

## **European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)**

The European Credit Transfer and accumulation System (ECTS) is a credit system for higher education developed by the European Union within the framework of the Bologna Process used in the European Higher Education Area, which aims to facilitate the visibility and comparison of curricula in different European countries and student mobility.

ECTS is widely used in traditional higher education and can be applied to other training activities in the lifelong learning process.

### **Presentation**

This system allows the attribution of credit points to all the components of a curriculum (tuition, training courses, examinations, reports, ...) by basing itself on the workload to be realised by the learner. It therefore offers a better European vision of the national curricula and is a complementary tool to the diploma, facilitating mobility for students from one country to another and from one institution to another.

The ECTS system is centred on the learner. It helps institutions to switch from a traditional approach centred on the teacher, emphasising the needs and expectations of the student in the conception and the implementation of training programs and gives the students a wider choice in subjects, modes, rhythms and the place of learning.

Every institution of higher education independently decides within the framework of national regulations, to recognise or not these credits for the inscription in one of its programs, or to complete a curriculum leading to one of the diplomas that it delivers.

The credits of a curriculum can be transferred towards another program proposed by the same institution or by another one. Such a transfer can take place only when the establishment which delivers the title recognises the credits and the corresponding results of learning. The partner establishments have to agree beforehand on the recognition of the periods of studies abroad

Within the agreements of exchange of students, three parts are involved, namely the institution of origin, the host institution and the student. All three have to sign a learning agreement contract. The use of ECTS credits as part of continuing education uses the same principles of assignment, delivering, transfer and accumulation of credits.

The skills acquired in an unconventional way (outside of higher education, in the professional environment, from personal experience, ...) should also be able to benefit from the recognition that institutions can offer using ECTS.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning gives the opportunity to obtain a certification to those who were not able or did not wish to obtain the level by going through the traditional path. The award of credit is preceded by an assessment to ensure that learning outcomes are achieved. The evaluation criteria with associated methods must be established to measure the achievement of learning outcomes required at the appropriate level, without reference to specific learning activities.

Institutions are encouraged to publish their rules and procedures for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

A positive evaluation of learning outcomes is a precondition to the award of credits awarded to a learner. Therefore, descriptions of learning outcomes of program components must always be accompanied by clear and suitable assessment criteria.

The results of learning can consist of the description of thresholds (grades) or be drafted as reference points describing a situation of typical success.

Approaches based on learning outcomes also allow the assessment of knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside the context of traditional higher education (non-formal and informal learning) and the award of credits and therefore recognition of these for obtaining certification.

The transfer and the accumulation of the credits are facilitated by the use of the key-documents of the ECTS (course catalogue), registration form of the student, contract of learning agreement, transcripts of grades) and the supplement to the diploma.

This system thus serves to facilitate the implementation of partnerships between institutions of different countries by supplying a common principle of description of the programs of education.

### **Operation :**

One year of study is worth 60 credits, which means between 1,500 and 1,800 hours of student work. So one credit corresponds to a volume of about 25 to 30 hours of student work. Credits are granted only to students passing their exams.

Undergraduate certification (Bachelor) in principle includes 180-240 ECTS credits. Second cycle certification (master) includes in principle 90 to 120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 ECTS credits.

If the student has obtained results of learning in other contexts or frames of training (whether they are formal, non formal or informal), the corresponding credits can be attributed to them after a positive evaluation, validation or recognition of these results.

Three documents are associated with the ECTS system:

- A course catalogue, presenting the information on the establishment, the programs and proposed diplomas and general information for the student (cost of living, housing, proposed services, financial supports, insurance, practical information for foreigners);
- The contract of agreement learning including the list of the tuition to be followed with the ECTS credits corresponding to each course. In case of transfer of credits, the learning agreement must be accepted by the student and both establishments before the departure of the student;
- The grade sheet.

To benefit from this system, the student must have the nationality of one of the countries concerned by the ECTS, that is the European Union or the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), or must be recognised as having a status of refugee or permanent resident.

