

## Ad-Hoc Advisory Group on the ECTS Users' Guide Revision 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting

25<sup>th</sup> of June 2025

Brussels/Hybrid

### Minutes of the meeting

#### List of participants

Country/Institution	First Name	Last Name	Attendance
European Commission (EAC) (Chair)	Susanne	Conze	In person
European Commission (EAC)	Kinga	Szuly	In person
European Commission (EAC)	Sophia	Catsambi	In person
European Commission (EAC)	Bulent	Artan	Online
European Commission (EAC)	Camille	Odent	In person
European Commission (EAC)	Yann Maël	Bideau	In person
Knowledge Innovation Center – KIC (Lead expert)	Colin	Tück	In person
Austria (Fachhochschule Technikum Wien)	Agnes	Kriz	Online
Cedefop	Zelda	Azzara	Online
Croatia (Algebra University)	Ana	Tecilazić	In person
Denmark (University of Southern Denmark)	Per	Æbelø	Online
ENQA	Elena	Cîrlan	Online
EQAR	Aleksandar	Šušnjar	In person
Erasmus Student Network (Invited speaker)	Rita	Dias	Online
ESU	Lana	Par	In person
EUA	Thérèse	Zhang	In person
EURASHE	Jakub	Grodecki	Online/ In person
Finland	Jonna	Korhonen	In person
Germany	Ronny	Heintze	Online
ICF (Lead researcher)	Ilona	Murphy	In person
ICF	Jan	Vacha	In person
ICF	Cecile	McGrath	Online
ICF	Elodie	Lafont	Online
ICF	Hamad	Faridi	Online
Ireland (QQI)	Jim	Murray	Online
Italy (University of Pisa)	Ann Katherine	Isaacs	Online
Italy (CIMEA)	Chiara	Finocchietti	Online
Lithuania (Vilnius University)	Raimonda	Markevicienė	In person
The Netherlands (NUFFIC)	José	Ravenstein	In person

Country/Institution	First Name	Last Name	Attendance
The Netherlands (University of Groningen)	Robert	Wagenaar	In person
Poland (Warsaw School of Economics)	Jakub	Brdulak	Online
Slovak Republic (Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth)	Peter	Ondreicka	Online
Ukraine	Andriy	Stavytskyy	Online
EHEA Secretariat (Head)	Horia	Onița	In person
EHEA Secretariat	Irina	Duma	In person

Frederik De Decker (Belgium) was absent.

## 1. Welcome and Updates

Documents: [Presentation](#)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, which took place at the premises of the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium. Kinga Szuly (EAC) presented the outcomes from the EQF Advisory Group meeting, namely the possibility to use ECTS in the VET system, as well as to use qualifications of the type of VET for all levels of the EQF. The EQF Advisory Group also considered the way in which micro-credentials would be influenced by the revision of the ECTS Users' Guide and how the individual learning accounts could be linked to ECTS.

Colin Tück (KIC, Lead expert) added that the EQF Advisory Group supported the use of ECTS in other education sectors, aiming at making it more usable for a wider use in lifelong learning (LLL).

## 2. Research findings

Ilona Murphy (CNTR, Lead researcher) opened the [presentation](#) on the research findings, focusing on micro-credentials (MCs), blended intensive programs (BIPs), Learning Agreements and Transcripts of Records, mainly based on the desk research. Additionally, targeted findings in relation to grade conversion, digital tools, quality assurance (QA) and recognition of prior learning (RPL) were presented to support the discussion on the Draft o of the ECTS User's Guide. As an overview of the profile of the desk-research activities conducted at institutional level, the analysis considered 240 programs, 133 courses, 139 micro-credentials, and 22 BIPs. For the online survey, which remained open until September 2025, 2503 responses (514 from staff and almost 2000 from students) were received. However, the response rate was quite unbalanced, with most responses from Austria, France, Ireland and North Macedonia. For the focus groups, 13 staff and 10 students focus groups had been completed.

The main outcomes of the online survey showed that the tendency is to organize MCs in a blended mode of delivery, especially in engineering. The descriptions provided by MCs providers mostly contain the essential basic information in terms of content and course catalogue, as well as credit allocation.

