SPHERE
Support and Promotion for Higher Education Reform Experts

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HERE National Seminar

”ECTS for programme design, delivery and monitoring”

ECTS Explained: An essential tool for making study programmes student-centred and (inter)nationally compatible

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EUROPEAN COMMUNITY COURSE CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM
EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM
EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER AND ACCUMULATION SYSTEM

ECTS

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1. Key Bologna Process Commitments

Aim: Reinforcing and supporting quality and cooperation inside the EHEA:

- *a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS*
- *compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention,*
- *quality assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.*

2. Background of ECTS

Introduction EU ERASMUS mobility scheme in 1987

Every EU country having its own educational system:

3 types:

- **Countries with a workload-based credit system**
- **Countries with a system-based on contact hours**
- **Countries without any system**

Major concern:

How to organise and guarantee recognition of studies?

3. Why credits?: It is all about recognition!

Factors influencing recognition:

PRESTIGE of

- ***the educational system of a country***
- ***the university involved***
- ***the programme involved***

+

VOLUME and OUTCOMES of learning process:

- **student workload +**
- **learning outcomes of a study programme**

4. Why having (a) credit system(s)?

- Improve the comparability and compatibility of study programmes
- Make study programmes more transparent
- Allow for more flexibility and diversity of pathways
- Make it easier to construct well-balanced programmes
- Promote the feasibility of programmes
- Enhance the quality of programmes
- Facilitate and promote student mobility
- Facilitate and improve the recognition of periods of studies taken elsewhere successfully
- Facilitate different types of learning (informal, non-formal, formal, part-time, etc.)

A credit system is a key element for the accumulation of knowledge and skills expressed and measured in terms of (workload / time-based) credits

5. Why student workload based?

- To *bridge* different educational *models*
- To overcome *recognition issues* at country system level
- *Support recognition* of periods of studies instead of course to course unit recognition by universities
- *Facilitate different types* of structured activities: lectures, seminars, laboratory work, independent work, exercise courses, thesis writing, internships/ placements, etc.
- *Be fair to* the time investment of *students* in these activities including preparation and independent work

6. From a transfer to accumulation (2004-)

As a response to the Bologna Declaration: *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* initiative (2000 – present)

One of its objectives: convert ECTS from a transfer system into a *transfer and accumulation system*

Actions:

- **Base credit allocation on fixed programmes (*absolute value* instead of relative value)**
- **Decide number of working hours per credit**
- ***Change the paradigm*: introduce student-centred learning**
- **Base credit system on a combination of *workload and* intended / achieved *learning outcomes***
- **Use ECTS for *curriculum* design, delivery, evaluation and enhancement**

7. ECTS Key features 2015 -

ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer based on the principle of transparency of the learning, teaching and assessment processes. Its objective is to facilitate the planning, delivery, and evaluation of study programmes and learner mobility by recognising learning achievements and qualifications and periods of learning.

ECTS KEY FEATURES (2)

ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload.

60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent. ECTS credits are generally expressed in whole numbers

ECTS KEY FEATURES (3)

Learning outcomes are verifiable statements of what the individual *knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process*. (…) Learning outcomes are attributed to individual educational components and to programmes at a whole.

They are also used in European and national qualifications frameworks to describe the level of the individual qualification.

ECTS KEY FEATURES (4)

Workload is an estimation of the time the individual typically needs to complete all learning activities such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, work placements and individual study required to achieve the defined learning outcomes in formal learning environments. The correspondence of the full-time workload of an academic year to 60 credits is often formalised by legal provisions.

ECTS KEY FEATURES (5)

Allocation of credits **in ECTS is the process of assigning a number of credits to qualifications, degree programmes or single educational components.**

Credits are allocated to entire qualifications or programmes according to national legislation or practice, where appropriate, and with reference to national and/or European qualifications frameworks. They are allocated to educational components, such as course units, dissertations, work based learning and work placements, taking as a basis the allocation of 60 credits per full-time academic year, according to the estimated workload required to achieve the defined learning outcomes for each component.

