification.

Learning outcomes must be easily understandable, measurable, and achievable within the estimated workload. The achievement of learning outcomes must be assessed using reliable methods suitable to the described learning outcomes and based on clear criteria.

The learning outcomes are based on the profile and should adequately reflect the learning opportunity's context, level and scope.

In programmes, a distinction is made between programme learning outcomes and learning outcomes of each educational component. The principles for formulating learning outcomes for educational components are the same as for degree programmes.

Learning outcomes formulated for a full programme will be more general and often more numerous than learning outcomes for a single component of a programme or a smaller stand-alone learning opportunity, which will be fewer and more specific.

a) Formulating learning outcomes

Considerable care needs to be taken in formulating programme and unit learning outcomes. The following non-exhaustive list provides a set of guidelines which has proved to be helpful.

- Statements of learning outcomes must be succinct and not too detailed or too specific.
- The learning outcomes must be measurable.
- The learning outcomes must be mutually consistent.
- The learning outcomes should be easily understandable and verifiable in terms of what the learner will have achieved at the end of the learning process.
- The learning outcomes should indicate clearly the scope and the expected level of complexity and responsibility, so that the learning opportunity can be referenced to a qualifications framework level (national QF, QF-EHEA and EQF).
- A widely accepted way of formulating learning outcomes is based on three essential elements:
 - Use a precise action verb to express what learners are expected to know or be able to do (e.g. on completion of a unit or programme, the learner can ‘describe’, ‘implement’, ‘draw conclusions’, ‘assess’, ‘plan’).
 - Specify what this outcome refers to (object or skill e.g. can explain the ‘function of hardware components’, or can present the ‘design of a living room by hand’).
 - Specify the context in which learners are able to perform the actions indicated in the learning outcome (e.g. ‘to give an overview of the materials most often used in electro-engineering’; ‘to develop a research design applying up-to-date scientific methods’, etc.)
- There are no rules on the ideal number of learning outcomes. Experience suggests that 10 to 12 learning outcomes are appropriate for programmes leading to a full qualification, and 6 to 8 in other cases, such as short learning opportunities (e.g. micro-credentials) as well as courses and modules that are part of full programmes.
- The learning outcomes must be achievable within the specified workload.
- The learning outcomes must be linked with appropriate learning activities, assessment methods and assessment criteria.

- It is recommended to link learning outcomes to standardised ESCO⁶ skills where applicable.

Institutions should take into account relevant additional guidance on writing learning outcomes for programmes and educational components, see box below.

Generative AI tools have the potential to support the formulation of learning outcomes and to improve their transparency and consistency. AI tools, however, must not be used as a substitute for academic or professional expertise and must remain guided by principles of human oversight.

The programme and unit learning outcomes should be part of the descriptions included in the Course Catalogue and in the Diploma Supplement.

Further reading

Guidance on writing learning outcomes

For additional guidance on writing learning outcomes for programmes, it is suggested to consult the following publications:

- A Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles. Including Programme Competences and Programme Learning Outcomes
- The “European guidelines for the development and writing of short, learning-outcomes-based descriptions of qualifications” (Cedefop 2024, <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/838553>). While the guidelines focus on qualifications, many principles can be applied also to their components.

For defining unit learning outcomes, it is suggested to consult for example the following publications:

- University College Cork (UCC), Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL), Learning Outcomes: <https://www.ucc.ie/en/cirtl/resources/learningoutcomes/>

3.3 Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Learning, teaching and assessment methodologies and approaches need to be suitable and fully aligned to facilitate the achievement of the defined learning outcomes.

A flexible organisation of learning, teaching and assessment activities is essential for accommodating different learning styles and opening opportunities for learners with different profiles or needs.

Regardless of the mode of study, the actual learning, teaching, and assessment activities need to be aligned with the learning outcomes. The staff responsible for delivering the learning

⁶ European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations, see <https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en>

opportunity and its components should ensure consistency between the stated learning outcomes, the related learning and teaching activities and assessment procedures. This constructive alignment (Biggs, 2023) between learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment is an essential requirement for educational programmes and stand-alone units.

The learning activities further need to be aligned with the estimated workload.

Assessment methods include the whole range of written, oral and practical tests/examinations, projects and portfolios that are used to evaluate the learner's progress and ascertain the achievement of the learning outcomes of a course unit or module. Assessment criteria describe what is expected from learners in assessments and assignments to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes.

If generative AI tools are used in the assessment process they must not be used as a substitute for academic or professional judgment or peer review. The assessment must remain guided by principles of human oversight and control to maintain trust, fairness, and respect for academic freedom. Any use of AI tools must be transparent, clearly explained, and non-discriminatory, and learners must be informed of AI tools used in assessment.

3.4 Workload

Workload is an estimation of the time the learner would need to complete all learning activities (e.g. lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, traineeships and individual or self-directed study, including exam preparation) to achieve the learning outcomes. One credit represents a learner workload of 25 to 30 hours.

60 ECTS credits correspond to a year of full-time learning in formal education. That is, the workload for a year of full-time learning ranges from 1.500 to 1.800 hours.

The use of ECTS credits facilitates the design of learning opportunities /experiences by providing a tool which enhances transparency, promotes flexibility in curriculum design and ensures that curricula are realistic and learner-centred.

Education programmes must be designed so that 60 ECTS credits correspond to a year of full-time learning. The calculation of individual units of learning including standalone units (e.g. micro-credentials) is based on this normative number of credits and hours.

The workload needs to be estimated initially based on the planned learning activities, considering time in classroom as well as individual and self-directed learning. In the case of fixed-size modules, activities need to be planned in such a way that the typical workload corresponds to the standard size.

3.5 Allocation of ECTS Credits

Allocation of credits is the process of assigning credits to learning opportunities. Higher education institutions must allocate ECTS credits to all learning opportunities, e.g. courses, modules or standalone learning opportunities such as micro-credentials. Other education providers may allocate ECTS credits to all learning opportunities. The number of credits allocated to a single educational component must respect the workload necessary to achieve its defined learning outcomes.

For full programmes, credits must be allocated to all components, such as course units, dissertations, work-based learning and traineeships. As a result, learning outcomes need to be formulated for all these components. The allocation must be based on 60 credits per full-time year.

For higher education degrees, the total number of credits must be within the ranges established by the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

ECTS credits are allocated to learning opportunities regardless of the mode of delivery (e.g. classroom-based, work-based, distance learning, hybrid) or the status of the learner (e.g. full-time, part-time).

Learning opportunities can be a single, stand-alone unit or broken down into smaller learning opportunities, i.e. educational components such as modules, courses, traineeships, etc. In some cases, these components – especially where they are larger modules – might be sub-divided further in course units, research projects, laboratory work and other relevant learning activities.

It is important that credits be allocated to all parts of a learning opportunity, including obligatory and elective modules, traineeships, work on a dissertation, and social and community activities (for example, tutoring and mentoring).

In the case of programmes, after the educational components of the programme have been identified, credits should be allocated to each component, based on its learning outcomes and associated workload, considering that 60 credits correspond to a year of full-time learning.

There are two main approaches to structuring a programme's components or units:

1. All educational components are of standard size, e.g. 5, 6, 10, 15 ECTS. These are often called "modules" and the standard size is usually set in institutional or department/faculty-level regulations. In this case, the learning outcomes assigned to modules need to be commensurate with workload associated with the standard module size.
2. All educational components have an individually determined size, possibly within a certain range set by national or institutional regulations. In this case, learning outcomes can be assigned based on other considerations and the number of credits adjusted accordingly, as long as the total for each academic year is 60 ECTS.

3.6 Monitoring

Monitoring of Workload: In formal education the actual workload must be regularly monitored using appropriate instruments, such as learner surveys. Discrepancies between the allocated credits and the actual workload must be addressed by reviewing either the allocation of credits or the design of the educational component(s).

Once a learning opportunity is offered, the estimations and assumptions made when calculating workload and allocating credits must be regularly reviewed against practice. This monitoring establishes whether the estimated workload is realistic and the credit allocation thus adequate.

Monitoring can be managed in different ways through questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, or by monitoring the results achieved. Data, such as completion times or learning analytics generated by learning management systems (LMS), should be used in compliance with applicable data protection regulations.

Whichever methods are used, feedback from learners should constitute an essential element for checking and revising credit allocation. Learner feedback should be combined with feedback from staff and, where appropriate, other stakeholders.

If the information gathered reveals a discrepancy between the workload foreseen and the average time taken by learners to achieve the defined learning outcomes, it will be necessary to revise either the workload (by adjusting the learning outcomes or learning and teaching activities and methods) or the credit allocation. This could also involve redesigning the learning opportunity and its educational components.

Monitoring as described above should be organised regularly after each offering of a learning opportunity, e.g. every year or semester. Revisions should be communicated to those who had participated in the monitoring exercise, to foster an ongoing, cooperative feedback culture in the institution.

3.7 Level

Indication of Level: ECTS credits awarded must be accompanied by an indication of the education level with reference to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) or the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF). This regards not only full qualifications such as degrees, but also standalone learning opportunities such as micro-credentials.

The level of the learning opportunity is defined with reference to the applicable national, sectoral and European qualifications framework(s). The level and the intended learning outcomes need to be aligned.

Some components (modules, courses) of a programme may be of different levels than the programme as a whole, provided that their learning outcomes clearly contribute to the

programme learning outcomes. For second cycle higher education programmes the QF-EHEA provision applies that at least 60 ECTS credits constituting the programme need to be (at least) at second cycle level.

There are two overarching European qualifications frameworks: the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of the EU (EQF).

Both frameworks include learning outcome-based descriptors for levels/cycles. The EQF describes each level using three dimensions: (1) knowledge, (2) skills, and (3) responsibility and autonomy. The QF-EHEA describes each cycle using five dimensions: (1) knowledge and understanding, (2) applying knowledge and understanding, (3) making judgements, (4) communication skills, and (5) learning skills.

The QF-EHEA covers higher education only, while the EQF covers all levels and sectors. For higher education levels, the two frameworks are compatible.

The QF-EHEA includes credit ranges for higher education degrees.

Further reading

In the context of the Erasmus+ Project Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning in Higher Education (CALOHEE) the more detailed Tuning-CALOHEE General Qualifications Frameworks (2024) have been developed for the EQF Levels 5-8 based on a merger of the two European Qualifications Frameworks.

(<https://www.calohee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Tuning-CALOHEE-Qualifications-Reference-Frameworks-Final-Light-ISBN.pdf>)

The European and national qualifications frameworks can be supplemented by subject-specific qualifications frameworks. Good examples in this context are the Tuning-CALOHEE Subject Area Specific Qualifications Frameworks (<https://www.calohee.eu>) and the QAA Subject Benchmark Statements (<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>).