The staff focus groups revealed that in higher education institutions (HEIs), MCs are in different stages of development, depending on regulatory frameworks. The focus groups participants were leaning towards LLL for enhancing graduate employment and also supporting working

professionals. When it came to aligning the MCs to qualification framework (QF) levels, it was observed that this assignment was not so straightforward, given that a MC might be suitable for a certain level in a particular discipline, but considerably different for another discipline. It was also emphasised that confusion with some terminology was still experienced by HEIs.

Moving on to BIPs, it was found that they are mostly common in European Universities Alliances (EUIs), but openness to staff participation in BIPs is rather limited. For some BIPs, around 3 ECTS were awarded after the assessment of learning outcomes. As expected, BIPs are often not counted towards degree requirements. Also, some administrative challenges arise in relation to coordination across institutions in terms of existing systems, procedures, mobility windows, and recognition of credits for doctoral students. The students' focus groups revealed that experiencing BIPs was considered rewarding and enriching, with many participants saying that they would like more such opportunities for mobility. However, the participants questioned the utility of additional ECTS credits offered through BIPs or other mobility-related ECTS credits when they did not count to degree requirements. The desk research revealed that around half of the learning agreements lacked references to course catalogues, the name of the program, or even the study cycle. However, the learning agreements studied were generally similar to each other, also given that HEIs usually use the Erasmus+ template. When it came to transcripts of records, the desk-research revealed that the most common information missing was related to the field of study, the program name, the grade distribution or the current year of study. Compared to the learning agreements, the transcripts of records differ highly from one institution to another.

Ilona Murphy (CNTR, Lead researcher) emphasised that different institutional practices and policies are mostly influenced by national policies and regulatory frameworks, and how ECTS is integrated in these legislative frameworks. Regarding the grade conversion from the mobile students' perspective, only half of the survey respondents considered the conversion fair. It was observed that, in some cases, the pass rate at the home institution was considered a fail score in the mobility country, which should be taken into consideration in the grade conversion process. Jan Vacha (ICF) then presented the findings from the staff focus groups, which showed that some faculties have their own approaches to grade conversion, while most institutions do not convert grades, but resort to the pass/fail system. As a supporting tool, the [EGRACONS](#) was found useful by the staff involved in grade conversion matters. In addition, students from the focus groups confirmed that a significant amount of institutions avoid grade conversion, while some applying them do not always show fairness (for example, automatic conversion would usually result in lower grades in their home institutions, despite learning in a foreign language and showing higher performance in the mobility institution).

Moving on to the digital tools, Ilona Murphy (CNTR, Lead researcher) showed that the Erasmus Without Papers (EWP) initiative was highly welcomed, contributing to the reduction of administrative burden. However, some challenges were identified, particularly in terms of access (the system not allowing different users), widely spread usage (not all partners use digital systems), or difficulty to amend learning agreements online. Some institutions developed their own supplementary digital tools, particularly used with partners they are frequently working with.

In terms of quality assurance, the staff survey research investigated the mechanisms used for monitoring the allocation of ECTS credits, most used being the student questionnaires. More qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups are less used by institutions. Other monitoring methods are the evaluation of study programmes, curricula design, committee review, and online questionnaires for students on a voluntary basis. From the student perspective,

the survey showed that in most cases students either believe that their institutions do not monitor their workload, or they are not aware of any workload monitoring. Overall, 31% students declared that they have opportunities to contribute to internal or external QA monitoring in relation to ECTS allocation. From the staff focus groups, it was found that online questionnaires are the most common monitoring tools, but low student response rates were identified as challenge for meaningful feedback. Most participants declared that monitoring results could lead to workload redistribution or even structural changes of the curriculum. The students' focus groups showed that they have overall mixed experiences with workload monitoring. They raised concerns about the limited systematic assessment of actual versus planned student workload and suggested that workload descriptions and explanations of assessment components should be included in course catalogues.

In relation to RPL, the regular recognition of learning outcomes outside of formal learning is rather low, mostly due to absence of institutional policies in this regard or no requests. On the other hand, half of the students reported that they had no knowledge of the possibility of recognizing learning outcomes achieved outside formal learning. When opening the floor for questions and discussions, José Ravenstein (The Netherlands, NUFFIC) pointed out that these findings strongly align with the lessons learnt from the Erasmus+ program. EUA inquired about the publishing of the report on the research findings, and Ilona Murphy (CNTR, Lead researcher) confirmed that these findings would be included in the technical report produced as a background document for the revision of the ECTS Users' Guide, to be presented in more detail in the following AG meeting. Kinga Szuly (EAC) added that it would not be a stand-alone study published by the European Commission but would be part of the work conducted for the revision of ECTS Users' Guide. EUA also asked if the responses were pondered by country and stated that the results in terms of grade conversion may come from the different perceptions at institutional level based on value, reputation and prestige, thus being difficult to steer change only by using grading tables.