8. The role of time in the learning process

Some notions

Time is an unchangeable dimension

Time is the basis for organising life

Becoming competent requires effort and time (experience)

Although time is absolute, it is relative at the same time …….

What (really) counts is productivity: what can be done in a given timeframe depends on many factors

The concept of productivity is related to the concept of learning outcomes and student workload

Tuning works with the concepts of notional learning time and the typical student to obtain the intended (expected) learning outcomes

One can distinguish different types of interrelated elements that influence productivity, that is the time to obtain the required level of competence:

- **Diversity of traditions**
- **Curriculum design and context**
- **Coherence of curriculum**
- **Teaching and learning methods**
- **Methods of assessment and performance**
- **Organisation of teaching and learning**
- **Ability and diligence of the student**
- **Personal and material means available**

Notional learning time and the typical student

Definition: ***the notional learning time is the time an average student will need to meet the expected learning outcomes. These learning outcomes can be formulated at threshold (minimum) level or at desired level***

These concepts are used to design a degree programme or a course unit or module: a realistic estimation for calculating time

However ….. the average student does not exist in reality

Warning!

The notional learning time is not the actual time that any particular learner needs to spend. The actual time will differ from student to student

Credits are also a tool for planning !

Calculating credits in relation to time

Survey among ECTS experts to decide workload

Outcome: student workload in Europe ranges from (1200) 1500 – 1800 hours.
Decision: 1 ECTS credit reflects 25-30 hours of workload

Today ECTS system is also applied in many countries to calculate workload / time of staff (instead of teaching hours)

Challenges:

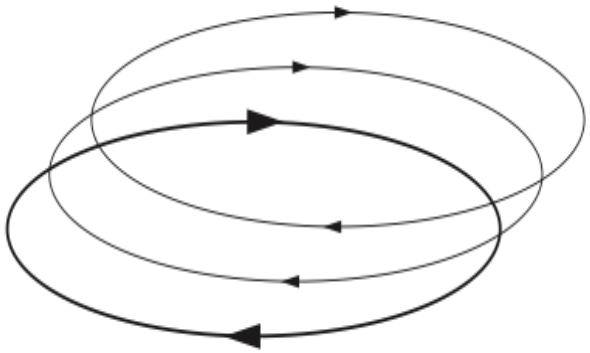
- **Discrepancies of volume of learning between Bologna countries**
- **Correct calculation and application of student workload: check and balances**

Calculating ECTS credits

I. Module
(Number of credits/students hours)

An approach

IV. Adjustment of the unit either with regard to the number of credits allocated or the educational activities



II. Planning educational activities / determining student time involved

III. Checking of workload by student evaluations in terms of real time involved

4 steps:

I. **Introducing modules/course units**
II. **Estimating student workload (Modes of instruction, learning and assessment)**
III. **Checking the estimated workload through student evaluations**
IV. **Adjustment of workload and/or educational activities**

9. Learning outcomes: Opportunities and challenges

Opportunities

Learning outcomes allow for better comparison and recognition of periods of successful learning

Learning outcomes allow for different approaches to reach the same results

Challenges

Formulating learning outcomes requires expertise and experience

Learning outcomes should express reality

Learning outcomes should always be measurable

THE CONCEPT OF THREE CYCLES: LOs and Credits

Third cycle
Learning outcomes:

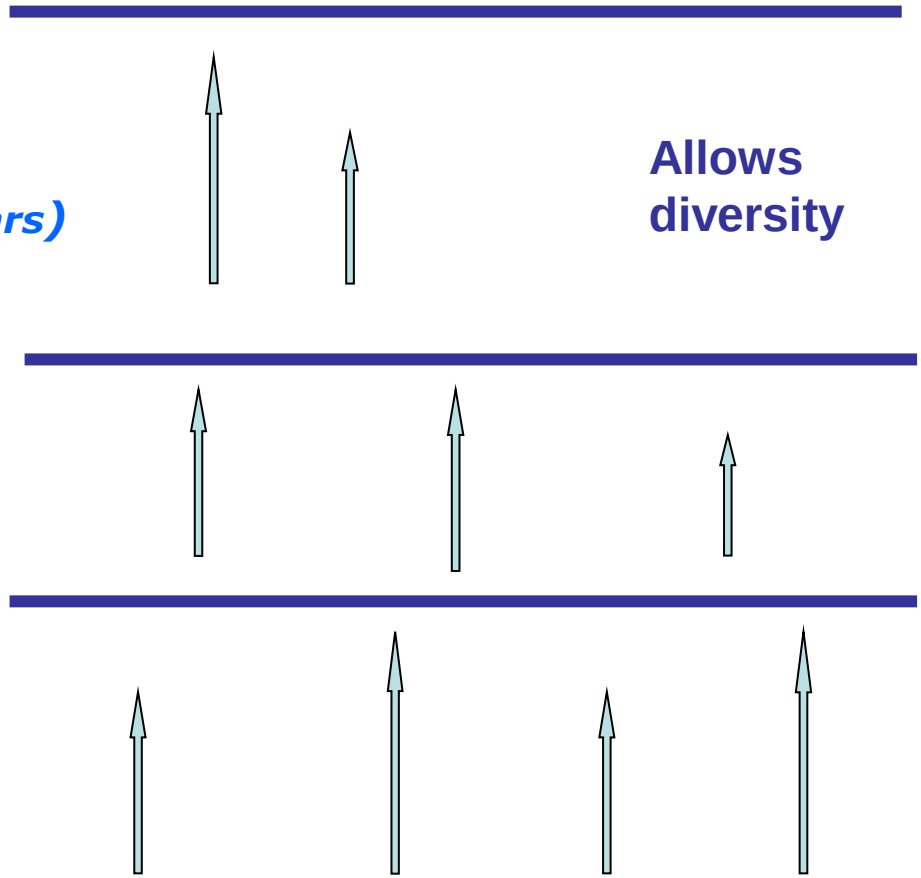
Different pathways
180 -240 ECTS credits (3-4 years)

Second cycle
learning outcomes:

Different pathways:
(60) 90 – 120 ECTS credits

First cycle
learning outcomes:

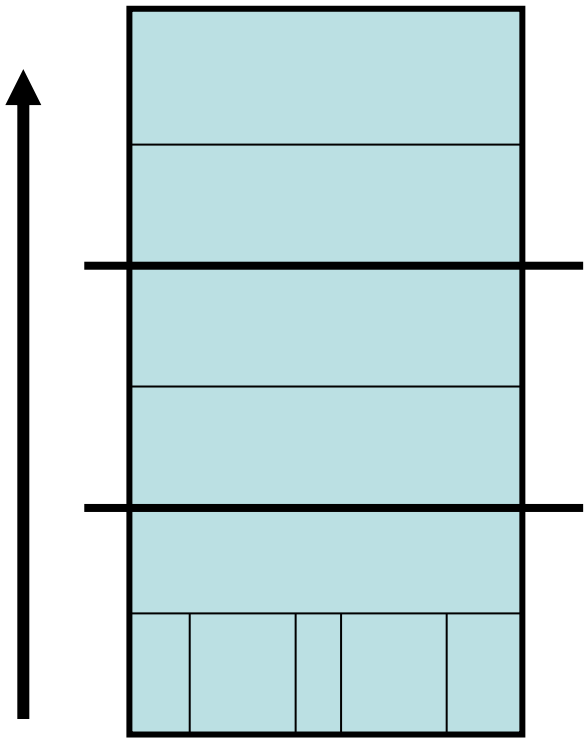
Different pathways:
180 – 240 ECTS credits



There are different ways that lead to Rome ……..