Qualifications frameworks describe the cycles/levels in terms of a set of indicators associated with a full qualification, but also offer a sound basis for indicating the level of stand-alone units such as micro-credentials:

- **Programmes leading to a full qualification** (e.g. a higher education degree): in this case the programme learning outcomes need to correspond to the appropriate cycle/level descriptor. The total number of credits needs to comply with relevant national, sectoral and European regulations, and in the case of higher education the QF-EHEA ranges.
- **Short learning opportunities** that do not lead to a full qualification, but a partial or intermediate one (e.g. a micro-credential or similar): the learning outcomes should be used to identify the level based on the scope and complexity learning, compared to the descriptors in the qualifications frameworks.

It needs to be considered that a micro-credential or partial qualification may contribute to a full qualification at the given level, but will not signal completion of the level.

A single micro-credentials may be stackable towards different qualifications at different levels, e.g. in different fields of study. The level indicated for the micro-credential itself should be the level that represents the “centre of gravity” of its learning outcomes.

EQF and QF-EHEA levels

The following table illustrates the correspondence of levels and cycles:

EQF level	QF-EHEA cycle	QF-EHEA credit range
1		
2		
3		
4		
5	short cycle	approximately 120 ECTS
6	first cycle	180-240 ECTS
7	second cycle	90-120 ECTS (minimum 60 ECTS at second cycle level)
8	third cycle	no range

Further information

Doctoral qualifications are characterised by a variety of routes to a doctorate and the recognition of the principle that high level training is helpful to develop third cycle generic (transferable) and subject specific competences. In some countries and institutions, ECTS is also used in the third cycle. ECTS credits can be used for all components, both educational ones (e.g. taught course units) as well as research or innovation project work.

If ECTS is used, the guidelines of this ECTS Users' Guide apply, considering the specific nature of doctoral degrees. The related information should be included in the Course Catalogue.

Formulating learning outcomes can be valuable in demonstrating to future employers the achievement of high-level generic and subject specific competences, such as those mentioned in: <http://eurodoc.net/skills-report-2018.pdf>

Defining learning outcomes for specific milestones within long-term components (e.g. research or innovation work spanning several years) could allow candidates who interrupt their studies to have a clearer certification of what they have achieved up to that point.

3.8 Course Catalogue

Course Catalogue: To ensure transparency and clarity for learners, in particular mobile learners, as well as other stakeholders, such as recognition bodies or employers, ECTS includes a standard format to describe learning opportunities. Education providers must publish in an easily identifiable place on their website, and in a timely manner, a Course Catalogue that includes accessible information on all learning opportunities offered.

The Course Catalogue includes detailed, user-friendly and up-to-date information on the institution's learning environment that should be available to learners in sufficient time before entering and throughout their studies to enable them to make the right choices and use their time most efficiently.

In the context of mobility for studies, it is essential to bear in mind that the Course Catalogue also supports the creation and approval of Learning Agreements (often through digital systems). To fulfil this role, the Catalogue must include clear, up-to-date information that enables learners and institutions to make informed choices, and ensures that learning agreements are based on reliable information. Information on courses offered in the coming term/semester/year should be published sufficiently in advance for prospective learners to make their choices.

The Course Catalogue must provide information on all learning opportunities offered by the institution. This includes programmes leading to full qualifications as well as short learning opportunities, e.g. blended intensive programmes (BIPs) or those leading to micro-credentials. As

part of or closely related to the Course Catalogue, the institution's website should include general information on the institution, its resources and services.

The Course Catalogue should be published on the institution's website, preferably in the local language(s) and in English, so that all interested parties can easily access it. It is recommended to publish the Course Catalogue in an institution-wide standard format dynamically and based on the institution's own information systems, rather than as a static page or document. Institutions increasingly exchange data digitally and it is therefore recommended that institutions make available their Course Catalogue as linked open data, using the ELM standard⁷.

The Course Catalogue might be linked to a national register/database of qualifications or learning opportunities.

The standard format can be found in section 7.1.

⁷ ELM includes an application profile for Learning Opportunities and Qualifications (LOQ), which should be used for publishing Course Catalogue data.

4. Credit Accumulation

4.1 Awarding Credits for Formal Learning

Awarding credits is the act of formally granting learners the credits assigned to the learning opportunity they have completed, e.g. an educational component of a programme or a standalone learning opportunity such as a micro-credential. Credits must be awarded to learners after they have achieved the defined learning outcomes, evidenced by appropriate assessment.

ECTS credits with a QF-EHEA level (short, first, second and third cycle level, including small standalone learning opportunities at those levels that do not lead to a degree) must be awarded by institutions that are subject to external quality assurance in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG), at institutional or programme level.

For ECTS credits not linked to the QF-EHEA, national authorities can designate which education providers are allowed to award ECTS credits and at which EQF levels. National authorities must ensure that transparent and reliable quality assurance arrangements are in place for those education providers, in line with the principles set out in Annex IV to the EQF. For credits at EQF levels 6, 7 and 8, the quality assurance arrangements should be in line with the ESG. For credits in VET, the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) should be applied.

Credits are awarded when appropriate assessment has shown that the defined learning outcomes of a programme component or a standalone learning opportunity have been achieved. The number of credits awarded to the learner is the number of credits allocated to the component (module, unit) or other opportunity.

The number of credits awarded is fixed and does not vary according to performance or other factors.

If the learner has not achieved the learning outcomes, no credits are awarded.

4.2 Awarding Credits on the Basis of Non-formal or Informal Learning

If learners have achieved learning outcomes in non-formal or informal learning contexts, credits should be awarded based on validation of such learning.

Learners can request the validation of learning outcomes they have achieved in non-formal or informal contexts. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is a key element of life-long learning and helps make education more inclusive. It widens access and opens opportunities for all learners including those from professional life and coming from a broad range of non-traditional learning environments, thus making possible flexible life-long learning.

Validation often happens when learners transition into a formal education programme and wish to be exempt from taking courses or components whose learning outcomes they already achieved. Learners can also seek the award of credits for their prior learning purely to formally document their personal learning achievements.

Institutions should facilitate the recognition of all forms of prior learning⁸, including validation of informal and non-formal learning (e.g. through work experience, voluntary work, learner participation or independent study). These policies should include elements such as advice, feedback to learners on the results of the assessment and the possibility for learners to appeal. Institutions' policies and practices should be accessible on their websites with full information on how to access the procedures.

In line with the commitments made in the Bologna Process (e.g. Bergen Communiqué 2005), higher education institutions must have clear systems in place to award credits for learning outcomes acquired outside the formal learning context.

Provided that these learning outcomes satisfy the requirements of a qualification or educational component offered by the institution, the recognition must lead to the award of the ECTS credits attached to the corresponding qualifications or educational component. These credits can be accumulated in the same way as those acquired in formal learning. No grades are awarded for credits based on validation of non-formal or informal learning.

Qualified staff should be appointed in each department or subject area, who should have the formal authority to award credits for learning outcomes acquired through non-formal or informal learning.

As with formal education, the award of credits is preceded by an assessment to verify the achievement of learning outcomes. Assessment methods and criteria should be defined without reference to specific learning activities or workload. If the non-formal learning is documented and already includes reliable assessment (e.g. supported by a tool for identifying and documenting the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, such as Youthpass), the education institution should take that into account and not repeat the assessment.

Institutions should also create facilities for counselling and guidance as regards the validation of non-formal and informal learning. These may take different forms depending on national and institutional practices (e.g. they may exist within single higher education institutions or as joint centres for several institutions).

Further information

⁸ Recognition of prior learning is here understood as any learning that has not previously led to the award of ECTS credits. If credits were already awarded, they should be transferred and considered for stacking.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

The EU Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning ([Recommendation 2012/C 398/01](#)) defines four main stages in the validation of non-formal and informal learning:

- Identification of the learning outcomes acquired, including through counselling and guidance provided by the institution;
- Documentation of the learning outcomes acquired, incl. relevant proof and evidence;
- Validation based on the documentation or assessment against reference points;
- Certification of the learning outcomes through the award of credits and, where applicable, recognition towards a qualification/credential.

An [inventory on validation](#) of non-formal and informal learning is maintained by Cedefop, which includes detailed information on national policies and initiatives in educational institutions at different levels of education.

[The European guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning](#) following the 2012 Council Recommendation. They clarify the conditions for developing and implementing validation. They provide insights into validation provision and methodologies and how the process can be coordinated and carried out. They are written for everybody involved in initiating, developing and implementing validation.

Portfolio

There are a wide range of assessment tools and methods for recognising prior learning and experience. To capture the range of learning involved, a combination of tools and methods may be required. One of the assessment tools is a portfolio method. Portfolios include documents that learners have collected to demonstrate the knowledge and skills the learner has acquired in different contexts, such as work experience, volunteering, during leisure time.

A portfolio considers a collection of materials that verify skills and knowledge acquired through previous experience in non-formal and informal learning. A portfolio can include references from employers, supervisors and mentors/coaches; it may also include a performance appraisal, CV and other documents. By using a portfolio, the assessor analyses a range of information that learners have provided. This may be followed by an oral defence of the portfolio. Learners may require help and advice when preparing their portfolios of evidence during the identification and documentation stages of validation.

For example, Youthpass is a long-standing European transparency instrument which includes a supportive process for identifying and documenting learning outcomes. By offering both a structured process and a certificate, Youthpass facilitates personal reflection and guided

assessment, effectively highlighting non-formal and informal learning achievements. This approach makes learning visible to the learners and aids the further pathway to validation for ECTS credits.

4.3 Documentation of Credits Awarded

The award of ECTS credits must be certified in a verifiable digital format. The education provider awarding the credits must be clearly identifiable.

All credits awarded – whether for educational components that are part of programmes, for stand-alone learning opportunities such as micro-credentials or for any other educational components freely taken by a learner – must be certified in a digital document issued to the learner.

Digital documents must be issued in a format that is verifiable to ensure trust. The digital format used should ensure that the identity of the issuer can be trusted and that unauthorised modification of the content can be easily detected.

In the case of learners enrolled in a programme leading to a full qualification, the credits awarded should be documented in the Transcript of Records and the Diploma Supplement or personalised Certificate Supplement, if applicable.

European Digital Credentials for Learning (EDC) is an EU standard for digital credentials for any type of learning achievement. EDC is underpinned by an accreditation database that reflects the rules for awarding credit. Hence, any ECTS credits awarded in an accredited EDC credential are validly awarded.

One or more accredited EDC credential(s) can thus serve in lieu of a Transcript of Records for all intents and purposes.

Providers of non-formal learning can issue non-accredited EDC credentials. Non-formal learning might also be certified in other types of digital credentials, such as Open Badges.

After validation, education institutions should issue an accredited EDC credential that documents the ECTS awarded based on the validation of non-formal or informal learning.