ENQA suggested that MCs and BIPs, as policy fields under development, should be carefully and clearly addressed in the Guide, taking into account existing work in projects such as [MICROBOL](#) and [IMINQA](#).

Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania) emphasized that the increasing use of grading tables by universities can be seen as an achievement, and institutions may need more guidance on how grade conversion should be implemented. Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) focused on the lack of awareness regarding RPL, highlighting that the Guide should include clearer rules on this matter, since the importance of RPL will increase, despite the core problems with the slow progress in RPL.

### **3. Student perspective on ECTS implementation**

#### **3.1. Introduction of ESU Statement on the Implementation of the ECTS**

Lana Par (ESU) presented the results of the Bologna with Students' Eyes (BWSE) publication. She noted that in a significant number of countries, students perceived that allocation of ECTS credits on the basis of the total student workload for achieving learning outcomes (LOs) were rarely or only sometimes implemented. For the majority of countries included in ESU's study, national student unions were dissatisfied with the implementation of ECTS at national level.

Lana added that ESU has been involved in a project focused on the automatic recognition of ECTS credits obtained through mobilities (together with the EUF – European Universities

Foundation, EUA and ESN), where they also conducted several focus groups in which students were asked about the opportunities and challenges faced in mobilities. She emphasized that they discovered mostly the same issues as the ICF research findings revealed. ESU underlined that the most common challenges in the implementation of ECTS refer to inconsistent credit allocation, diverse grading systems, recognition of prior learning (informal and non-formal learning, such as work experience, internships and volunteering were rarely recognized with credit allocation), workload discrepancies, lack of transparency and awareness (for both students and staff in terms of understanding of how ECTS works), which results in there being barriers to mobility.

ESU proposed several steps to be taken for enhancing the overall ECTS, namely: digitalisation of credit transfer, improved stakeholder engagement, stronger institutional commitment, continuous training for academic staff, and alignment of ECTS in VET, to ensure flexible learning paths. Consequently, ESU proposed the following recommendations for improving the ECTS Users' Guide: 1) Standardise credit allocation, by defining clear and consistent rules for assigning credits based on student workload and LOs; 2) Harmonised grading scales; 3) Clearer guidelines on RPL; 4) Improved monitoring of ECTS allocation; 5) Enhanced transparency and students involvement; 6) QA in ECTS application, to ensure that ECTS is applied consistently across institutions and countries.

### 3.2. Key messages from ESN

Rita Dias (ESN) presented the outcomes from the [XV<sup>th</sup> ESNsurvey Final Report](#), based on the information gathered in 2023. The survey showed that there was still room for improvement in terms of information provided by institutions about mobility opportunities, available funding or financial aid, as well as support in the preparation of learning agreements, mobility application, grade transfer, and ECTS recognition. Mobile students also emphasised the need for more international components in teaching and learning activities in their home institution, linguistic support, intercultural and other international activities, as well as the need to better support to those with fewer opportunities or special needs. Consequently, ESN recommended to provide students with comprehensive information about the accessibility of courses and the ECTS system, while Erasmus+ institutional coordinators should play a key role in guiding students.

The ESNsurvey showed that the main issues encountered by mobile students during the mobility refer to insufficient financial resources to cover the costs of living, problems in finding affordable accommodation, and problems with the courses taken (including the learning agreement and courses recognition phase).

After mobility, it was observed that the most widely used tool was the Online Learning Agreements, albeit by only 44.14% of institutions. While the average recognition rate was found to be 28 ECTS, there were respondents who reported that they did not have any of their credits recognised upon return to their home university. Although there are some discrepancies in the understanding of each part's responsibilities (students and institutions), it was revealed that students agree that the main priority of HEIs was to provide full and accurate information on credit transfer and grade conversion procedures.

