

ECTS - European Credit Transfer System

- [A common language for academic recognition](#)
- [What does ECTS offer to the student ?](#)
- [What does ECTS offer to higher education institutions ?](#)
- [What are ECTS credits ?](#)
- [What is the ECTS grading scale ?](#)
- [How does ECTS work ?](#)
- [How is ECTS used by students and institutions ?](#)

A COMMON LANGUAGE FOR ACADEMIC RECOGNITION

The European Community promotes study abroad as a means of improving the quality of academic cooperation bringing benefits to students and higher education institutions.

Studying abroad can be a particularly valuable experience. It is not only the best way to learn about other countries, ideas, languages and cultures; increasingly, it is an important part of professional and academic career development.

Students envisaging a study abroad will be looking for:

- study programmes which are relevant to their final degree,
- full academic recognition which ensures that they will not lose time in completing their degree by studying abroad.

To help students make the most from their study abroad, the European Commission has developed a European Credit Transfer System, which provides a way of measuring and comparing learning achievements, and transferring them from one institution to another.

ECTS helps higher education institutions to enhance their cooperation with other institutions by:

- improving access to information on foreign curricula,
- providing common procedures for academic recognition.

ECTS can also be used within one institution or between institutions within one country.

See also the [Network of national academic recognition centres](#)

HOW FAR HAVE WE GOT WITH ECTS ?

ECTS, the European Credit Transfer System, was initially established under the Erasmus programme (1988-1995) and has been tested over a period of 6 years in a pilot scheme involving 145 higher education institutions in all EU Member States and EEA countries, operating in five subject areas: Business Administration, Chemistry, History, Mechanical Engineering and Medicine (the so-called "inner circle" institutions).

In the next phase, the ECTS pilot scheme was broadened so that the participating institutions could introduce the system to a wider range of subject areas, partner institutions and networks over the period January 95/ May 96.

In a further step, in autumn 1995, the Commission invited institutions working as co-operation partners with the "inner circle" institutions to present their plans concerning the introduction of ECTS in one or more disciplines. Special emphasis was given to the use of the ECTS system within the non-university higher education sector. As a result of this second extension of ECTS, a total of 38 new universities with 348 departments and 36 non-university institutions including 206 departments implemented the ECTS system during 1996-1997.

Based on the results of the pilot scheme, the ECTS system has proved to be an effective instrument for creating curricular transparency and facilitating academic recognition and, as a consequence, the European Credit Transfer System has been included within the higher education component - Erasmus - of the Socrates Programme (1995-1999). Its promotion within higher education institutions has taken place within the framework of the Institutional Contracts drawn up between the Commission and the institutions.

In 1997-1998, 772 new institutions applied for the introduction of ECTS. This exponential increase in the number of ECTS users was a real challenge for the Commission: following up the implementation of the system and ensuring its quality. 48 workshops were organised in all countries participating in the SOCRATES programme from September 1997 to January 1998. These workshops were organised in co-operation with the ECTS counsellors, the SOCRATES/ERASMUS National Agencies and host universities that had already had a great deal of experience with the ECTS system.

In early 1998, as a follow-up of these workshops, a network of ECTS-Helplines has been set up. The task of the resource persons involved is to answer questions related to the implementation of ECTS, to help resolve practical problems, using examples of good practice gathered so far in the Member States.

ECTS site visits are also organised under the Institutional Contract to allow the more experienced ECTS institutions to receive a visit by two international ECTS experts who take stock of what has been achieved, give advice, identify good practice and ensure that ECTS practice develops in a consistent manner in all EU institutions.

In the framework of the Institutional Contract 1998-1999, 290 more institutions have requested a grant for the introduction of ECTS, of which 63 applications are from the associated countries. Workshops will be organised for these institutions during the autumn and the corresponding Helplines are already in place.

WHAT DOES ECTS OFFER TO THE STUDENT ?

- ECTS guarantees academic recognition of studies abroad.
- ECTS enables access to regular courses alongside local students, with the benefit of full participation in the academic life of the host institution. This characteristic of ECTS distinguishes it from many other student mobility programmes.
- ECTS enables further studies abroad. A student may prefer not to go back to the home institution after the study period abroad, but rather to stay at the host institution -- possibly to gain a degree -- or to move to a third institution. The institutions themselves decide whether or not this is acceptable and what conditions the student must fulfil in order to get a diploma or transfer registration.

WHAT DOES ECTS OFFER TO HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ?

- ECTS creates curriculum transparency by providing detailed information on the curricula and their relevance towards a degree.