4.4 Accumulation and Stacking of Credits

Accumulation of credits means collecting credits awarded for achieving learning outcomes in formal, non-formal or informal contexts. A learner can accumulate credits in order to:

- stack them to obtain a qualification or larger credential based on the requirements of the awarding body;*
- gain admission to a further learning opportunity based on the prerequisites and admission requirements;*

- document achievements in a lifelong learning context.

ECTS credits are suitable for documenting all kinds of learning. Learners are awarded credits based on assessment or validation of the achievement of learning outcomes. Learners can '**accumulate**' (i.e. 'pile up') credits they have been awarded as they progress on their educational pathway.

In formal education, credits are awarded for components (e.g. courses or modules) of programmes leading to a full qualification as well as for standalone learning experiences, such as micro-credentials or summer schools.

Credits are furthermore used to express learning achieved in non-formal or informal contexts, such as work or professional experience, using the validation procedures for non-formal and informal learning. These credits can be accumulated in the same way as credits from formal learning.

Learners also accumulate credits gained through mobility experiences, see section 5.3 on credit transfer in the following chapter.

Learners can accumulate credits to develop their personal skills profile and to document their achievements along their personal flexible learning path. Learners can accumulate credits without linking them to a qualification or other credential.

Learners can also present records of their accumulated credits to be awarded a specified qualification or degree, or to gain admission to a specific programme or learning opportunity, according to the regulations of the education institution offering that learning opportunity or qualification. In this case, the relevant accumulated credits are '**stacked**' (e.g. as building blocks) to demonstrate achievement of the required learning outcomes.

Learners following a programme (e.g. a traditional higher education degree programme or a programme leading to a full qualification) will accumulate and stack credits as they study their curriculum. In this case, both accumulation and stacking happen implicitly and add the same time.

5. Mobility and Recognition

5.1 Transparency and Information

Course Catalogue: To ensure transparency and clarity for learners, in particular mobile learners, as well as other stakeholders, such as recognition bodies or employers, ECTS includes a standard format to describe learning opportunities. Education providers must publish in an easily identifiable place on their website, and in a timely manner, a Course Catalogue that includes accessible information on all learning opportunities offered.

Successful learning mobility requires full, clear and timely information about the offer of each education provider to plan meaningful learning activities during a stay abroad. Such information also supports the transfer and recognition of credits.

The standardised Course Catalogue (see section 3.8) includes the required information and should be available to learners in a timely manner for learners to be able to choose the most appropriate receiving institution.

The Course Catalogue then supports the creation and approval of Learning Agreements (see scenario a) below) or allows learners to choose learning opportunities (see scenarios b) & c) below). Information on courses offered in the coming semester/year should be published sufficiently in advance for prospective learners to make their choices.

As part of the Course Catalogue, the institution's website should include general information on the institution, its resources and services, with a specific focus on the needs of mobile students.

5.2 Planning a Mobility Experience

There are different ways in which a mobility experience can be planned, individually or following a standard pathway.

a) Individual Mobility Period Based on a Learning Agreement

Standard formats for mobility: ECTS facilitates agreed individual inter-institutional learner mobility and automatic recognition by defining the necessary procedures and standard formats. Next to the Course Catalogue (see above), the standard formats include Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records, and Traineeship Certificate. Education providers must use these formats in digital records or documents when organising and documenting mobility experiences.

Based on the information in the Course Catalogue (see section 3.8), the three parties involved – the learner, the sending institution and the receiving institution or organisation/enterprise – agree on a suite of learning opportunities to be followed abroad. This is formalised in a Learning Agreement (see below).

For virtual/online or blended learning outside their own institution, the same principles apply and the same templates should be used.

Institutional arrangements

In the Erasmus+ programme, several quality standards documents such as the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (institutional commitment) and the Erasmus Student Charter (code of conduct for Erasmus+ students) provide frameworks for learner mobility and recognition of credits.

The institution should clearly define responsibilities for implementing and monitoring credit mobility. The institution should ensure that application procedures and selection criteria for credit mobility are transparent and fair, and that an appeal mechanism is in place.

Further information

Integration of credit mobility into programmes

Structurally embedding credit mobility in learning opportunities can facilitate mobility and recognition. Institutions may use one or several of these approaches:

- identify the semester or year when a period of study or traineeship abroad would best fit into the programme (mobility window);
- schedule in that semester/year the educational components with learning outcomes that can be easily achieved abroad (e.g. international or comparative courses, supplementary/elective courses, preparation of dissertation, language courses, traineeships);
- identify partner institutions/organisations, where compatible/complementary learning outcomes could be achieved.

Learning Agreement

The Learning Agreement is the pivotal planning document for individual student mobility, binding all three parties involved. The Learning Agreement assures the learner that their chosen programme is accepted and that their credits achieved during the mobility period will be automatically recognised.

The Learning Agreement format exists in two versions:

- Learning Agreement for Studies
- Learning Agreement for Traineeships

Learning Agreement for studies

The Learning Agreement identifies a set of suitable learning opportunities to be completed at the receiving institution and states how they will be recognised as part of the programme of the sending institution. The number of credits to be gained at the receiving institution should be proportionate to the time of study abroad, i.e. in line with the reference of 60 ECTS credits per year of full-time learning.

An open and flexible approach to the recognition of credits obtained in another context, including learning mobility, should be followed, based on comparability of learning outcomes rather than equivalence of course contents. The substantial difference principle of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), see section 5.6 below, must be respected when drafting a Learning Agreement.

Given the diversity of learning opportunities and education providers, the credits and learning outcomes of two single educational components in two different programmes will usually not be identical. Hence, the educational components to be completed during the mobility period cannot be expected to match components offered at the sending institution "one-to-one". Rather, the learning outcomes of the whole package of learning opportunities taken abroad must be compared with the learning outcomes of the whole package of educational components at the sending institution for which recognition is to be granted after the study period abroad.

It is also possible to record the entire mobility period as a whole, instead of recording it component by component. This is suitable especially for traineeships.

The Learning Agreement is tripartite. By signing the Learning Agreement:

- the *sending institution* commits to automatically recognise the credits earned by the learner during their mobility period;
- the *receiving institution* commits to admit the incoming learner to the planned educational components;
- the *learner* commits to complete the planned educational components.

Learning Agreement for traineeships

The Learning Agreement is also essential for traineeships, as a binding document outlining the learning activities to be carried out by the learner within this educational component.

The receiving organisation commits to provide a quality traineeship, relevant to the learner's learning path, with clearly defined learning outcomes, and to issue a Traineeship Certificate upon completion of the traineeship.

The sending institution commits to ensure the quality and relevance of the traineeship, monitor the learner's progress, and to grant recognition of the ECTS credits for the successfully completed traineeship.

Learning Agreement process

Learners should draft a proposal for the Learning Agreement with the support and guidance of both the sending and receiving institutions/organisations.

A staff member should be appointed in each department or subject area and formally authorised to discuss the programme of study abroad with the learner. That staff member should be authorised to approve and sign the Learning Agreement on behalf of the sending institution.

Learners should not be asked to negotiate recognition with staff members who are not authorised to do so, before or after their study abroad period.

The initial version of the Learning Agreement should ideally be agreed by the three parties before the mobility period. At this stage, the agreement of the sending institution is most crucial in order to guarantee automatic recognition upon return.

Receiving institutions should verify that the planned educational components are available for the mobility period. The Learning Agreement most often needs to be modified or updated later on, e.g. to accommodate changes in the learning opportunities available at the receiving institution.

Amendments must be agreed by all three parties. Most frequently, amendments are primarily the result of discussions between the receiving institution and the learner. When reviewing to proposed amendments, the sending institution should exercise the maximum amount of flexibility and limit itself to assuring that the learning outcomes of the whole package of learning opportunities taken abroad does not change substantially by the amendment.

The digitalisation of learner mobility processes can enhance their efficiency, transparency and reliability. The approval of the Learning Agreement and its amendments is possible through digital signatures or copies of scanned signatures, sent electronically, in line with institutional regulations or practice.

b) Embedded Mobility Pathways

The mobilities described above are individually planned programmes of study and thus require a case-by-case analysis of learning outcomes for recognition prior to the mobility period. Consortia or partnerships of institutions may also agree standard mobility pathways that are generally available to learners, without a need for individual Learning Agreements.

In this case, only the institutions enter into a general (bilateral or multilateral) agreement. This can be a dedicated agreement about the mobility pathway, a general cooperation agreement or any other suitable form.

The agreement serves as a universal agreement and the pathways it creates are generally open to all learners. It specifies agreed rules, conditions or requirements that apply. If these are met, individual Learning Agreements are not necessary.

The agreement must ensure the learner that their credits achieved during the mobility period are transferred and automatically recognised by the relevant institution(s) in the consortium.

Institutions must ensure that the mobility opportunities and the prerequisites for using them are clear and transparent for learners. Such information may be integrated into their Course Catalogues (see section 3.8) or be part of joint Course Catalogues established by partnerships/consortia.

If administrative and technical frameworks permit, learners can be enabled to enrol directly into the respective educational component at a partner institution.

An emerging example of such pathways are mobility or virtual exchange opportunities within European Universities alliances. As a result of the European Universities initiative, alliances have been working towards mobility pathways available to learners on a large scale.

c) Open Mobility

Rather than following an individually or generally/collectively planned mobility pathway, learners may also decide to enrol in learning opportunities offered by other education institutions without coordinating with their home/sending institution specifically.

In this case, recognition cannot be guaranteed, but can only be decided after the mobility has taken place. The learner has the right to their credits being transferred and considered for recognition towards a programme or qualification in line with the LRC (see section 5.6 below).

5.3 Credit Transfer

Transfer of credits is the process by which credits awarded by one education provider are included (i.e. accumulated) in the learner's record at another provider, in a learner's personal wallet, or in a learner's account/profile in a national database or repository. Any ECTS credits awarded in line with the provisions above must be accepted as validly achieved (at the indicated level) and thus eligible for transfer by any other European education institution or other organisation concerned.

The receiving institution provides the learner and the sending institution with a Transcript of Records immediately after proclamation of the learner's results at the receiving institution. The Transcript of Records provides an up-to-date record of learners' progress in their studies: the educational components they have taken, the number of ECTS credits they have achieved, and the grades they have been awarded.

In the case of a short mobility, e.g. for a micro-credential, BIP or other stand-alone learning opportunity, the Transcript might contain only a single educational component.

It is important to keep it in mind that the Transcript may be used in various contexts, thus information should be provided in a transparent, complete and clear way.

The Transcript of Records should be issued and transmitted in a digital format, using data models and standards that include a digital signature/seal to make the digital document tamper-evident. Furthermore, the formats and standards should ensure that the authenticity of the issuing institution is guaranteed.