Following these results, ESN's recommendations covered different actors and processes: 1) National governments and HEIs must intensify their efforts to ensure the automatic recognition of LOs from Erasmus+ mobilities; 2) The European Commission, National Agencies and HEIs should fully explore the potential of Erasmus+ participation by systematically analysing the impact of mobility through a data-driven approach; 3) National Agencies should implement



stricter monitoring of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) to ensure that course catalogue information is provided well in advance and that recognition procedures are applied in full compliance with the charter commitments.

In addition, qualitative data from the ESNsurvey revealed structural issues contributing to the so-called “inflexibility in degree programs”, mostly caused by individual teachers and their subjectivity with respect to the classes taken abroad.

Finally, ESN recommends that ECTS Users’ Guide should incentivise institutions to embed mobility windows within every degree programme. In terms of quality assurance, it was recommended that national and European QA authorities should support curriculum reform through institutional planning, incentives and best practices.

From the consultations conducted across the ESN membership, it resulted that the majority of students did not get any form of recognition from their HEI for the volunteering activities, while only 11.1% experienced an academic recognition such as ECTS credits.

### 3.3. Reflections, questions and answers

Following the two presentations on the students’ perspectives, the chair opened the floor for discussion.

José Ravenstein (The Netherlands), supported by Ronny Heintze (Germany) mentioned that due to the continuous change of staff within universities, the ECTS User’s Guide should also be provided in a website-type platform that would offer clear, accurate and accessible information to staff working with ECTS within universities, students, and other interested individuals.

Aleksandar Šušnjar (EQAR) considered that the existing issues may not necessarily stem from the non-implementation of the ECTS, but rather mis-implementation or superficial implementation, outlining the usefulness of the qualitative analysis from the monitoring exercises that dig into the depth of the topic, and not only rely on quantitative survey results. He reiterated his suggestions that focus groups prioritise the practical challenges in implementing ECTS rather than focusing on the content of the Guide. Secondly, he emphasized the need to decide on the meaning of the recognition of studies abroad. For example, if a mobile student chooses to follow a course outside their study field, and that course is not recognized upon their return, it would rather reflect on the missing interdisciplinarity or inflexible learning paths rather than the ECTS itself. In this regard, he suggested that the Advisory Group would decide specifically on what the Guide aims to solve, and provide proposals of specific tools aimed at reaching those objectives.

Ronny Heintze (Germany) suggested that going beyond the ECTS Users’ Guide, a toolkit could be prepared to better ensure a user-centred approach.

In terms of students’ findings, Colin Tück (KIC, Lead expert) underlined that automatic recognition based on learning agreements seemed to work fairly well, which was also noticed in the focus groups and surveys conducted with ICF. However, he emphasised that the process of actually having the learning agreement signed may pose difficulties, thus inquiring ESU and ESN in this regard ESN, seconded by ESU, underlined that even after completing and signing the learning agreement the recognition process was not guaranteed. Moreover, she added that students experienced lack of support from their home universities before signing the learning agreement, which may be because institutions are often understaffed.

#### 4. Use of ECTS in vocational education and training

Zelda Azzara (Cedefop) presented insights on credit systems from the [Transparency and transferability of learning outcomes](#) study. The study included both ECTS and ECVET systems and aimed at exploring European and national efforts to increase flexibility of learning systems with a view to informing future policy discussions. They explored the synergies between different systems based on several policy areas, such as credit transfer and accumulation, quality assurance, comparability of skills and qualifications, validation of non-formal and informal learning, and recognition of skills and qualifications. It was found that ECTS and ECVET are usually linked with other policy areas within national systems, with the caveat that ECVET is not always fully applied across countries. For example, credit systems in VET are not present in all countries while in some countries, there are even three credit systems for different education levels. However, an increasing number of countries are exploring the possibility of using ECTS outside the higher education sector.

Cedefop recalled the importance of implementing relevant Council recommendation to make the best use of the European transparency tools. The main findings of the project also showed an increased focus on learning outcomes as a unifying element in promoting coherence, with moderate synergies across transparency initiatives and stronger ones within education sectors (e.g. higher education or VET) than across policy themes; more flexible learning pathways; growing focus on learning outside formal settings, and supporting LLL – with non-formal and informal learning yet under-integrated.

As conclusions, Cedefop acknowledged remaining barriers to portability of learning across countries, sectors and institutions; that credit systems are more advanced in higher education while the use of credits in VET is more limited; weak coordination across subsystems hampering permeability and that cross-border portability is prioritised over cross-sector portability.

