

Ad-Hoc Advisory Group on the ECTS Users' Guide Revision 4th Meeting

2nd of September 2025
Online

Minutes of the meeting

List of participants

Country/Institution	First Name	Last Name
European Commission (EAC) (Chair)	Susanne	Conze
European Commission (EAC)	Kinga	Szuly
European Commission (EAC)	Sophia	Catsambi
European Commission (EAC)	Bulent	Artan
European Commission (EAC)	Camille	Odent
European Commission (EAC)	Johannes	Gehring
European Commission (EAC)	Yann Maël	Bideau
Knowledge Innovation Center (Lead expert)	Colin	Tück
Austria (Fachhochschule Technikum Wien)	Agnes	Kriz
Belgium (Ghent University)	Frederik	De Decker
Cedefop	Zelda	Azzara
Croatia (Algebra University)	Ana	Tecilazić
Denmark (University of Southern Denmark)	Per	Æbelø
ENQA	Elena	Cîrlan
EQAR	Aleksandar	Šušnjar
ESU	Lana	Par
EUA	Thérèse	Zhang
EURASHE	Jakub	Grodecki
Finland	Jonna	Korhonen
Germany	Ronny	Heintze
ICF	Cecile	McGrath
ICF	Elodie	Lafont
Ireland (QQI)	Jim	Murray
Italy (University of Pisa)	Ann Katherine	Isaacs
Italy (CIMEA)	Chiara	Finocchietti
Lithuania (Vilnius University)	Raimonda	Markevicienė
The Netherlands (University of Groningen)	Robert	Wagenaar
Poland (Warsaw School of Economics)	Jakub	Brdulak
Ukraine	Andriy	Stavytskyi
EHEA Secretariat	Irina	Duma

Ilona Murphy (Lead researcher) sent her apologies, and José Ravenstein and Peter Ondreicka were absent.

1. Welcome and Updates

Documents: [Presentation](#)

The Chair (Susanne Conze) welcomed everyone to the online meeting and briefly presented the agenda.

2. Review of ECTS Users' Guide – Overview & Key features

2.1. Overview of main changes from Draft 0

Colin Tück provided an overview of the main changes brought with the Draft 1 of the ECTS Users' Guide, in comparison with the Draft 0 which was discussed in the [previous AG ECTS meeting](#). The main changes consisted in the drafting of the following chapters: Introduction, Principles and Objectives, and Key features. Furthermore, based on the comments received, the Draft 1 improved the consistency of terms, together with avoiding repetitions in the Glossary. Another revision was to add Key features at the beginning of each chapter, besides the Key features chapter from the beginning of the document. The Key Features chapter, which refers to the normative part of the ECTS Users' Guide, was redrafted based on the comments and suggestions from members, namely removing content that does not need to be normative, underlining the applicability outside higher education, clarifying the awarding of credits, and clarifying concepts of transfer versus recognition of credits.

2.2. Discussion of the Key features chapter

The discussion on the Key Features chapter was opened by Colin Tück with several questions related to: 1) Outline and structure (whether it was clear enough that the key features are binding, and whether relevant key features should be quoted at the top of each further section); 2) Expectation of having all ECTS linked to qualification levels; 3) Wording on awarding credits, especially related to the position of non-HE programmes/qualifications at EQF level 5 and above; 4) General approach to distinguish credit transfer vs recognition of credits.

Frederik De Decker (Belgium) raised the question of differentiating the normative/binding character of the Key Features chapter compared to the rest of the document, given that it might be expected that the whole ECTS Users' Guide as endorsed by the EHEA Ministers would be used by users, and not only the so-called "normative" or "binding" part. In this regard, Colin Tück clarified that having the Key Features indicated as normative/binding does not imply that the other parts of the ECTS Users' Guide are less important or less expected to be used. In this regard, he made a comparison with the European Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG), which is a document organised into the normative part (Standards) and the guidance part (Guidelines). Therefore, in the ECTS Users' Guide, it can be considered that the Key Features contain mandatory elements to be implemented, while the other parts provide guidance for reaching that implementation.

Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy), seconded by Ronny Heintze (Germany), agreed that, once the ECTS Users' Guide would be approved by EHEA Ministers, the whole document should be "binding" but, indeed, the parts not included in the Key Features should be rather explanations of the

elements indicated to be mandatory. Ronny Heintze added that understanding what “binding” means could prove challenging, for example when definitions explain a certain term and are followed by actions explaining how that definition should be implemented. Moreover, given that some parts of the document are significantly practice-oriented, he underlined that it might be a challenge to understand which actions must be conducted by the users, rather than a simple guidance. Colin Tück, seconded by the Chair, considered that claiming the whole document to be “binding” would create challenges in the applicability in different systems, and the Key Features should be the ones mandatory. Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) continued by stating that “binding” was not the appropriate word when describing the character of the whole document. She claimed that the distinction between the first part (Key Features, Introduction, Objectives and Principles) and the part with practical advice and examples (which are not mandatory as they have to be tailored to the national system and context) was obvious. As such, she specified that when ministers endorse the document, they acknowledge that ECTS is the system used in the EHEA.

In this regard, the Chair asked whether “Key features” was the appropriate wording for a part that is set to be normative and would describe the basic rules of the ECTS system. Frederik De Decker (Belgium) illustrated the difficulty of defining what “binding” and “not binding” is but highlighted the need to decide on which elements should be stated as “binding” – for example, the grading practices are not set as mandatory in the current version of the ECTS Users’ Guide, and this could be a discussion for the group. Secondly, he agreed with Colin’s suggestion of starting each chapter with a Key Features box, but showed that this could be challenging in terms of selecting the key features to be mentioned in the respective boxes without overly repeating them

ENQA reiterated that the Key Features should be seen as “standards”, followed by guidance and recommendations. EQAR suggested to distinguish between “internally binding” and “externally binding” – more specifically, the Advisory Group may decide which elements within the document are “internally binding” as elementary features that are inherently part of the ECTS system, and should not be overlooked when a user claims to use the ECTS system.

Irina Duma (EHEA Secretariat) underlined that in the Draft 1 only the Key Features chapter is presented as normative and suggested to reiterate this character below each Key Features section in the following chapters.

Following the discussion on the normative character of the document, Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) highlighted that the ECTS, as a system, is included in the legislation of each EHEA country, making it normative by definition. He suggested that the Key Features should be included systematically and consistently in the Guide, and that the rules described in the ECTS Users’ Guide should not be overlooked but rather explained.

Jonna Korhonen (Finland) saw the Key Features as fundamental elements of the ECTS as a system, which should be implemented in order to be part of the system. She believed that “binding” might be a too strong word and suggested that the Guide should be as concise as possible in order to make it useful for the institutions using it.

Ronny Heintze (Germany) underlined that the words “binding” or “should” may be understood differently in different countries, and are not necessarily seen as mandatory at all times. He underlined that there are elements obviously constitutive of the system, and other elements

which are implemented differently even at institutional level, and not only between national levels. However, he suggested that a threshold should be set to clearly define the expectations from institutions – what is mandatory when claiming to use the ECTS, and what represents guidance and good practice example.

Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania) suggested to focus more on the balance between formal and non-formal learning, taking into account the various forms of learning, including micro credentials. Secondly, she suggested that the “binding” parts should be clear and short.

ESU highlighted that there are several core elements that have to be mandatory in the Guide, for example the use of learning outcomes. ESU also referred to their survey data showing that basic elements were not always in place everywhere, meaning that even slightly different approaches may oblige students to follow different rules for the same results. Therefore, ESU stated that the system should be unified, and all elements should be mandatory in order to ensure fairness and equality to all students across EHEA. While ESU acknowledged the necessity of including explanatory parts together with examples of implementation, the ECTS Users’ Guide as a whole document should be mandatory and followed through.

Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) suggested to use the word “must” for the mandatory parts of the Guide, and to remove the statement from the Key Features chapter related to the normative part of the document, since it may be misunderstood that all the other parts are optional. She suggested the following wording for the Key Features: “this section describes the fundamentals of ECTS system and its core rules”. Additionally, she suggested a structure including three parts: the mandatory aspects (delimited by the word “must”), the implementation aspects, and concrete examples.