For example, this can be ensured by exchanging Transcript of Records through the Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) network or by issuing an accredited credential using the European Digital Credentials for Learning (EDC) standard.

A digital credential (e.g. EDC) that is differently titled (e.g. Certificate, ...) but contains the elements listed in section 7.3 serves in lieu of an ECTS Transcript of Records and must be accepted as equivalent for all intents and purposes.

The sending institution should immediately transfer the ECTS credits achieved, i.e. formally record the credits in its own learner records, e.g. in its student information system (SIS).

This is regardless of the scenario above: any ECTS credits awarded in line with the key features should be transferred to the learner's record without any additional assessment or verification procedures.

Accredited EDC credentials ensure that awarded credits are documented in a secure digital format, with the authenticity of the issuing provider guaranteed; they can thus be used for a seamless, fully automated transfer of credits.

5.4 Grade Transparency

Grade transparency: Given the different grading systems and cultures in Europe, transparent information is needed for the understanding and interpretation of grades by those not familiar with the grading system. If education providers award grades these must be accompanied by an ECTS reference grade. In addition, education providers should make grade distribution information available to ensure transparency.

Grading is a sensitive part of the learning process. Rooted in different cultural and pedagogical traditions, European education systems have developed highly diverse grading systems and scales. Their use in practice and “grading cultures” often vary also within a country or an institution, e.g. between different subject areas.

The ECTS reference grades and standardised grade distribution information aim to make grading systems transparent and understandable, so that grades awarded in all countries, subject areas or institutions can be properly understood, compared and converted where needed.

For each local grade, institutions should provide the corresponding ECTS reference grade on the Transcript of Records. In addition, institutions should include in or annex to the Transcript of Records:

- information on their local (i.e. national or institutional) grading system and scale;
- an explanation how local grades are mapped to ECTS reference grades;
- standardised grade distribution information.

a) ECTS reference grades

The ECTS reference grading scale includes five passing grades and one failing grade. Education institutions should map local grades to the reference table using one of the three approaches described below. National authorities may provide a system-wide mapping of their grading scale to the reference table based on one of the approaches.

In the context of joint programmes, institutions may also directly use the ECTS grading scale as their main grading scheme.

ECTS Reference Grade	Label	Definition	Normalised scores (0-100%, 50% threshold)	Indicative distribution (middle points)
A	Excellent	This grade represents outstanding performance in achieving the intended learning outcomes. The learner completed the assessment with only minor errors.	$S \geq 90$	ca. 10% $M \leq 10$
B	Very Good	The learner completed the assessment with some errors, but still exceeding average expected performance significantly.	$80 \leq S < 90$	ca. 25% $10 < M \leq 35$
C	Good	The learner has achieved the intended learning outcomes and completed the assessment and with some errors, representing average expected performance.	$70 \leq S < 80$	ca. 30% $35 < M \leq 65$
D	Satisfactory	The learner has achieved the intended learning outcomes, but completed the assessment with a number of significant errors.	$60 \leq S < 70$	ca. 25% $65 < M \leq 90$
E	Sufficient	The learner has achieved the intended learning outcomes at a minimum level, but completed the assessment with a number of major errors.	$50 \leq S < 60$	ca. 10% $M > 90$
F	Fail	The learner has failed to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The assessment showed several major errors or misunderstandings.	$S < 50$	n/a

b) ECTS grade distribution information

Grade distribution information represents the statistical distribution of positive grades (pass and above) for a sufficiently large reference group, e.g. across all courses in a subject area during the past 2-3 years. This information helps others understand the local grading system and culture.

The sample should include learner results from all learning opportunities across a given discipline or subject area. It is recommended to create reference groups including all learning opportunities (in the listed order of preference):

1. In one ISCED-F “broad” field of study ([UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014](#))
2. In one ISCED-F “narrow” field
3. Offered by the education institution (that is, regardless of field)
4. In one ISCED-F “detailed” field
5. In the same education system (possible if data is collected at system level)
6. Part of one programme

The sample should cover learner results of the last two to three years.

In any case, the sample must include at least 30 learner results. If that is not the case, institutions should widen the sample, e.g. by including additional years or using a broader reference group.

It can be useful to provide additional information on success rates at the same level of aggregation, but these should not be used for transfer.

The following standardised distribution table should be provided on the Transcript of Records if grades are awarded (i.e. not to be provided for pass/fail systems or courses):

Information	Example					
Reference group	ISCED-F 07					
Timespan covered by the sample	01/10/2023 – 30/09/2025					
Passing grades (from best to worst)	α	β	γ	δ	ϵ	ζ
Percentage of learners with that grade	10%	35%	20%	20%	10%	5%
Success rate (optional)	83%					

c) Mapping local grades to ECTS reference grades

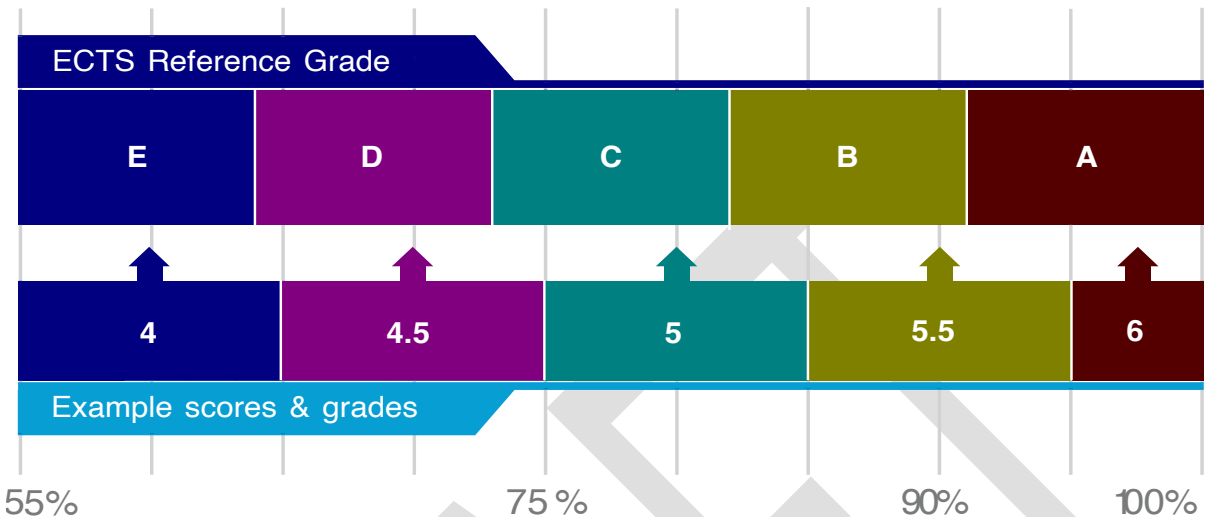
Based on scores or points

Several local grading schemes are defined in such a way that the grade is a function of test scores or points achieved in an assessment – i.e. each grade represents a score or range of scores. If that is the case, local grades can be mapped to a reference grade based on the score they represent.

The five ECTS reference grades are understood to divide the range of passing scores into five equally-sized bins. For example, if 50 points are required to pass and a maximum of 100 points can

be achieved, then grades representing average scores between 50 and 60 should be mapped to E, etc..

If a local grade represents a range of scores overlapping with several reference grades, it should be mapped to the reference grade based on the average score it represents.



In general, the scores or points leading to a grade X can be converted to a normalised average S_{normal} on the 50-100 scale used in the reference table with the following parameters:

S_{Xavg} Average score for which grade X is awarded
(= arithmetic mean of minimum and maximum scores for grade X)

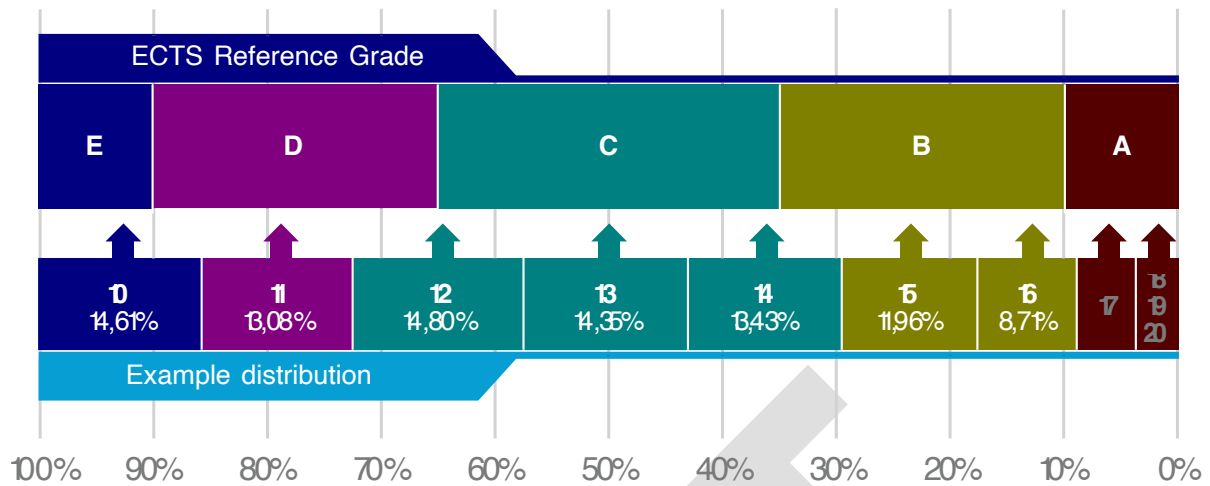
S_{pass} Minimum passing score

S_{max} Maximum achievable score

$$S_{normal} = 50 + 50 \cdot \frac{S_{Xavg} - S_{pass}}{S_{max} - S_{pass}}$$

Based on grade distribution

To determine ECTS reference grades based on grade distribution information, local grades should be mapped to the reference grade where its middle point falls in the indicative distribution.



The middle point of a grade represents the middle in the cumulated grade distribution. That is, if a grade X has the middle point M, this means M is the sum of all observations of grades better than X plus half of the observations of grade X.

For a grade X, the middle point can be calculated from any two of the following parameters:

p_x Percentage of observations of grade X

p_{better} Cumulated percentages of all observations of grades *better* than X

p_{worse} Cumulated percentages of all observations of (passing) grades *worse* than X

$$M = p_{better} + \frac{p_x}{2} = 50 + \frac{p_{better}}{2} - \frac{p_{worse}}{2} = 100 - p_{worse} - \frac{p_x}{2}$$

Based on the above example:

Grade	α	β	γ	δ	ϵ	ζ
Percentage	2%	8%	15%	50%	20%	5%
Middle point M	1	6	17.5	50	85	97.5
ECTS Reference Grade	A	A	B	C	D	E

Grade	Excellent	Pass
Percentage	15%	85%
Middle point M	7.5	57.5
ECTS Reference Grade	A	C

Based on grade definition

If no grade distribution information is available and local grades are not directly based on scores or points in such a way that the described method could be applied, local grades should be mapped to the reference grade based on their qualitative definition.