Following the presentation, the chair opened the floor for discussion. Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands, University of Groningen), endorsed by Jim Murray (Ireland, QQI) mentioned the consistent discussions held during the development of both ECTS and ECVET and how the differences in philosophy led to the creation of two separate systems for HE and VET. He emphasized that ECTS developed from a transfer to an accumulation system in a rather short period of time, by the time the ECVET was just being developed. A key difference was that ECVET introduced the “complexity” factor, namely that the system relies on the complexity of learning rather than the workload found in ECTS. In addition, Jim Murray (Ireland, QQI) provided the example of Ireland in which integration of all forms of education into one system is desired by policy-makers, and had already been developed to some extent.

#### 5. Introduction to Draft o

**Changes to overall structure/outline | Mainstreaming LLL and opening ECTS for all sectors | Portraying micro-credentials as a regular type of offer | Adaptations to mobility/transfer**

The chair outlined the three segments of the discussion, namely the Overall structure proposed for the revised ECTS Users’ Guide, General and accumulation aspects, respectively Transfer and recognition.

Looking at the overall structure of the ECTS Users’ Guide, Colin Tück (KIC, Lead expert), provided an overview of the proposed revisions, namely, to turn the EHEA chapter into

“Principles and Objectives”, and to shorten the Glossary and link it more clearly to the text. He also proposed discussing about the status/nature of the document and considering a more modern format of the publication.

In relation to micro-credentials, the Draft o proposed fully integrating short learning opportunities/programmes (in the chapter on Programme design) and explaining the linkage of MCs to QF levels.

In terms of LLL, it was proposed to mainstream it into other chapters as an integral part instead of an “add on” and keep the previous LLL chapter with a focus on RPL. Moreover, the draft o proposed to use “learner” instead of “student” throughout the document to emphasize the openness beyond higher education, and to remove or change any text applicable exclusively to higher education (more specifically, change the term HEI into education institution, and not refer to three cycles without other QF level).

For mobility and recognition, he added that the proposal was to introduce the notion of automatic transfer of credits to cover different mobility scenarios such as free mover mobility (given that the current ECTS Users’ Guide is exclusively focused on individual learning agreements and standard pathways for automatic recognition). Regarding grade conversion, he proposed a simplified grade distribution information scheme (included in the transcripts of records) and, as an alternative, to use definition-based grading scales.

Regarding digital infrastructure, he emphasized the need for introducing online course catalogues (linked to the European Learning Model – ELM) and establishing requirements for digital transcripts of records.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) opened the discussion by mentioning that the ECTS Users’ Guide is both normative, as a set of norms and standards, and a tool for application, starting with the fact that there could be no system in the absence of rules. Moreover, he believed that the ECTS is in the end an accumulation system, which also allows for transfer. He pointed out that broadening ECTS to all qualification levels was a sensitive issue, given that the process of revising the ECTS Users’ Guide was set by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), who is representing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and limited portfolios.

Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) repeated that the ECTS Users’ Guide is a set of standards. She suggested that the Users’ Guide should be more user-friendly, by using a digital format in which key functionalities could be found easily, and further explanations could be accessed by connecting it with other platforms through online links. Furthermore, she underlined that the Draft o proposal often refers to European Union (EU) documents, while the ECTS Users’ Guide is an EHEA document. Given that not all members of the EHEA are EU members, she suggested that references to EU documents should be moved to notes, in the form of examples on how certain thematics are implemented at EU level. She added that this was even more the case for the QF, since the EHEA’s QF had barely been mentioned in comparison with EQF. In terms of VET, she believes that the current format of ECTS could easily be used in VET as some countries such as Norway already do.

Horia Onița (EHEA Secretariat, Head) highlighted that since 2015 and the Paris Ministerial Communiqué, the ECTS is considered a key commitment within EHEA and as such the design of EHEA overarching framework could not function unless the Guide was considered normative, even more so as it was the only document regulating ECTS. Consequently, and supported by EQAR, he suggested that the Key principles in the Guide would be set as normative elements by



default and other parts of the document distinguish between normative aspects and suggestions for implementation. In terms of VET, he suggested to add a note on explaining the shift to the ECTS and the discontinuation of ECVET. Finally, he suggested to revise conceptually the use of ‘competencies’ and ‘responsibility and autonomy’ in line with EQF and underlined that the document would be adopted by the ministries of higher education who may not have a mandate on other levels of education, thus the applicability to other sectors might be mentioned as voluntary.