Colin Tück concluded that everyone agreed with having the Key Features part representing the core elements of the document, while the other parts could be rather explanatory. He agreed that the word “normative” could be removed from the document, so it would not be misunderstood that the other parts are optional. EQAR suggested to revisit to the wording issue on a later version of the document, and at the moment clarify which elements must be implemented by the users of the Guide, underlying that these elements might not only be key features, but also included in other parts.

Regarding the linkage between ECTS and levels, ENQA acknowledged its relevance for recognition and transparency for learners, yet recalled that, in practice, not all micro credentials or other forms of learning should be linked to levels, even if they may offer credits. Therefore, ENQA suggested not to add this expectation for institutions, because they are the ones knowing best what they offer to their learners, and to what extent the learning offer may be linked to qualification levels. EQAR highlighted that if a form of learning has learning outcomes, then it is linked to a qualification level, and as such no inconsistency is shown by linking ECTS to levels.

Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania) underlined that this linkage might be challenging for other forms of education, depending on too many variables. However, she strongly agreed with EQAR that learning outcomes should be in place when recognition is carried out.

In relation to this linkage, Ana Tecilazić (Croatia) asked about the possibility of linking ECTS to learning outcomes, which implies linking ECTS with qualification levels. She further pointed out the difficulty of linking ECTS with QF levels in non-formal education. Colin Tück clarified that

ECTS had been always linked to learning outcomes, yet linking ECTS to QF levels might be challenging from the grading perspective – having different rules in HE systems compared with non-formal education. Kinga Szuly (EAC) explained that the [Council Recommendation on a European approach to microcredentials for lifelong learning and employability](#) included level features among the mandatory elements of micro credentials, but acknowledged that there are certain situations in which adding QF levels to micro credentials is not possible. She suggested that it is important to have a QF level attached to micro credentials, in order to be recognised and to be able to include them in the Diploma Supplement. She suggested to include a description in the ECTS Users' Guide, which encourages as much as possible the use of QF levels for micro credentials.

Frederik De Decker (Belgium) emphasized that there was already a link between ECTS and QF levels, and the question should be whether this link should be made more direct. He argued that such a move would facilitate recognition.

Cedefop underlined that the 2015 version of the Guide stated that ECTS credits for levels 5 to 8 can only be awarded by institutions compliant with the ESG, which was highly restrictive for other education providers. Therefore, she suggested to remove those parts that are only applicable to higher education institutions, to make the document open to other education providers.

Chiara Finocchietti (Italy, CIMEA), seconded by EQAR, highlighted that linking QF levels to ECTS would represent a good starting point for increased transparency across systems. Furthermore, EQAR claimed that the level should be a mandatory element of the ECTS system. When it comes to micro credentials, EQAR raised the issue of micro credentials awarding ECTS credits without being linked to a level – and suggested to further discuss on the matter given that if learning outcomes are linked already to qualifications levels, then the ECTS should be as well. EQAR considered that the link would enhance both recognition and accumulation. Moreover, EQAR agreed that the ECTS system should be open to other education providers, yet in this case the Guide should also set the premises for the QA of other education providers, which is in place for higher education institutions through ESG.

ENQA also found it necessary that other education providers comply with quality assurance standards to have the right to award ECTS credits. In this regard, Ronny Heintze (Germany) complemented the wording from the Draft 1, which makes the link to QF levels by mentioning the necessity to have quality assurance (through ESG) for higher education-level ECTS, regardless the type of institution. He added that this formulation implied that ECTS would always be linked to QF levels. In reply, ENQA asked whether other quality assurance tools, which apply to VET, should also be mentioned in the Guide given that in some national contexts the quality assurance agencies do not have the mandate to externally evaluate VET and professional training providers.

Nonetheless, Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) underlined that the ECTS is linked to all QF levels since 2004, which makes it open for micro credentials as well. Moreover, the learning outcomes must be formulated based on these levels.

Colin Tück concluded that indeed there had already been a link between ECTS and QF levels and agreed that other quality assurance systems (such as EQA-VET) should be mentioned in order to enhance the ECTS Users' Guide openness to other systems. Kinga Szuly (EAC) underlined that other education providers should be quality assured in order to be allowed to award ECTS credits

linked to QF levels, while Irina Duma (EHEA Secretariat) reiterated the prudential approach in mentioning how other sectors would implement the Guide while it's the HE ministers that adopt it.