Education institutions or national authorities should publish a clear referencing statement when using this approach, including a systematic comparison of local grade definitions with the ones in the reference grading scheme.

5.5 Grade Conversion

Grade conversion means translating a grade part of a different grading scale (e.g. from another institution in another country) to a grade part of the institution's grading scale. Conversion should be performed when requested by the learner or when necessary, e.g. according to the education provider's policies to calculate average grades. Grade conversion can be based on the direct conversion methodology using grade distribution information or based on the ECTS reference grade. Grade conversion methodology must be transparent and the information should be readily available for the learners.

Grades should only be converted where necessary, e.g. if an average grade must be calculated. In cases where grades do not need to be converted, the local grades should be documented in their original notation together with the ECTS reference grade indicated by the awarding education institution.

Contextual information, e.g. grade distribution tables from other education institutions, should be included or linked in the Transcript of Records.

a) Direct grade distribution method

When grade distribution information is available for both institutions, grade conversion can be performed directly based on a comparison of the two grade distribution tables. While this method might require additional effort compared to using the reference grades, it can help preserve greater precision in some scenarios, especially if one or both grading scales involved have more than five passing grades.

For the direct method, the academic responsible for credit transfer should compare the grade distribution information provided by the other institution with their local grade distribution table for a comparable reference group.

The grade of the other institution should be converted to the average comparable local grade in the case of several overlapping percentage ranges. Annex 2 includes examples of grade conversion using the direct method.

b) Using ECTS reference grades

Institutions may use the standardised ECTS reference grade to convert a grade to their local grading scheme. Institutions should use the inverse of the mapping of their local grades to ECTS grades (see above).

Grade conversion using the ECTS reference grades can be performed regardless of the approaches that the sending and receiving institutions use to map their local grades to the reference grades.

5.6 Recognition

Recognition of credits is the process of having transferred credits accepted to be stacked, i.e. counted towards a qualification. For example, credits transferred after a mobility period are counted towards the credits required for obtaining a qualification, replacing credits usually acquired through a course or module that is part of the programme. Credit recognition is necessary for successful mobility.

Recognition of credits means that an institution accepts that learning outcomes achieved and assessed in another context satisfy the requirements of one or more learning opportunities it offers. That is, the credits gained for comparable learning outcomes achieved in another context will replace the number of credits that are allocated for comparable learning outcomes at the awarding institution, and be “stacked” towards a qualification.

An open and flexible approach to the recognition of credits obtained in another context, including learning mobility, must be followed, based on comparability of learning outcomes rather than equivalence of course contents. In line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), recognition may only be refused if the institution can demonstrate a substantial difference, in terms of:

- **learning outcomes:** a small discrepancy should not be considered a substantial difference, since learning outcomes cannot be expected to be 100% identical in different contexts;
- **level:** a different level under a qualifications framework can, but does not necessarily imply a substantial difference;
- **volume in credits:** a small discrepancy of +/- 1-2 ECTS should not be considered a substantial difference, e.g. 5 ECTS credits may be recognised to replace 6 ECTS credits, or 28 ECTS might be recognised to replace a set of 30 ECTS for a full semester, at the degree-awarding institutions if the learning outcomes match).

Differences in the following must not be considered a substantial difference in themselves:

- mode of delivery (on site, online, hybrid)
- pace (full time, part time)
- prerequisites or admission requirements
- teaching methods

- assessment methods
- details in course content and syllabus (beyond the learning outcomes)
- recommended literature

Please see European Area of Recognition Manuals – EAR HEI Manual (2020) and EAR Manual (2023) for details. These manuals include useful flowcharts on the recognition of periods of study abroad.

Institutions should make their recognition policies known and easily accessible⁹. Specific institutional rules should be developed to deal with various types of mobility (including for open mobility), work experience, virtual learning, prior and informal learning.

Institutional policies and practices should enable the learner to promptly undergo (re-)assessment for educational components at the sending institution that were meant to be replaced by credits transferred from the receiving institutions, but which the learner failed to complete successfully at the receiving institution. Such procedures should be communicated to learners beforehand.

In the case of traineeships abroad, the transfer of credits will be based on the traineeship certificate or equivalent document.

a) Automatic Recognition

Automatic recognition of credits is the recognition of credits without delay, additional work or assessment. Automatic recognition is guaranteed by the use of the relevant ECTS documents for individual learner mobility (i.e. Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records) or equivalent arrangements (e.g. consortium agreements in the case of joint programmes or mobility pathways). Automatic recognition must be ensured for all credits acquired at another education provider in line with a previously agreed Learning Agreement or other general agreement.

For mobilities planned individually (section 5.2 a)) or using standard pathways (section 5.2 b)), recognition is “pre-decided” based on the learning agreement and must therefore be automatic.

The golden rule of recognition is: all credits gained during the period of learning abroad or during the virtual exchange – as agreed in the Learning Agreement or in line with the conditions/general agreement of the embedded mobility pathway, and confirmed by the Transcript of Records – must be transferred without delay and automatically recognised towards the learner’s qualification.

Automatic recognition means that this happens without any additional work by or assessment of the learner. Frequent questions arise regarding what qualifies as “automatic recognition”. For example, does it count as full automatic recognition if:

- ... the learning agreement was changed during the mobility? Yes, if the latest version is signed by all parties, see 5.2a) above.

⁹ This is also recommended by the “Europe on the Move” Council Recommendation (ST/9804/2024/INIT).

- ... the learner needs to complete a small administrative procedure upon return? Yes, if the learner does not have to complete any additional courses, assignments or assessment.
- ... only the learner's credits are transferred and not the grades? Yes.
- ... the learner only completed electives abroad and not just mandatory/specialised courses? Yes, as long as the courses are recognised as part of the learner's degree programme or other learning opportunity.

Info box

Degree mobility

Degree programmes can vary in the number of ECTS credits they include (see Nota Bene box in Section 3). For the purposes of recognition of qualifications, the difference in the number of ECTS credits gained after successful completion of a qualification are not a consideration, provided the number of credits is within the QF-EHEA range.

Higher education qualifications should be automatically recognised if they were awarded in a system where quality assurance operates in compliance with the ESG¹⁰ and where a fully operational¹¹ national qualifications framework (NQF) has been established (see Rome Communiqué, 2020).

¹⁰ For interdisciplinary programmes, the classification should follow the ISCED-F guidance for interdisciplinary programmes.

¹¹ In the case of credit mobility under a Learning Agreement, this refers to the decision made when/before the Learning Agreement is signed.

Info box**Automatic Recognition in Higher Education**

In 2018, the Council of the European Union adopted a recommendation to support automatic recognition of higher education qualifications and periods of study in Europe.

The recommendations describes the preconditions and necessary steps that Member States should take to make automatic recognition a reality. This includes steps such as the establishment of national qualifications frameworks referenced to the QF-EHEA and EQF, or the establishment of quality assurance in line with the ESG.

The recommendations addresses four types of automatic recognition, namely of:

1. higher education qualifications for the purpose of access to further studies;
2. outcomes from a learning period abroad, as agreed beforehand in a learning agreement;
3. upper secondary education and training qualifications for the purpose of access to higher education;
4. outcomes from a learning period abroad during upper secondary education and training.

In general, the recommendation focuses on recognition for access, but emphasises that it does not aim to prejudice an education institution's or the competent authorities' right to set specific admission criteria or to check the authenticity of documents.

Info box:

The Lisbon Recognition Convention

The Lisbon Recognition Convention, which entered into force in 1999, provides a legal framework for cross-border academic recognition. It promotes a culture of recognition focused on learning outcomes, rather than on differences in the curricula. ECTS can therefore be seen as a tool to support the shift to the recognition of learning outcomes aimed for by the Convention.

The Convention stipulates:

‘36. Qualifications of approximately equal level may show differences in terms of content, profile, workload, quality and learning outcomes. In the assessment of foreign qualifications, these differences should be considered in a flexible way, and only substantial differences in view of the purpose for which recognition is sought (e.g. academic or de facto professional recognition) should lead to partial recognition or non-recognition of the foreign qualifications.

37. Recognition of foreign qualifications should be granted unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the qualification for which recognition is requested and the relevant qualification of the State in which recognition is sought.’

The European Area of Recognition manual ([EAR Manual, 2023](#)) gives the following explanation for the interpretation of substantial difference:

“The principle that a qualification should be recognised unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated by the recognition authority, has led to an important move away from equivalence based approaches that have previously provided an obstacle for academic mobility and in many cases made recognition unobtainable.

[...]

Although many differences can be found, the substantial differences are only those differences between the foreign qualification and the national qualification that are so significant that they would most likely prevent the applicant from succeeding in the desired activity such as further study, research activities or employment.

The burden of proof of a substantial difference lies with the competent recognition authority of the host country.

For practical purposes, this means that:

- not every difference should be considered to be “substantial”;
- the existence of a substantial difference entails no obligation to deny recognition to the foreign qualification. Partial recognition should be considered in cases where full recognition cannot be given;
- the difference should be substantial in relation to the function of the qualification and

the purpose for which recognition is sought, rather than in the formal characteristics of the qualification, such as nominal length of study or the structure of a study programme.”

For more on the topic of substantial differences, see the full text of the [EAR Manual](#) and the [specific publication](#) developed in the framework of the TPG-LRC project, co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme (CIMEA, 2021).

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Info box

Recognition of professional qualifications

To do: update if a new Directive is adopted in the Skills Portability Initiative.

EU Directive 2013/55/EU amends Directive 2005/36/EC on the **recognition of professional qualifications**.

It allows ECTS to be used as an additional means of expressing full-time course duration in the case of the seven 'sectoral' professions. The obligation to express course duration in terms of full-time academic years and total numbers of hours will remain for medical doctors, general care nurses, dentists, and midwives. For veterinary surgeons, pharmacists and architects, the obligation covers only full-time academic years.

Similarly, ECTS may also be used in levels (d) and (e) of the qualifications grid used in the **General System**, which covers all other qualification-based regulated professions in the EU and the EEA.

The Directive also addresses the recognition of **work placements** which are necessary to have access to a regulated profession. These can be undertaken in any EU/EEA member state, irrespective of where the qualification is delivered, and enjoy full recognition. Recital 27 states that the 'recognition of a professional traineeship completed in another Member State should be based on a clear written description of learning objectives and assigned tasks, to be determined by the trainee's supervisor in the host Member State.' Article 55a requires Competent Authorities to 'publish guidelines on the organisation and recognition of professional traineeships carried out in another Member State or in a third country, in particular on the role of the supervisor of the traineeship.'