Jonna Korhonen (Finland) welcomed the preparation of the first draft as a starting base and remarked that the EHEA was not mentioned in the document. In the light of previous interventions, she also wondered whether the inclusion of the VET system was in line with the purpose of the ECTS Users’ Guide, and whether the Advisory Group should focus instead more on the issues they were mandated to revise by the BFUG. She also pointed out the need of clarity in expressing norms, given that “should”, “should not”, “has to” were currently used for different meanings.

In terms of broadening the scope of the ECTS, EQAR raised the question on the applicability to other levels of education, not only going beyond HE, but also considering the use of ECTS for informal and non-formal education. EQAR also suggested that clearer definitions would be needed for recognition and transfer, and that the table proposed for the grade conversion seemed useful yet raised questions on the usefulness of the relative grade distribution rates.

EUA noticed that the Draft o did not highlight the difference between already existing firm commitments and those elements aimed at supporting practitioners within institutions. Therefore, she suggested to separate what had already been agreed as requirements from institutions and what is thought about for further developments, but not necessarily in place or mandatory.

Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania, Vilnius University) believed that the key features should be clear enough to be applied as normative elements, while the other parts should describe how those key features would be implemented. In terms of grading, she considered that the topic required a much broader discussion, given the existing differences between countries and the sensitive nature of the topic. She highlighted that consistent changes in rules and approaches might lead to greater confusion in implementing the ECTS.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands, University of Groningen) provided the example of the short cycle, which became a stand-alone level. Given that this matter was not foreseen in the previous version of the Guide, and that there are two versions of short cycle programmes, namely for HE and VET, this had led to considerable confusion among countries and users.

Zelda Azzara (Cedefop) emphasized that, even though the document would be endorsed by the ministers of higher education, the Guide should acknowledge the possibility of its use in VET. She underlined that the message sent through the ECTS Users’ Guide should be one of openness to other sectors, notwithstanding that the decision is left to national actors. Secondly, she pointed out that the process of developing the EQF also includes countries from beyond the EU, and that the 2017 Council recommendation emphasized the need to work with national and regional QFs to ensure compatibility. Lastly, in relation to Ann Katherine Isaacs’ question on whether ECTS would also be potentially used for level 1 of EQF, she considered that EQF is not necessarily related to education sectors, but to LOs, and there are countries providing adult education for level 1 EQF.

Jim Murray (Ireland, QQI) underlined that EHEA and EU collectively led to permeability between the different systems of education and, in some countries, had a tangible impact on VET as well. He provided the example of Ireland, where there is no separation between different education sectors in the national QF, but referred to as “education and training”. He believed that the ECTS Users’ Guide had been flexible and open from the beginning, allowing countries to implement it for VET as they find appropriate.

Colin Tück (KIC, Lead expert) agreed that the ECTS Users’ Guide is, to some extent, a normative document and that the Guide should clarify between standards and examples for implementation. He proposed to discuss the placement of key features either at the beginning of the document, or at the beginning of each chapter based on the thematic issue. Regarding the inclusion of other education sectors, he agreed to include a message emphasizing the openness of the ECTS Users’ Guide beyond HE. As a side effect of opening the document to non-HE sectors, he added that it would be expected to have more references to the EQF than to the QF-EHEA.

Kinga Szuly (EAC) underlined the technical characteristics of the ECTS Users’ Guide and proposed to consider in the revision process the issues faced in the implementation phase. In this sense, if for HE the implementation could be linked to the ESG and the related internal and external QA processes, she inquired how could proper implementation be ensured for other education sectors.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands, University of Groningen), reminded that ECTS is already included in the countries’ legislations, therefore making the Users’ Guide a normative document. He reiterated that from the first construction of the Guide the intention was of providing guidance for reaching the established set of normative features.