3. Review of ECTS Users' Guide – Grade conversion

3.1. Introduction to Grade conversion

Robert Wagenaar, as representative of The Netherlands in the EHEA Thematic Peer Group A on Qualifications Frameworks, opened the Grade conversion agenda point by presenting the evolution of the discussions surrounding ECTS Grading and Conversion from 1995 to 2015, underlining the two main issues, namely the national grading scales/tables and the national grading cultures.

Colin Tück continued by sharing the ICF research findings on grade conversion, which confirm the conclusions presented by Robert Wagenaar, namely that there is no unified grading system. In this context, rather surprisingly, the survey revealed that most mobile students find that the grade conversion upon return to their home institution from an international mobility was fair. The focus groups discussions revealed that many higher education institutions do not convert grades at all, while several use their own approaches instead of applying the ECTS grade conversion methodology.

3.2. Discussion on grading scale and grade conversion

Colin Tück opened the discussion starting from several main questions related to: 1) Pros and cons of having a reference grading scale with absolute definitions; 2) Pros and cons of using grade conversion based on grade distribution; 3) Which approach would be the fairest for learners; 4) Which approach would have the highest chance of being used by higher education institutions in practice; 5) Whether grade conversion should be a key feature in the ECTS Users' Guide.

Frederik De Decker (Belgium) agreed that the take-up of the grade conversion system was very poor. He underlined that some universities acknowledge the need of such a conversion yet noticed that in the past years there had been less of a need for conversion, even in the case of traditional mobilities, since home institutions tend to add the ECTS credits obtained by students in a mobility next to their own without "translating" or converting them. He found this approach as a negative evolution, highlighting the need for a proper implementation of fair grade conversion which leads to less granularity.

EQAR suggested to use an approach similar to the translation from the European Qualification Framework to the National Qualification Frameworks, thus having a translation tool which would simplify implementation and may lead to wider spread among institutions. Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania) highlighted that qualification frameworks are more centralized at country level and thus the conversion in this regard is clearer. On the other hand, when it comes to grading, there might be different approaches even within the same institution, meaning that firstly the culture should be changed. She appreciated the EGRACONS tool and supported its use, even though it is not as widely spread as desired.

Kinga Szuly (EAC) underlined that institutions should be shown a way forward to implement grade conversion, without forcing them to change their system or asking for more data to be provided.

Jim Murray (Ireland) provided their national example where higher education institutions have a fair degree of autonomy, meaning that it might be problematic to convince them to implement a certain grade conversion system, highlighting that the Advisory Group should also think about an implementation strategy, regardless the final decision on the format of grade conversion. Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) acknowledged that there are great differences in the way grades are expressed and attributed in different national systems and subject areas, so it is not surprising that difficulties arise in attempting to recognize grades fairly. Therefore, she suggested that the Diploma Supplement of a student who has had a mobility experience should include the elements contained in the ECTS 'Transfer of Records' as provided by the host institution. As to grade recognition, she suggested that if grade conversion is needed by the student, this should be carried out based on an annex, provided by the host institution, that explains the local/national grading system and the distribution of grades in practice. She also mentioned that during the development of ECTS the question had been posed as to whether credits are awarded when all the learning outcomes are completely achieved – in which case it is hard to see why everyone would not receive the highest grade – or when the subject is 'passed', thus implying that LOs can be achieved to a greater or less extent, which is the understanding that exists in most countries today. In other words, there is a difference between the level that defines the necessary learning outcomes as a base line, and the intended or desired learning outcomes, which is seen as an upper, often aspirational, level. She further suggested that universities participating in the Erasmus+ programme, and hence required to provide a Course Catalogue, include in it a description of their grading culture and grade distribution, thus facilitating greater understanding and easier conversion of grades.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) suggested that autonomy and grading are directly related, namely grading being based on an academic decision. He also underlined the importance of grading to students, and the necessity of making ranking of students possible and documented at institutional level. Given the differences in grading between study fields and even countries, it is even more important that grade distribution is clearly explained in the Diploma Supplement or in the transcript of records.