Finally, **common training frameworks** (CTF) based on 'common sets of knowledge, skills and competences' can be established for professions that are regulated in at least one third of EU Member States. CTFs may be proposed by representative professional bodies operating at EU or national level, or by Competent Authorities. They are to be referenced to the European Qualifications Framework and are free to make full use of ECTS.

5.7 Individual Records and the Diploma Supplement

Standard formats for mobility: ECTS facilitates agreed individual inter-institutional learner mobility and automatic recognition by defining the necessary procedures and standard formats. Next to the Course Catalogue (see above), the standard formats include Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records, and Traineeship Certificate. Education providers must use these formats in digital records or documents when organising and documenting mobility experiences.

The Diploma Supplement is designed to provide graduates with a transparent record of their achievements.

Usually, a full Transcript of Records is included within the Diploma Supplement (section 4.3) or attached to it. The learner's mobility periods should be visible in the Diploma Supplement and Transcript of Records.

Learners sometimes earn credits at another education institution that are not recognised as part of a programme, e.g. credits beyond those planned in the Learning Agreement or in case the Learning Agreement includes a limited number of credits that cannot be automatically recognised. These credits should nevertheless appear as additional credits on the Transcript of Records attached to the Diploma Supplement – with an indication of their issuing institution and the grades awarded (if applicable).

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6. Quality Assurance of ECTS Implementation

Box: European quality assurance frameworks

Annex IV to the EQF contains quality assurance principles for all education sectors. Different sector-specific quality assurance frameworks exist, which are compatible with these overarching principles.

Higher education

The primary responsibility for quality assurance lies with each institution, as agreed by Higher Education Ministers of the countries involved in the Bologna Process ([Berlin Communiqué, 2003](#)). The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, [add reference to 2027 version](#)) are the framework for quality assurance in higher education.

[Standards 1.2, 1.3, 1.4](#) and the associated guidelines refer to areas related to ECTS (in particular programme design, student-centred learning, teaching and assessment and student admission, progression, recognition and certification). ([To do: Update to ESG 2027](#))

The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes ([add reference to 2027 version](#)) is a specific framework that facilitates integrated approaches to quality assurance of joint programmes, which genuinely reflect and mirror their joint character.

[Standards 3.2 and 3.3](#) of the European Approach refer to the correct use of ECTS. ([To do: Update to EA 2027](#))

Vocational education and training (VET)

In VET, the primary responsibility for quality assurance lies with each national education system. The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) was established by a 2009 Council Recommendation and updated in 2020.

It provides a common quality assurance approach for both initial and continuing VET, based on a continuous improvement cycle (Plan, Do, Check, Act). EQAVET includes ten indicators and descriptive criteria applicable at both system and provider levels. EQAVET is not a binding set of standards but functions as a flexible "toolbox" from which countries and VET providers can select those elements most relevant to their specific needs and contexts.

The framework is supported by a European EQAVET Network, bringing together National Reference Points from EU member states, social partners, and the European Commission.

6.1 Principles

Good practice in using ECTS will help institutions improve the quality of their programmes and their learning mobility offer. Thus, ECTS use should be quality assured through appropriate

evaluation processes (e.g. monitoring, internal and external quality reviews and learners' feedback) and continuous quality enhancement.

In evaluating the effectiveness of a programme (including the learning outcomes, workload and assessment methods) a number of indicators will be used. These may include dropout or failure rates or completion times. A programme can be considered effective when learners are able in practice to achieve the defined learning outcomes, accumulate the required credits and obtain the qualification in the regular time planned for the programme. However, care should be taken to analyse the reasons if that is not the case, as they may include ineffective planning, delivery of the programme, inadequate measures for supporting learners, or other factors, such as the learners also being employed.

6.2 Indicators

The following indicators should be used by education institutions (internal quality assurance) or quality assurance agencies (external quality assurance) for evaluating the quality of ECTS implementation:

- Educational components are expressed in terms of appropriate learning outcomes, and clear information is available concerning their level, credits, delivery and assessment;

Key features: credits, learning outcomes

- Learning activities can be completed in the time officially allocated to them (i.e. the workload associated with an academic year, a semester, trimester or a single course component is realistic);

Key feature: workload

- Regular monitoring examines any variations between the estimated workload and the actual time spent by learners, and follows up with appropriate revision;

Key feature: monitoring

- Learners are provided with detailed information and advice so that they can follow progression rules, exploit options for flexible pathways and select educational components at an appropriate level for their qualification;

Key feature: accumulation, documents

- Learners are informed promptly of their results.

For mobile learners and recognition, this means that:

- Appropriate staff are designated as responsible for credit recognition and transfer matters;

Key feature: transfer, recognition

- Incoming mobile learners can easily access the Course Catalogue in time to receive clear information on the available learning opportunities for planning their mobility;

Key feature: documents

- Learning Agreements are used for individually organised mobilities; the processes for approving the Learning Agreement and subsequent changes are flexible yet robust;

Key feature: documents

- Transcripts of Records are provided to mobile learning, recording the credits and grades awarded, including the ECTS reference grade and standardised grade distribution information where available;

Key feature: documents, grade transparency

- All credits awarded by another institution are automatically transferred and accumulated as part of the learner's record;

Key feature: transfer

- Recognition as part of a programme is decided¹² based on learning outcomes, level and number of credits only, no other factors are considered a “substantial difference”.

Key feature: recognition

- Recognition as part of a programme is automatic for all credits achieved as part of an approved Learning Agreement or an embedded mobility pathway;

Key feature: automatic recognition

- Where needed, grade conversion is performed in line with the methodologies of the Guide, Grade conversion rules and methods are transparent and known by the students before going on mobility.

Key feature: grade conversion

Learners and learner representatives should be actively engaged in quality assurance processes for ECTS:

- In internal quality assurance, where learners provide information (by responding to surveys on a regular basis, focus groups); participate in the preparation of the institutions' self-assessment reports; are actively engaged in the bodies responsible for internal quality assurance processes and monitoring of the ECTS credit allocation.

¹² For mobility based on a Learning Agreement, this refers to decisions made when drawing up such a Learning Agreement.

- In external quality assurance, where learners are members of external review panels of education institutions and/or programmes.

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7. Standard Formats

ECTS is supported by a set of standard formats. They represent a widely used and accepted way of communicating information which is useful for all learners (including mobile and non-mobile learners), teaching and administrative staff, employers and other stakeholders.

The standard formats are used in digital learner records or documents.

7.1 Course Catalogue

(see section 3.8)

a) General Institutional Factsheet

Education institutions should provide a set of general information on their website. Institutions participating in Erasmus+ should make this information available as part of their EWP Factsheet.

- name and address
- description of the institution (including type and status)
- teaching calendar
- general admission requirements, including language policy, and registration procedures
- arrangements for the recognition of credit mobility and prior learning (formal, informal and non-formal)
- ECTS credit allocation policy (institutional credit framework)
- arrangements for counselling and guidance

In particular, certain information on resources and services is particularly relevant for mobile learners:

- student affairs office
- international relations office
- accommodation/housing
- meals
- cost of living
- financial support for learners
- medical facilities
- insurance

- facilities for learners with disabilities and special needs
- learning facilities
- international mobility possibilities
- practical information for incoming mobile learners
- language courses
- traineeship possibilities
- sports and leisure facilities
- student associations

b) Information on Learning Opportunities

The access point to the Course Catalogue should be a **list of all learning opportunities offered by the institution.**

Required information on each programme or stand-alone learning opportunity, e.g. micro-credential:

(To do: map and add references to European Learning Model – ELM – fields for all items.)

- qualification awarded
- length of programme
- required number of ECTS credits
- level according to the national qualifications framework (NQF), QF-EHEA (if applicable) and EQF (if applicable)
- field(s) of study (using ISCED-F)
- specific admission requirements (if applicable)
- specific arrangements for recognition of prior learning (formal, non-formal and informal) (if applicable)
- qualification requirements and regulations, including graduation requirements (if applicable)
- profile of the programme (see section 3.1)
- programme learning outcomes
- programme structure diagram with credits (60 ECTS per full-time equivalent academic year)

- learning schedule (full-time/part-time/e-learning etc.)
- examination regulations and grading scale
- compulsory or optional mobility windows (if applicable)
- traineeship(s) (if applicable)
- work-based learning
- programme director or equivalent
- occupational profiles of graduates
- access to further studies

For joint programmes, some additional elements are recommended:

- information on the form of the diploma and Diploma Supplement (joint/multiple)
- members of the consortium
- mobility structure of the programme
- virtual exchanges embedded in the programme

Information on individual educational components of full programmes:

- code
- title
- type (compulsory/elective/optional)
- if different from the programme: level according to the national qualifications framework (NQF), QF-EHEA (if applicable) and EQF (if applicable)
- year of study when the component is delivered (if applicable)
- semester/trimester when the component is delivered
- number of ECTS credits allocated
- name of lecturer(s)
- learning outcomes
- mode of delivery (face-to-face/distance learning etc.)
- prerequisites and co-requisites (if applicable)

- course content
- recommended or required reading and other learning resources/tools
- planned learning activities and teaching methods
- assessment methods and criteria
- mode of supervision and identity verification during assessment
- language of instruction
- integration/stackability options (if applicable)
- date of last update

(To consider later: is the ELM Learning Opportunities and Qualifications (LOQ) application profile fully aligned with the Guide? should be reviewed after the recommended Course Catalogue info below is agreed.)

7.2 Learning Agreement

(see section 5.2)

The Erasmus+ programme provides specific official formats for the Learning Agreement¹³ for studies and for traineeships for institutions participating in the programme. It also provides guidance for institutions on how to use the formats, and sets out specific deadlines institutions need to comply with.

Institutions outside the Erasmus+ programme may use the following generic formats.

a) Learning Agreement for Studies

The Learning Agreement for Studies must include the following standard elements:

- name and contact details of the learner
- name and identifier(s) of the sending institution
- name and identifier(s) of the receiving institution
- name and qualification level of the learner's programme at the sending institution
- learner's field of study at the sending institution (ISCED-F codes)
- programme abroad: list of educational components to be taken (with codes and allocated number of ECTS credits)

¹³ In the case of credit mobility under a Learning Agreement, this refers to the decision made before the Learning Agreement is signed.