## 6. Discussion of Draft o – general and accumulation

### Objectives | Key features | Programme design, delivery and monitoring

Colin Tück (KIC, Lead expert) briefly presented the main changes proposed to the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter on Key features. He explained that the proposed changes in this section were meant to clarify that the Key features are normative, for example on the workload. Another proposal would be to link ECTS with QA related practices outside HE, given that in the EHEA the implementation of ECTS is already linked to the ESG.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands, University of Groningen) observed that the first part of the chapter on Key features sets the scene of ECTS and is not necessarily a norm or a standard. He suggested to state that ECTS facilitates accumulation of learning, especially of LOs, to offer the basis for the awarding of certificates (which could also be applicable for small learning modules), and that it can be applicable for formal, non-formal and informal contexts. He added that the document should mention that ECTS is a planning instrument for study programmes.

Agnes Kriz (Austria, Fachhochschule Technikum Wien) raised the question of half-credits, given that the proposed version might lead to a step back in terms of the already existing coherence across European systems. Colin Tück (KIC, Lead expert) explained that the current version of the Guide states that credits should be expressed in whole numbers, but another section refers to the possibility of splitting credits in half for modules spread over two semesters. In this regard, Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania, Vilnius University) underlined the necessity to differentiate between key features in the Guide and how they are implemented in practice. Colin Tück (KIC, Lead expert) pointed that he identified no issue with credits expressed with half numbers (.5).

Colin Tück (KIC, Lead expert) continued with the definition of the Allocation of credits, which opened the scope of the ECTS Users' Guide to MCs (named before "self-standing components").

Supported by EQAR, EUA found it risky to refer to the whole set of levels of EQF when discussing about the broader scope of ECTS, since education providers could declare compliance with EQF in the absence of an external monitoring process like the external QA in line with the ESG for HE. EUA added that when discussing about VET in the ECTS Users' Guide, the focus should be on how HE recognizes VET ECTS, rather than on how VET should be organized. Colin Tück (KIC, Lead expert) mentioned that the proposed definition would enable the recognition of prior learning in non-HE settings by HEIs, while the RPL in HE should be automatically recognized by HEIs.

ENQA suggested to only refer to the QA of HE and EQF levels from 5 to 8, given that opening the document more broadly would exceed the Advisory Group's competencies. She mentioned that the openness should be in terms of making the document applicable to non-HE sectors rather than making it prescriptive to them. From ENQA's research, it was determined that not all QA agencies cover VET, while at national level there are various frameworks for QA of VET, making it extremely difficult to cover all aspects of VET in the ECTS Users' Guide. Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) underlined the different focuses of ESG (i.e. on the process) and EQF (on the learning outcomes).

Zelda Azzara (Cedefop) noted that the 2015 version of the ECTS Users' Guide is implicitly for higher education, but did not explicitly exclude other education sectors, therefore it would be improper to limit the use in the revised version. She also underlined that there are QA mechanisms in relation to VET at national levels, even though they are more diverse than the ones related to HE.

EQAR highlighted that the current version emphasizes the compliance with ESG for higher education, thus providing an acceptable level of compatibility and trust between systems. He added that ESG are also open for other providers and forms of education, as long as there are several prerequisites in place.

Jim Murray (Ireland, QQI) acknowledged the open character of ECTS and the continuous evolvement of its implementation across systems and education sectors, with the main purpose of supporting learners throughout their educational pathways.

Horia Onița (EHEA Secretariat, Head) warned about the risk of making the guide more ambiguous instead of clarifying in the pursuit of ensuring boarder openness. He mentioned that the current version of the ECTS Users' Guide is straightforward in terms of regulated topics, and that the BFUG focused in their discussion on the implementation issues.

Regarding the Principles and Objectives chapter, Colin Tück (KIC, Lead expert) explained the proposal to move the text to Introduction. One addition would be the reference to other credit systems and a comparison table, to provide guidance for recognition of learning outside the EHEA. Horia Onița (EHEA Secretariat, Head) added that either the Principles or the Introduction should explain the place of the document within the EHEA acquis.

Moving on to the chapter on Programme design, delivery and monitoring, Colin Tück (KIC, Lead expert) explained the addition related to the table of the EQF level, QF-EHEA cycle and QF-EHEA credit range in terms of connecting the MCs to the qualification level. Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands, University of Groningen), seconded by Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania,

Vilnius University), warned that the use of “programme” may be in some cases misleading when referring to stand-alone modules such as MCs in particular, and suggested to find a term to be used throughout the whole document. ENQA highlighted that MCs are not considered programmes, but stand-alone provision of learning, and reiterated that a differentiation should be made between short provision of learning and actual study programmes.