Lana Par (ESU) underlined that grades are an important part for students in continuing their education and, in general, in their student lives. She argued for keeping the reference to the grading scale and grades distribution, both necessary for students. She also underlined that the different approaches to grading exists even within the same study programme, regardless of institutional policies. Therefore, she emphasized the need for more information to be provided by institutions and even individual teachers regarding their grading system. Following ESU's suggestion on tackling the grading practices at institutional level in the research, Cecile McGrath (ICF) clarified that data on grade conversion was collected from the focus groups organised with academics and administrators, which would be included in the draft technical report.

Yann-Maël Bideau (EAC) highlighted several shortcomings of the current grade conversion methodology. He stressed that it is overly complex, relies on the availability of private digital tools, and places a heavy reporting burden on universities, which often lack the capacity or willingness to provide the level of detailed data required for it to work. Moreover, the methodology is not suitable for joint programmes—where grade conversion is essential—or for programmes or mobility experience that span multiple disciplines or fields which are increasingly offered. He added that the methodology could also be questioned in national or even institutional contexts, where differences in culture exist but do not require complex grade

conversion and do not alter the grades ultimately awarded to the students. He concluded by saying that proposing a methodology is important and that the methodology to be proposed should be simple enough to provide higher education institutions with a methodology they can apply on their own without depending on private tools or creating unnecessary reporting burden.

Jim Murray (Ireland) suggested that the Guide recommends methodologies for grading, which should be in place regardless of the tools used. He also proposed having guidance for universities to help them map their own grading systems with others. In addition, to increase fairness to students, a grading conversion methodology may be suggested to institutions.

Frederik De Decker (Belgium) highlighted that EGRACONS was included in the 2009 ECTS User's Guide as a tool to facilitate the grade conversion methodology, and the reason for the reduced usage of EGRACONS may be that universities do not provide grade distribution tables. Therefore, he suggested that the Guide should include a solution that would encourage institutions to provide their grade distribution tables. He supported the idea that grade distribution tables should become a key feature in the ECTS Users' Guide, by making sure that the grade distribution table is provided with each transcript of records. Jim Murray (Ireland) warned that demanding institutions to provide grade distribution tables might be seen as restrictive, given the institutional sensitivities.

Colin Tück concluded that the Advisory Group acknowledged the importance of grade conversion especially for students, and considered its introduction as a key feature. The grade conversion methodology could be described in the guidance part, in order not to interfere with institutional autonomy.

4. Revised ECTS Users' Guide (parallel sessions)

4.1. ECTS for accumulation: Programme design, delivery and monitoring; Recognition of prior learning; Quality assurance

In the first parallel session, moderated by Kinga Szuly (EAC), Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) suggested strengthening and reformulating the guidance related to programme design, in the sense that the description of the process should include reference to the needed competences which then are expressed in the form of learning outcomes. This aspect was included in previous ECTS Users' Guides although not in the 2015 edition. Furthermore, it would be vital to give guidance on how to establish the need for a new programme, before undertaking its design and implementation.

Jim Murray (Ireland), seconded by Jonna Korhonen (Finland), referred to the balance between flexibility (which is expected to be higher in the case of micro credentials) and the necessity of applying processes of quality assurance, credits awarding and determining links to QF levels. Therefore, tensions may arise between universities and other education providers related to the possibility of overlooking those processes by the latter for the sake of flexibility. Given that the ECTS Users' Guide is perceived as an authoritative document, he suggested to clearly mention which processes must be in place for the flexible forms of learning. Regarding enterprises and businesses willing to award ECTS credits, Kinga Szuly (EAC) underlined that it is indeed necessary to comply with quality assurance standards.

Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania) claimed that even though the ECTS Users' Guide may be clear enough, the main challenge remains the translation of the document into the national legislation. However, for other education providers than higher education institutions, she drew attention that the current Draft 1 of the ECTS Users' Guide is not clear in terms of applicability and eligibility to use the system. On another note, she suggested that the terms would be explained more clearly and consistently throughout the document (e.g. module, unit).

Jonna Korhonen (Finland) added that the balance between flexibility and expectations from providers should ensure that the system would not be too restrictive. Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) suggested to use concise and simple language and underlined the necessity of establishing how quality assurance would be applied to microcredentials without transforming it into a barrier. In any case, she noted that the Draft 1 of the Guide suggests that national authorities should decide on the criteria for education providers to offer microcredentials.