- expected level of competence in the main language(s) of instruction of the receiving institution (if applicable)
- automatic recognition by the sending institution: list of educational components at the sending institution for which the components successfully taken abroad will be recognised, or stipulating how the mobility period as a whole will be recognised as part of the learner's programme at the sending institution
- signatures of the three parties (the learner, representatives of sending and receiving institutions)

b) Learning Agreement for Traineeships

The Learning Agreement for Traineeships must include the following standard elements:

- name and contact details of the learner (trainee)
- name and identifier(s) of the sending institution
- name and identifier(s) of the receiving organisation/enterprise
- names and contact details of the contact person(s) at the sending institution
- name and contact details of the contact person(s) and mentor(s) at the receiving organisation/enterprise
- qualification level and field of study (ISCED-F code) of the learner's programme at the sending institution
- type of organisation/enterprise (private/public/third sector/etc.)
- period of training (from/to) at the receiving organisation
- number of working hours per week
- number of ECTS credits to be awarded for the traineeship
- learning outcomes to be acquired by the learner (trainee) at the end of the traineeship
- detailed programme of the traineeship, including tasks/deliverables and learning/training content
- expected level of competence in the workplace language (if applicable)
- monitoring arrangements and evaluation plan
- provisions for changes for the Learning Agreement for Traineeships
- automatic recognition in the sending institution: (list of) educational component(s) as which the traineeship will be recognised

- signatures of the three parties (the learner, representative of the sending institution, and receiving organisation/enterprise – including the supervisor of the trainee)

7.3 Transcript of Records

(see section 5.3)

The Transcript of Records must include the following standard elements:

(To do: indicate corresponding ELM + EWP fields)

- name of the learner
- ID and/or contact details of the learner (if applicable)
- names and contact details of the institution
- field of study (ISCED-F code), name and level of the programme (if applicable)
- current year of study (if applicable)
- learning opportunities taken at the institution:
 - o code
 - o credits
 - o local grade and ECTS reference grade (if applicable)
- if any learning opportunities have grades awarded:
 - o description of the institutional grading system
 - o information how local grades were mapped to ECTS reference grades
 - o grade distribution information (see section 5.4)
- date of issue and signature of the responsible person

The sending institution should provide the learner with an updated Transcript of Records (or equivalent document/database) as soon as possible to confirm the transfer of credits and provide clarity about the recognition of credits from the mobility period abroad.

7.4 Traineeship Certificate

The Traineeship Certificate aims to provide transparency about the learner's traineeship. This document is issued by the receiving organisation/enterprise upon the trainee's completion of the traineeship, and it can be complemented by other documents, such as letters of recommendation.

(To check: can employers issue a Traineeship Certificate as a EDC?)

The Traineeship Certificate must include the following standard elements:

- name and contact details of the learner
- name of the organisation/enterprise
- contact details of the organisation/enterprise [street, city, country, phone, e-mail address, website]
- awarded number of ECTS credits (according to the Learning Agreement for Traineeships)
- type of organisation/enterprise (private/public/third sector/etc.)
- start and end of the traineeship
- detailed programme of the traineeship, listing the tasks/deliverables and learning/training content
- knowledge, skills (intellectual and practical) and competences acquired (learning outcomes achieved)
- evaluation of the learner's performance
- date of issue, name and signature of the responsible person at the receiving organisation/enterprise

8. Acknowledgements

This Guide has drawn on the considerable amount of work that has been done in recent years within the Bologna Process and in individual countries. It would be impossible to give credit to all the organisations and individuals who have carried this out.

In particular, the European Commission wishes to thank the members of the Advisory Group on the review of the ECTS Users' Guide for their support and commitment:

- (new list of members to add)

9. Annexes

9.1 Annex 1 : Glossary

NB: Changed to shorten definitions where possible, omit definitions that are not clearly needed and to avoid repeating content of the key features.

Accumulation of credits

see key features

Allocation of credits

see key features

Automatic recognition

see key features (update after respective part is stabilised)

Award of credits

see key features

Blended Intensive Programme (BIP)

A specific type of short learning opportunity delivered in a blended format. BIPs are supported by the Erasmus+ programmes. A BIP combines a virtual exchange component (online learning and collaboration) with a short-term mobility component.

Competence

EQF defines competence as the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. Fostering competences is the object of all learning opportunities.

Course Catalogue

The Course Catalogue is a standardised format of presenting information on the learning opportunities offered by an education provider and on the provider itself. See [section 7.1](#).

Course

A self-contained, formally structured educational component that is part of a larger learning opportunity. It should have a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes, defined learning activities consistent with the time and credits allocated within the programme, and appropriate assessment criteria.

Credit (ECTS)

[see key features](#)

Credit mobility

The mobility of a learner, who stays at a receiving institution for a period, during which they can carry out activities and are awarded the allocated credits, which are then recognised by the sending institution.

Credit transfer

[see key features](#)

Cycle

The EHEA has defined a hierarchy of three higher education cycles (first cycle, second cycle and third cycle) and an optional short cycle. All higher education qualifications in the European Higher Education Area are located within these cycles.

The Bologna Declaration in 1999 adopted 'a system based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate.' In 2003, doctoral studies were included in the Bologna structure and referred to as the third cycle. In 2018, short cycle qualifications were added as an optional level, i.e. countries are free to decide whether and how to integrate short-cycle qualifications in its national qualifications framework.

Cycle (Level) Descriptors

Generic statements about the expected learning outcomes for each cycle or level in a qualifications framework. (see section Error: Reference source not found)

Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement (DS) is a document accompanying a higher education diploma, providing a standardised description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies completed by its holder. It is produced by the higher education institutions according to standards agreed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

Graduates in all the countries taking part in the Bologna Process have the right to receive the Diploma Supplement automatically, free and in a major European language.

Double/multiple degrees

To do: To align with the forthcoming revised European Approach.

Separate qualifications awarded by education institutions offering a joint programme attesting the successful completion of this learning opportunity. See also [European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes](#)

Erasmus+

The EU programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport.

Educational component

A part, e.g. a course, module, or traineeship, of a larger learning opportunity, such as a programme. An educational component has defined learning outcomes and credits allocated to it.

Europass

Europass is the EU framework for the provision of better services related to skills and qualifications. It includes a set of standard documents (Curriculum Vitae, Language Passport, Europass Mobility, Certificate Supplement, Diploma Supplement) which aim to make skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe.

Europass Mobility is a document to record knowledge and skills acquired in another European country, completed by the institutions involved in the mobility of the individual (sending and receiving institution).

European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was launched at the Bologna Process' decade anniversary, in March 2010, during the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Conference. Building on the main objective of the Bologna Process since its inception in 1999, the EHEA is meant to ensure more comparable, compatible, coherent and attractive systems of higher education in Europe.

European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning is a common European reference framework which enables countries of the European Union to link their qualifications systems to one another. It makes qualifications more readable and understandable across different education systems.

The EQF was adopted by the European Parliament and Council in 2008 and revised in 2017. It defines eight reference levels based on learning outcomes.

Formal learning

Learning that takes place in an organised and structured setting (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically leads to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective and takes place in an education or training institution. See also [Recommendation 2012/C 398/01](#).

Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)

The QF-EHEA is an overarching qualifications framework for the EHEA, adopted in 2005. All EHEA countries committed themselves to develop national qualifications frameworks that are compatible with this overarching framework.

The QF-EHEA provides generic cycle (level) descriptors for the agreed cycles in the EHEA (first, second and third cycle, optional short cycle). The short, first and second cycles are also characterised by credit ranges.

Free mover

A student participating in credit mobility outside an organised student mobility programme (for example Erasmus+). A free mover chooses a receiving institution and organises their credit mobility at that institution.

Full programme

A learning opportunity leading to the award of a full qualification to a learner after successful completion of all the requirements.

Grade distribution table

Grade distribution tables show the statistical distribution of positive grades (pass and above) awarded to learners. See 5.3 b) Grades

Informal learning

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. Informal learning is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. It may be unintentional from the learner's perspective.

Examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are: project management skills, ICT skills or languages learned through life and work experiences, intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work or through activities at home, e.g. taking care of a child. See also Recommendation 2012/C 398/01

Joint programme

To do: To align with the forthcoming revised European Approach.

An integrated learning opportunity coordinated and offered jointly by several education institutions, leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree. See also European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes

Learner

An individual engaged in a learning process (formal, non-formal or informal learning).

Learning Agreement

A formalised agreement of the three parties involved in a pre-organised mobility - the learner, the sending institution and the receiving institution or organisation/enterprise – to facilitate the organisation of credit mobility and its recognition. The agreement assures the learner that their credits achieved during the mobility period will be automatically recognised by the sending institution. See [5.2 a\) Credit mobility](#) and [7.2 Learning Agreement](#)

Learning outcome

See [key features](#)

Learning opportunity

An opportunity to realise a given set of learning outcomes, offered by an education institution. A learning opportunity can be subdivided and consist of several smaller ones, such as courses or modules. A learning opportunity can be a programme leading to a full qualification or a shorter learning opportunity, e.g. leading to a micro-credential.

Learning pathway

Learning pathway is a route taken by a learner to progressively acquire desired learning outcomes. The learning pathway may be 'signposted' through institution guidance and regulations (including the recognition of prior learning and experience) and different learning pathways may lead to the award of the same qualification. In essence the concept of a 'learning pathway' emphasises the choice of the learner in reaching the desired educational goals.

Level descriptors

See [Cycle \(Level\) Descriptors](#)

Lifelong learning

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective ([Communication \(2001\) 678](#)).

Learning opportunities contributing to lifelong learning may include mainstream programmes, continuing education, evening classes, specific programmes for part-time learners, access to libraries/other resources, distance learning, training courses, targeted guidance and counselling services among other actions and initiatives.

Micro-credential

A micro-credential is a certified small volume of learning (see [MICROBOL Common Framework for Micro-credentials in the EHEA, 2022](#)).

The European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability ([Council Recommendation 2022/C 243/02](#)) defines a micro-credential as the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning, proven through an assessment against transparent and clearly defined criteria.

Both frameworks:

- consider that learning opportunities leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs;
- recommend that micro-credentials should be owned by the learner, sharable and portable;
- mention that micro-credentials may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications (see [stackability](#));
- emphasise the importance of micro-credentials being underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector.

Mobility window

A mobility window is a period of time reserved for international learner mobility that is embedded into the curriculum of a learning opportunity ([Ferencz et al., 2013](#)).

Module

An educational component that is part of a learning opportunity/programme, often in a system in which each module carries the same number of credits or a multiple of it. A module may or may not be further subdivided and consist of several courses.

National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

An instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society ([Recommendation 2012/C 398/01](#)).

National qualifications frameworks encompass all qualifications or those from a specific education sector, e.g. all higher education qualifications. NQFs usually describe levels in terms of learning outcomes.

NQFs in Europe are usually referenced to the [EQF](#) and the [QF-EHEA](#).

Non-formal learning

Learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) and where some form of learning support is present (e.g. learner-teacher relationships). Common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public (*Ibid.*).

Programme (educational)

A learning opportunity that usually consists of several educational components that are offered as a coherent curriculum and lead to the award of a qualification.

Progression

The process which enables learners to accumulate credits towards a qualification and to access educational programmes that prepare for qualifications at a higher level than those they already possess.