- ECTS helps academics to make academic recognition decisions thanks to prior agreement on the content of study programmes abroad between students and their home and host institutions.
- The use of ECTS can also be a catalyst for reflection on course curriculum structures, student workload and learning outcomes.
- With ECTS, higher education institutions preserve their autonomy and responsibility for all decisions concerning students' achievements, without amending existing course structures and assessment methods: all courses and assessments are those which are normally taken by regular students at the host institution.

WHAT ARE ECTS CREDITS ?

ECTS credits are a value allocated to course units to describe the student workload required to complete them. They reflect the quantity of work each course requires in relation to the total quantity of work required to complete a full year of academic study at the institution, that is, lectures, practical work, seminars, private work -- in the laboratory, library or at home -- and examinations or other assessment activities.

In ECTS, 60 credits represent one year of study (in terms of workload); normally 30 credits are given for six months (a semester) and 20 credits for a term (a trimester).

ECTS credits are also allocated to practical placements and to thesis preparation when these activities form part of the regular programme of study at both the home and host institutions.

ECTS credits are allocated to courses and are awarded to students who successfully complete those courses by passing the examinations or other assessments.

WHAT IS THE ECTS GRADING SCALE ?

Examination and assessment results are usually expressed in grades. There are many different grading systems in Europe. To help institutions translate the grades awarded by host institutions to ECTS students, the ECTS grading scale has been developed. This provides additional information on the student's performance to that provided by the institution's grade, but does not replace the local grade. Higher education institutions make their own decisions on how to apply the ECTS grading scale to their own system.

HOW DOES ECTS WORK ?

The main tools used to make ECTS work and facilitate academic recognition are:

- The information package. Institutions which want to use ECTS produce an information package, updated annually, in which they describe the courses available at the institution. It provides general information about the institution, its location, student accommodation, administrative procedures necessary to register and academic calendar. Good course information is essential to prepare serious study abroad and descriptions covering the content, prerequisites, mode of assessment, time unit, type of course, teaching and learning methods employed and ECTS credits allocated are all included in the information package, along with a description of the department offering the course. Details of examination and assessment procedures, the institution's grading scale and the structure of the curriculum of the degree are also included.

The information package is produced in both the national language and in a second Community language. They are circulated to partner institutions for students and professors to consult and use in planning study abroad programmes.

- The learning agreement, describes the programme of study abroad and is drawn up by the individual student and institutions involved before the student goes abroad.
- The transcript of records, shows the learning achievements of the student prior to and after the period of study abroad. The transcript of records show for every course taken by the student not only the ECTS credits but also the grade awarded according to the local grading scale and the ECTS grading scale. The combination of the local grades and the ECTS credits and grades represents qualitatively and quantitatively the performance of the student on the courses at the host institution.

These tools are used by the institutional and departmental coordinators, appointed by each institution to deal with the administrative and academic aspects of ECTS. It is their role to advise and counsel students who wish to participate in ECTS.

By using ECTS, transparency of curricula and students' learning achievements is created, which in turn facilitates academic recognition.

HOW IS ECTS USED BY STUDENTS AND INSTITUTIONS ?

Planning the programme of study abroad

Students who wish to study abroad contact their home departmental coordinator and study the information packages of other institutions to choose their destination and plan their programme of study abroad. This helps the student to select courses which are appropriate in their content and academic level, for recognition by the home institution as part of the student's final degree. Using the ECTS credits helps students to organise a study programme which is realistic in terms of overall workload. The ECTS credit rating demonstrates the relative weight of each course in the proposed programme of study.

Ensuring full academic recognition

An ECTS study programme must be approved by both the home and the host institutions before the student leaves for the study period abroad. If the programme of study described in the learning agreement is completed satisfactorily by the student, it is fully recognised by the home institution. This means that the volume of study abroad, measured in terms of numbers of ECTS credits achieved, will replace an equivalent volume of study and assessment which would otherwise have been undertaken at the home institution.

How are ECTS credits transferred?

Institutions prepare and exchange transcripts of records for each student participating in ECTS. A copy of the transcript is given to the student and exchanged between the home and the host institutions before and after the period of study abroad.

Further studies abroad

As indicated, an ECTS student might wish to stay at the host institution - perhaps to get a degree or move to a third institution. This is possible provided that the institutions involved agree and that the student accepts the conditions to be fulfilled to get a diploma or to transfer registration. By providing a history of the students' academic achievements, the transcript of records is a particularly useful means of helping institutions to make these decisions further opening up Europe to student mobility.

Higher education institutions are encouraged to introduce ECTS within the framework of their institutional contract with the Commission.

Further details as well as advice on implementing ECTS are available from the [NATIONAL ECTS COUNSELLORS](#) (pdf format).