Chiara Finocchietti (Italy) suggested to establish first the core elements of the ECTS system in higher education (formal learning) and build upon it for recognition of other sectors. She underlined that the main element of inclusion of other sectors is represented by the learning outcomes, and agreed with the reference to [ESCO](#) in the Guide. At the same time, she suggested to have indicators for quality, and not necessarily quality assurance of education provision, the latter applying specifically to formal learning. Nonetheless, Chiara suggested that level linkage to ECTS would be possible for formal learning, while other education providers would apply this link in a formal context, if applicable.

ENQA referred to the main findings of the [Microbol project](#), which revealed that the ECTS system is also applicable for short learning provisions, meaning that the text of the ECTS Users' Guide only has to be adapted in terms of terminology. However, beyond learning outcomes, not all universities apply ECTS or QF levels to micro-credentials. ENQA's recommendation was that internal quality assurance cover micro credentials and lifelong learning, while external quality assurance is focused on programme level only, and not for each individual micro credential. ENQA also suggested merging the text from Quality Assurance (Chapter 6) with other parts of the text, to avoid repetition of terms and explanations. In the same vision, Chiara Finocchietti (Italy) proposed shortening the "substantial difference" part, given that automatic recognition has a dedicated section.

Regarding the award of credits, Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania) noticed its relation with the allocation of credits, and the distinction between these two should be clearer in the text. In addition, supported by Ana Tecilazić (Croatia), she suggested a separation between formal and non-formal learning, to ensure clarity for users.

Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) suggested that the following step would be to have a clear Draft 2 to be read thoroughly by both Advisory Group members and externals, to make sure that the document is coherent and understandable.

Ana Tecilazić (Croatia) underlined the challenge of making the document multi-purposed, firstly as a policy document adopted by the EHEA Ministers (which implies having more general parts including principles) and secondly as a guidance for users, who would appreciate more operational and specific elements. In this regard, she considered that the relationship between smaller units of learning and study programmes is not clear enough, and addressing their differences would help the recognition of credits. In reply, Kinga Szuly (EAC) emphasized that

the digital format of the ECTS Users' Guide would facilitate the addition of examples and operational details. On the other hand, it is important to decide on the parts to be presented to Ministers, as they could not be changed later. In this regard, she proposed that the BFUG would be able to revise the guidance part of the document more often, to ensure the "living" character of the document. Following this idea, Ann Katherine Isaacs (Italy) proposed having a policy part of a document to be approved by Ministers and a "handbook" part which may be subject to improvement whenever necessary.

Regarding credit recognition vs transfer of credits, Chiara Finocchietti (Italy), supported by EUA, proposed to clarify the difference between the two terms – transfer as the visualisation of credits obtained in a different institution (in the transcript of records and the Diploma Supplement), while recognition as the acceptance of those credits by the home institution for counting towards the final degree. In addition, Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania) highlighted that the main aim of the ECTS system was recognition, whereas mere credit transfer would be unsatisfactory. In reply, Kinga Szuly (EAC) referred to the practice in the Erasmus+ programme, where confusion exists between recognition and automatic recognition, considering cases in which students agree to take optional courses that would not be recognised towards their degree upon return from a mobility. Therefore, she suggested that the ECTS Users' Guide clarify that not counting optional courses towards the degree because of their status would not follow recognition principles. This distinction would facilitate identification of those institutions which do not comply with the ECTS system and only add additional credits to the Diploma Supplement.

Jim Murray (Ireland) provided their national example, where students may transfer from one institution to another during their study cycle, and those credits transferred are also automatically recognised when the receiving institution accepts the student, therefore the notion of transfer does not apply only for Erasmus students. On the same topic, ENQA proposed distinguishing between "transfer with recognition" and "transfer without recognition".

When discussing about solutions to the issues of transferring credits without recognition, Raimonda Markevicienė (Lithuania) referred to accumulation rules, which should imply that credits would be accumulated towards the final degree.

Jonna Korhonen (Finland), on the other hand, drew attention on the possibility of obtaining credits through an Erasmus+ mobility which do not count towards the final degree, but are nevertheless desired by the student. Kinga Szuly (EAC) clarified that the Erasmus funding rules do not imply mandatory recognition, but confusion exists for students and institutions when it comes to counting credits obtained in a mobility towards their degree.