Progression rules

Set of rules that define conditions for learners' progression within qualifications and towards other qualifications.

Qualification

A formal outcome of an assessment or validation process in which a competent authority attests that a learner has achieved learning outcomes to given standards. It is awarded as degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority.

Quality assurance

The set of processes implemented to ensure the quality of learning opportunities and qualifications awarded. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose. Quality assurance is often referred to in the context of a continuous improvement cycle (i.e. assurance and enhancement activities).

Recognition (academic recognition)

An institution accepts that learning outcomes achieved and assessed in another institution satisfy the requirements of one of the learning opportunities it offers. This includes:

- (i) **recognition of qualifications** for the purpose of entry to a learning opportunity;

- (ii) **recognition of credits** for periods of learning, e.g. in relation to student mobility; that is, the credits gained for comparable learning outcomes achieved in one institution/context will replace the number of credits that are allocated for comparable learning outcomes at another institution;
- (iii) **recognition of prior learning and experience**, for entry or for credit.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning

The process through which an institution certifies that the learning outcomes achieved and assessed in another context (non-formal or informal learning) satisfy (some or all) requirements of a particular programme, its component or qualification. See also [Validation](#)

Recognition of prior learning and experience

The [validation](#) of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or non-formal or informal learning, acquired before requesting validation ([Recommendation 2012/C 398/01](#)).

Recognition of professional qualifications (professional recognition)

Recognition of a qualification for the purpose of access to or pursuit of a regulated profession. In the EU, professional recognition is regulated by Directive 2013/55/EU. See [box on p. ***](#)

Stackability

A term that became used with reference to micro-credentials to show that, in addition to having a stand-alone value, they can offer a route to a larger qualification. Both the [MICROBOL Common Framework](#) and the [European approach to micro-credentials](#) indicate that micro-credentials may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications.

Stacking credits means that [accumulated](#) credits (from courses, modules or micro-credentials) are counted towards a qualification or larger credential, or used for access to a further learning opportunity. All ECTS credits are stackable: that is, they can be recognised by an education institution as a record of part of the achievement necessary to obtain a specified qualification or credential.

Pathways to stack credits can be offered by a single education institution, education institutions can offer standardised pathways to stack credits obtained from another education institution, or education institutions can make case-by-case decisions to recognise credits towards a qualification or credential.

Student

A learner enrolled in a higher education institution. To reflect the shift towards more flexible learning and to enhance its usability in other education sectors, the more general term 'learner' is used throughout the Guide.

Traineeship

A planned period of experience outside the institution (for example, in a workplace) to help students to develop particular skills, knowledge or understanding as part of their programme (also called work placement and internship).

Traineeship Certificate

A document issued by the receiving organisation/enterprise upon the trainee's completion of the traineeship. It aims to provide transparency and document the value of the experience of the student's traineeship. See [7.4 Traineeship Certificate](#)

Transcript of Records

A record of the learner's progress drawn up by an education institution, listing the educational components a learner has taken, the number of ECTS credits they have achieved, and the grades they have been awarded. See [7.3 Transcript of Records](#)

Transfer (of credits)

[see key features](#)

Validation of non-formal or informal learning

A process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard. See [4.3 Awarding of ECTS Credits for Non-Formal and Informal Learning](#)

Virtual exchange

Learning delivered online to learners of another education institution, within the same country or abroad.

Work-based learning

Learning delivered by a university, college or other training provider in the workplace, normally under the supervision of a person from the same company as well as a professional teacher from outside the company ([Scottish Funding Council, 2015](#)).

Workload

See [key features](#)

Work placement

See [traineeship](#)

9.2 Annex 2 Examples for grade conversion

a) 1- Grade conversion based on two grade distribution tables from two reference groups belonging to different national grading systems:

Reference group A in Italy (Passing grades ranging from 18 to 30 cum laude)

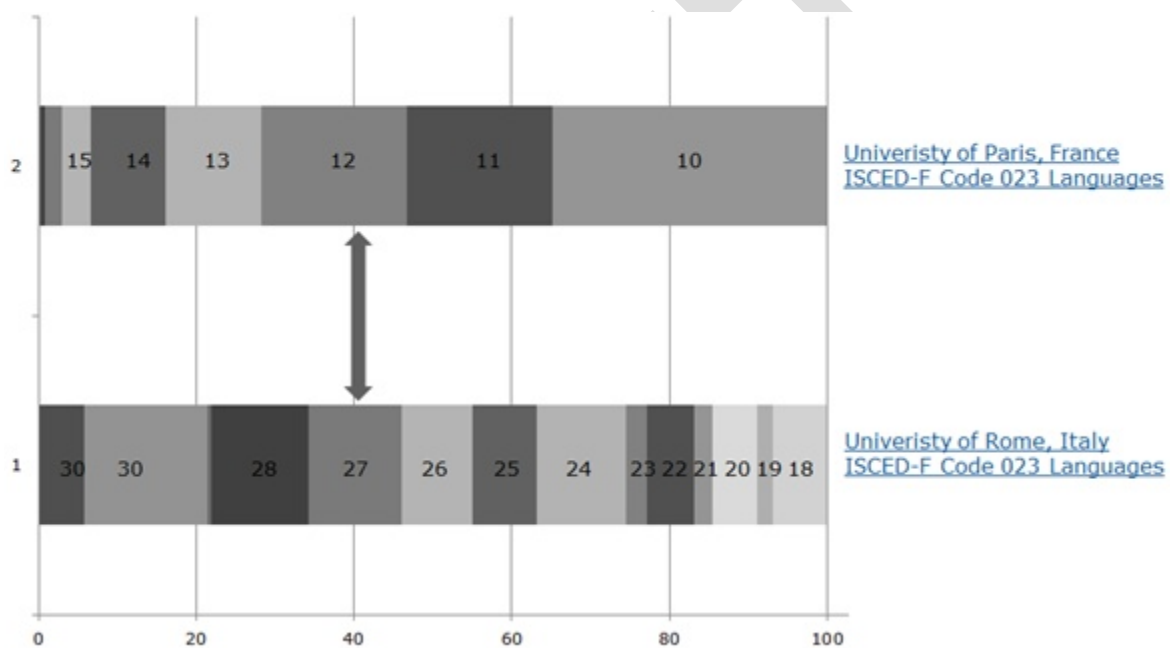
Reference group/Field of study: ISCED Code 023 Languages

Reference group B in France (Passing grades ranging from 10 to 20)

Reference group/Field of study: ISCED Code 023 Languages

*Distribution of the grade within the reference group

**Accumulated percentage of students obtaining the grade or lower



In this case, the percentage ranges of the grades overlap. The receiving institution should have decided in advance whether they will take the minimum, average or maximum comparable grade of overlapping ranges. Therefore, if the University of Rome had decided in advance that they would use the minimum or the average, the student's grade would be 27 and if they had decided that they would use the maximum, the student's grade would be 28.

b) 2 Grade conversion based on two grade distribution tables from two reference groups belonging to different national grading systems:

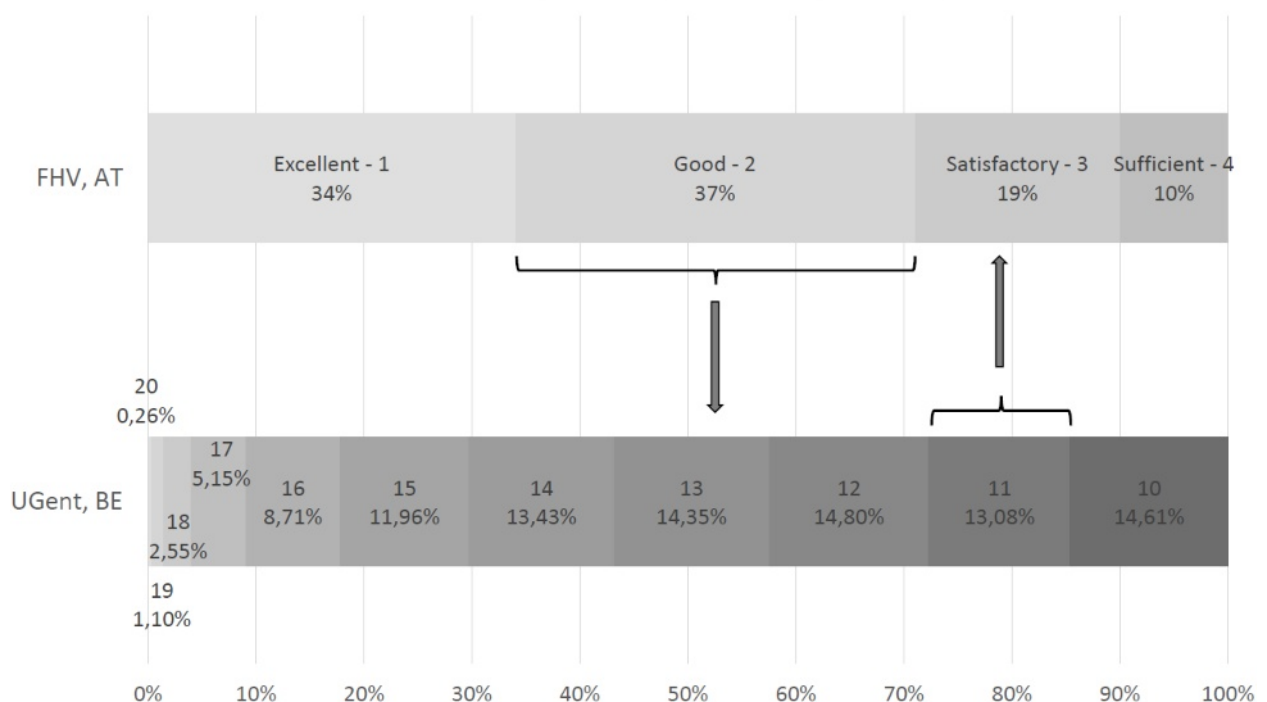
Institution FHV in Austria (Passing grades ranging from 1 to 4)

Reference group/Field of study: ISCED Code 071 Engineering and engineering trades

Institution University of Ghent in Belgium (Passing grades ranging from 10 to 20)

Reference group/Field of study: ISCED Code 071 Engineering and engineering trades

ISCED-F Code 071 Engineering and Engineering Trades



In this example a grade 2 (Good) from the institution in Austria would be transferred into a grade 13 in the institution in Belgium. A grade 11 from the institution in Belgium would be transferred into a grade 3 (Satisfactory) in Austria. In this case both institutions have decided to use the average in case of overlapping percentage ranges.

9.3 Annex 3 : Recommended Reading List

(to be added)

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9.4 Annex 4: Examples for formulations of learning outcomes

To be discussed: add examples or skip this annex

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