Case study

Two types of first cycle programmes: number 1

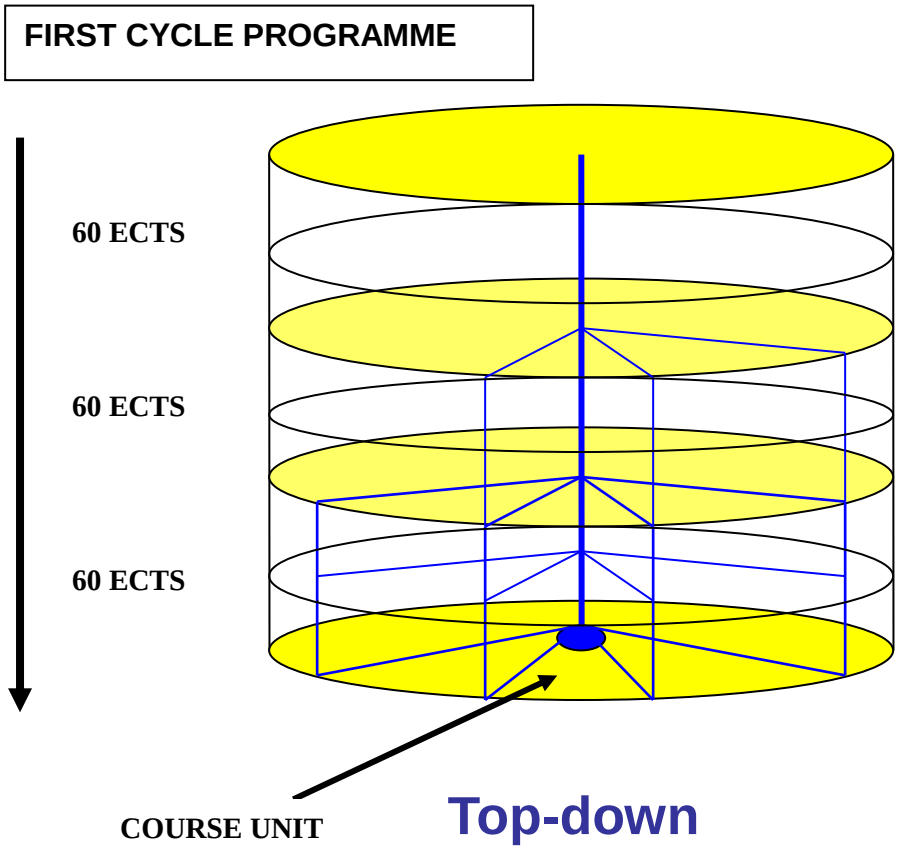


Bottom-up

Traditional (first cycle) programme:

- Constructed on the basis of rather loose course units
- Course units content is responsibility of individual academics
- (Very) limited cooperation and consultation between academic staff
- Danger of limit balance between course units
- Feasibility not guaranteed
- Academia oriented, limited concern for employability and educating for citizenship
- Outcome (level) of programme not quite clear

Two types of first cycle programmes: number 2



Degree programme based on the Tuning methodology:

- Programme based on profile, sets of competences to be obtained, desired learning outcomes to be achieved, ECTS credits to be awarded
- Programme design is team work, based on consultation, discussion, cooperation
- Learning outcomes / competences to be developed are basis for credit allocation
- Teaching, learning and assessment approaches respect credit allocation: feasibility key factor

PLANNING FORM FOR AN EDUCATIONAL UNIT/ MODULE

Programme of Studies:

Name of the module / course unit:

Type of course (e.g. major, minor, elective):

Target group (e.g. BA. MA, PhD):

Prerequisites:

Number of ECTS credits:

Competences to be developed:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

6.....

Learning Outcomes	*Educational Activities*	*Estimated student work time in hours*	*Assessment*

10. Conclusions

- ECTS is one of the main instruments of the EHEA to make HE programmes comparable and compatible

- Develop a deep understanding of its features: apply the paradigm of student centred / outcomes based learning

- Take student workload serious; make reliable calculations

- Define a profile for your programme, restructure it on the basis of this profile (and relate it to Learning Outcomes)

- Allow for flexibility, because society asks for it

- Align workload and learning outcomes

- Use the instruments available: ECTS Users' Guide and the Tuning materials

Train academic staff and administrative staff to use ECTS / make students and staff aware of its advantages

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