4.2. ECTS for transfer and recognition: Mobility and credit recognition; Supporting documents

In the second parallel session, moderated by Colin Tück, Frederik De Decker (Belgium) underlined that recognition is a core element of Erasmus mobilities, and is a focus of the ECTS Users' Guide rather than transfer. On the other hand, he provided the example of institutions restricting students' access to mobilities unless the courses in the host institution allow for obtaining credits that count towards the final degree, which would limit access to mobility. EQAR also mentioned that the ECTS Users' Guide should not allow for imposing this restriction to students and solve the misuse of the concept of credit recognition in the national legislation and

institutional policies. Johannes Gehringer (EAC) underlined that within the Erasmus programme, that practice is close to a target of 95% rate of credit recognition.

Going further, Frederik De Decker (Belgium) referred to the transcript of records which seemed to be generally used in the context of student exchange for transfer purposes, instead of recognition. In relation to Erasmus+ survey data, he referred to the cases in which students themselves do not demand transfer of credits.

Irina Duma (EHEA Secretariat), seconded by Colin Tück, underlined that the distinction between transferred and recognised credits for exchange students could be made at the moment of drafting the Learning Agreement, especially in the cases in which there is no full compatibility between programmes. However, the main issue remains when the Learning Agreement is not totally followed upon students' return from mobilities. Colin Tück emphasized that even those credits that are not part of the Learning Agreement should be at least transferred from the host to the home institution. He referred to the research findings that show changes in the host institution's offer which may occur after signing the Learning Agreement, thus flexibility from the home institution being necessary in these cases. Johannes Gehringer (EAC) added the example of courses included in the Learning Agreement that would not be organised anymore, or that are being taught in another language than the one assumed, leaving little time for the student to reconsider their options.

On the transcript of records, Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) underlined the wider meaning of the term, which is not limited to the context of exchange students. He also suggested that the credits only transferred following a mobility should be included in the diploma supplement instead of an annex to the diploma supplement. Colin Tück further explained that changes might occur after the student already arrived at the host institution, which would require amending the Learning Agreement, otherwise the credits that were not originally in the signed Learning Agreement would not be recognised. Therefore, he claimed that fully considering only the Learning Agreement raises barriers for students as other credits should be recognised as well.

Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) underlined that, in the absence of a signed Learning Agreement, an additional recognition procedure should be in place at the home institution, thus the distinction from automatic recognition which is already in place for credits included in the signed Learning Agreement. Johannes Gehringer (EAC) claimed that it is still possible to automatically recognise credits that were not initially part of the signed Learning Agreement. However, the question remains for failed courses, or for courses where a minimum passing grade was obtained, yet the student does not wish for the course to appear in the transcript of records. Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) suggested that the ECTS Users' Guide should also focus on the student's responsibility in drafting the Learning Agreement and information provision to the home university in case of changes to the Learning Agreement during the mobility.

To ensure coherence and consistency, Colin Tück suggested that automatic recognition in the ECTS Users' Guide would be defined and used in line with the Council Recommendation and Erasmus+ practices. Frederik De Decker (Belgium) highlighted that the Learning Agreement should be seen as a contract between three parties, the result of which is automatic recognition. He stressed that the responsibility lies with all three signatory parties, including the student.

The group agreed that the transcript of records represents all the learning achievement from an institution and should be attached to the diploma supplement, with further clarification

expected in the Guide. Colin Tück reiterated that all learning achievements should be recognised, and learning outcomes should be the decisive elements on which the recognition decisions are based, regardless of the formality of the Learning Agreement. In this regard, Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands), seconded by Irina Duma, suggested formulating as follows: “Recognition should take place if learning outcomes achieved contribute to the programme learning outcomes”, which might be a protection mechanism for students signing up for certain courses that may end up by not being organised anymore in the host institution.

