ECTS: A Credit System For Europe

Over the last decade, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has been successfully introduced through Socrates ERASMUS. Initially designed to facilitate European mobility, ECTS has primarily been used so far on a small scale as a credit transfer system, with its impact limited to a relatively small number of students. The further development of ECTS into a credit accumulation system at national level, speeded up by the Bologna Process, effectively means mainstreaming ECTS as a generalised credit system for the emerging European Higher Education Area. It thus becomes of key importance to Europe’s higher education institutions and students.

Objectives

As a credit transfer system, ECTS:
- facilitates the transfer of students between European countries, and in particular enhances the quality of student mobility in ERASMUS, thus facilitating academic recognition
- promotes key aspects of the European dimension in Higher Education

As an accumulation system, ECTS:
- supports widespread curricular reform in national systems
- enables widespread mobility within institutions, national systems and internationally
- allows transfer from outside the higher education context, thus facilitating Lifelong Learning and the recognition of informal and non-formal learning, and also promoting greater flexibility in learning and qualification processes
- facilitates access to the labour market
- enhances the transparency and comparability of European systems, thus also promoting the attractiveness of European higher education towards the rest of the world

As a credit transfer and accumulation system, the key goals of ECTS are:
- to improve transparency and comparability of study programmes and qualifications
- to facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications.

Key Features
• ECTS is a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme. These objectives are preferably specified in terms of learning outcomes.
• ECTS is based on the convention that 60 credits measure the notional workload of an average full time student during one academic year. This includes time spent attending lectures, seminars, project and laboratory work, independent study, preparing for and taking examinations, etc.
• Credits are allocated to all educational and training components of a study programme (such as modules, courses, placements, dissertation work, etc.). They reflect the quantity of work each component requires in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of study in the programme considered.
• Credits can be obtained only after completion of the work required and appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes achieved.

ECTS presupposes the use of a minimum number of essential tools. First and foremost, this means respect for the Learning Agreement. For student mobility and credit transfer this has to be concluded, before departure, between the student and the responsible academic bodies of the two institutions concerned. The use of Learning Agreements should also be extended to non-mobile home students for registering study options and programmes.