EUA considered that the reference to the 2024 “European guidelines for the development and writing of short, learning outcomes-based description of qualifications” should not be part of the purpose of the ECTS Users’ Guide, since the document focuses on short descriptions for LOs for databases rather than about writing LOs within study programmes. Horia Onița (EHEA Secretariat, Head) also underlined the usefulness of elements in the current version of the Guide which were removed in the Draft o, such as explaining the way in which LOs should be defined in the form of acting verb + object + context, pedagogical-related elements in defining and formulating LOs or remarks on the common number of LOs per programme or discipline. He added that such important features should not be left to references to policy papers.

Moving on to Programme structure and allocation of credits, Irina Duma (EHEA Secretariat), supported by EUA, remarked that references such as “very small programmes” and “larger programmes” should be either removed or defined in such way that consistency would be ensured. EUA suggested including references to the number of components, as it had been in the current version of the Users’ Guide. Colin Tück (KIC, Lead expert) mentioned that the reference could be made to the number of credits provided by these modules or programmes.

In addition, Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands, University of Groningen) suggested to include a paragraph on the calculation of student workload, to offer guidance and ensure consistency within and across education systems.

## 7. Discussion of Draft o – transfer and recognition

### **Mobility and credit recognition | Recognition of prior learning | Quality assurance | Supporting documents**

Regarding the chapter on the ECTS for mobility and credit recognition, José Ravenstein (The Netherlands, NUFFIC), supported by Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania, Vilnius University), considered that the term “automatic recognition” was rather confusing and, in practice, was actually an “automatic transfer” of credits gained through mobility.

Colin Tück clarified the need to differentiate between “transfer” as the appearance of credits in an institutions’ records, and “recognition” as the possibility to use those credits for progression, for example credits embedded in the minimum number of credits required for a certain qualification level.

Jonna Korhonen (Finland) made a general comment on the necessity of using simple, understandable terms, to make the Guide usable. She also underlined that ECTS, in particular transfer and recognition, did not only refer to mobility periods abroad but also mobility across institutions and systems.

Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania, Vilnius University) considered that transfer of credits is in fact accumulation, and institutions are responsible for accumulation and recognition of credits.

Kinga Szuly (EAC) underlined that automatic transfer and recognition are not the same process, yet jointly they ensured several rights to students, for example the fact that they would not have

to undertake exams passed in the host institutions upon their return to the home institution. In connection with students' rights, EQAR claimed the necessity of keeping a broader conceptualization of recognition as otherwise practices that currently happen 'by default' may no longer be considered for automatic recognition.

Chiara Finocchietti (Italy, CIMEA) highlighted the importance of being consistent with the Council recommendation, which specifically mentions that automatic recognition is understood as a recognition of qualifications obtained without having to go through additional procedures. Therefore, she suggested that the ECTS Users' Guide would clarify the term "automatic recognition" and would provide the conditions underpinning this recognition.

ESU noted that students should not be limited by the maximum number of ECTS expected for their degree when studying abroad. Secondly, she raised the issue of rather complex course modules that may cover a larger spectrum of topics than those necessary for fulfilling the requirements when returning from mobility – in this regard, it would be desirable that students have the possibility to only enrol in parts of a module.

Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania, Vilnius University) added that, historically, the reason for expecting students to achieve the necessary number of ECTS required per semester was to protect students upon their return from mobility, but noted that, if there is a need for greater flexibility in this regard, the ECTS Users' Guide might as well specify that a one-semester mobility could also lead to less than 30 credits. Moreover, she strongly argued for the necessity of protecting students from misunderstanding of transfer vs. recognition, namely that credits added to the diploma supplement does not necessarily mean that they are recognised towards the achievement of the degree.

Jonna Korhonen (Finland) suggested to keep the already agreed upon terminology and avoid creating confusion among national systems by introducing new terms.

## **8. Close: summary, overview of next meetings and AOB**

The chair asked for comments on Draft o by the **31<sup>st</sup> of July 2025**, with a new draft to be prepared for the upcoming AG ECTS meeting.

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking participants for their active involvement in the discussions. The upcoming AG ECTS meetings would take place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 2025 (online), on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2025 (in Brussels, Belgium), and the last one on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 2026 (online).