Going on, Colin Tück raised the topic of recognition in other scenarios than mobilities, for instance in the context of “free-movers”. In this regard, Colin emphasized that the current version of the ECTS Users’ Guide does not provide enough guidance for stacking/accumulation in this context. Another scenario would be in the case of the European Universities alliances, especially for joint programmes. Frederik De Decker further explained the Flanders system of flexibility in terms of students starting a degree program in one institution, and completing it in another institution, which would not have been possible without the ECTS system. This approach basically represents recognition of prior formal learning and making use of ECTS for recognition purposes. Secondly, supported by various members of the group, he referred to embedded mobility in joint programmes, where there is no transfer of credits as such since mobility is from the beginning part of the programme curriculum. On the same note, Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) drew attention to the situation in which mobilities are organized within a European universities alliance, for which Learning Agreements should still be in place. He added that all these scenarios should be clearly described in the ECTS Users’ Guide.

Ronny Heintze (Germany) emphasized that there are situations in which the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) is not used properly in the context of individual mobilities and, therefore, suggested to link the mobility paragraphs with the LRC principles. Colin Tück clarified that the LRC would apply to all scenarios, but more clarity would be sought in the following draft. In addition, Frederik De Decker (Belgium) suggested to link the LRC with recognition of prior learning and non-formal learning, in order to facilitate recognition inside formal learning.

Regarding joint degrees, Ronny Heintze (Germany) raised the situation in which not all partners are degree-awarding institutions, in which case recognition is necessary. Considering the challenge of covering all scenarios through the ECTS Users’ Guide, he suggested to mention them without creating confusion by focusing on their differences. EQAR underlined the granularity of joint programmes even though their organization might seem fairly simple. He suggested to try tackling through the ECTS Users’ Guide those issues identified at alliance level and acknowledged the existence of different requirements for awarding the same degree, stamping from national regulations. In order to avoid offering specific guidance for the organisation of joint programmes, Colin Tück suggested to identify and tackle those national barriers that may stand against the proper organisation of these programmes. On the other hand, Robert Wagenaar (The Netherlands) claimed that those barriers are more often caused by institutional practices rather than national regulations and believed that the Guide could be helpful in this regard.

5. Revised ECTS Users' Guide – wrap up

5.1. Report back from each parallel session

Cecile McGrath summarized the discussion on accumulation, presenting the groups' agreement that the ECTS should be applicable to all higher education provision and the focus on learning outcomes as the basic link between education sectors and different providers. Colin Tück raised the potential avenue of having the Key Features approved by the EHEA Ministers and the other parts constitutive of guidance updated periodically and approved by the BFUG. Colin Tück briefly presented the discussion from the second working group on transfer and recognition, firstly emphasizing the suggestion of including a requirement related to the minimum number of credits to be contracted for recognition purpose in the context of mobilities. Moving on, there was also the discussion of different uses of the transcript of records, which could be clearer and more transparent. Nonetheless, the group also discussed about recognition of prior learning and links of the Lisbon Recognition Convention to all scenarios, and not only individual mobilities. Lastly, regarding the joint degrees, the discussion revealed the necessity to make the ECTS Users' Guide as helpful as possible for institutions seeking organisation of joint programmes, but at the same time not making it too exhaustive.

5.2. Discussion of any remaining major issues identified in the groups

Johannes Gehringer (EAC) raised the issue of consistency between ECTS Users' Guide and the Erasmus+ programme, for instance in the case of "placement/apprenticeship" term, which would be synonymous with "internship". He considered that these similarities should be clarified in the Guide.

5.3. Next steps for the revision

Colin Tück went through the next steps:

- asking members to send further comments and suggestions by September 8th,
- circulate the Draft 2 around September 19th,
- have an additional round of written comments by September 28th,
- prepare the document for the BFUG Board by October 10th,
- present the document in the BFUG Board meeting on November 4th,
- discuss the feedback received from the BFUG Board in the AG ECTS meeting on November 5th.

The Advisory Group members would receive a draft for the upcoming meeting around mid-October.

6. **Consultation sessions**

Colin Tück proposed to have consultation sessions outside higher education sector, with small focus groups comprised of European and national stakeholders with experience in using ECTS in VET. Following ENQA's proposal, Colin Tück would give updates to the ESG Revision Steering Committee on the development of the ECTS Users' Guide as part of the consultation.

7. **End of meeting**

The Chair thanked everyone for the useful discussions and efficient meeting.