

# Review of the ECTS Users' Guide

2 September 2025



# Welcome and updates

Susanne Conze, European Commission, DG EAC B.1 - Higher education

# Agenda

11.00-11.15	<b>Welcome and updates</b>
11.15-12.00	<b>Revised ECTS Users' Guide – overview &amp; key features</b>
12.00-13.00	<b>Revised ECTS Users' Guide – grade conversion</b>
13.00-13.45	<b>Lunchbreak</b>
13.45-15.15	<b>Revised ECTS Users' Guide – work in two parallel sessions</b>
15.15-15.45	<b>Revised ECTS Users' Guide – reporting back &amp; wrap-up</b>
15.45-16.00	<b>Consultation sessions</b>
16.00	<b>End</b>

# Update on research

ICF team

# Revised ECTS Users' Guide – Overview and key features

Colin Tück

# Overview – changes from draft 0

- New introduction drafted
- First substantial chapter "principles and objectives"
- Key features revised thoroughly; clarified as binding rules
- Improved consistency of terms, esp. learning opportunity
- Start each section with key feature(s) - see chapter 3 as example
- Glossary: shortened, no repetition of key features, terms updated

# Key features – main changes

- Explicit statement that this is the normative part
- Redrafted based on comments and wording suggestions
- Removed content that does not need to be normative
- Underline applicability outside higher education
- Clarified awarding of credits
- Clarified concepts of transfer vs recognition

# Main questions

- Outline and structure:
  - Clear that key features are binding?
  - Quote relevant key feature at the top of further sections (see chapter 3)?
- Expectation that all ECTS are linked to levels?
- Wording on awarding credits clear, especially re. the position of non-HE programmes/qualifications at EQF level 5+ ?
- General approach to distinguish credit transfer vs recognition clear?



# Revised ECTS Users' Guide – Grade conversion

Colin Tück

# ECTS Grading and Conversion: An ongoing discussion

Robert Wagenaar, University of Groningen

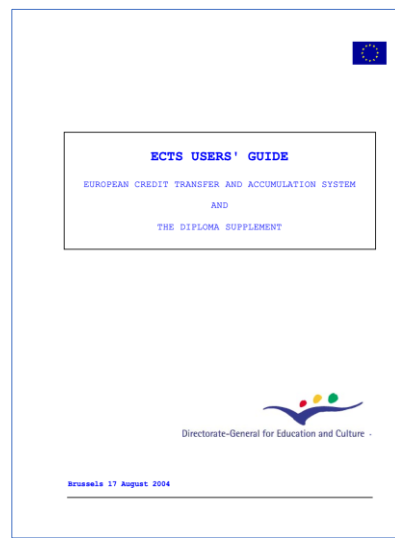
Representative of the Netherlands in Thematic Peer Group A on Qualifications Frameworks

Senior Expert Advisory Group ECTS Users' Guide 2015

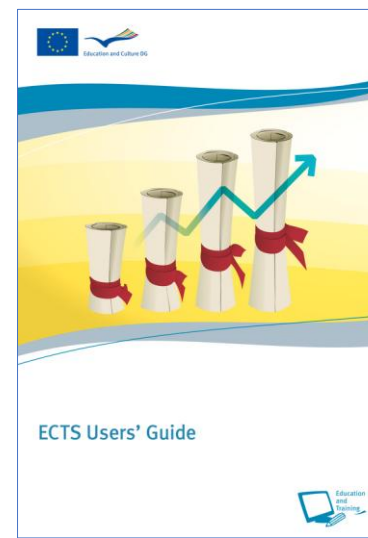
1995



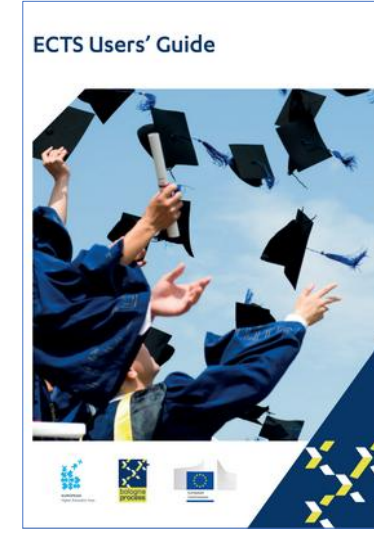
2004



2009



2015



# ECTS Grading Conversion in EU / EH(E)A context

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## **Coping with two issues:**

- National grading scales / tables
- National grading cultures

## **From the launch of the Pilot ECTS in 1989 a headache file:**

- Overtime several working groups to understand and solve the issue
- Deep discussions among the ECTS / Bologna group of counsellors / experts from 1995-2014
- Research papers published on the topic did not come up with the holy grail

ECTS grading scale / table and conversion kept being voluntary, but strongly recommended to apply

## **Key issues:**

- ECTS Models proposed and implemented: too complex and time consuming
- Grading conversion tables proved to be rather unreliable: resulted in consistent student complaints
- National / local grading scales not well understood by outsiders (complicated convergence)

## **Key problem:**

- Differences in grading cultures impossible to overcome
- Developing a European grading scale as an addition / replacement of national/local ones did not find support at policy level / actual users

# ECTS Grading scale / table

From ECTS Grading scale to Grading table to Grading distribution: doing justice to learner performance (1)

***ECTS Grading Scale 1995: double model to serve different type of systems (% and quality expressions/definitions)***

THE ECTS GRADING SCALE

ECTS grade	Percentage of successful students normally achieving the grade	Definition
A	10	EXCELLENT: outstanding performance with only minor errors
B	25	VERY GOOD: above the average standard but with some errors
C	30	GOOD: generally sound work with a number of notable errors
D	25	SATISFACTORY: fair but with significant shortcomings
E	10	SUFFICIENT: performance meets the minimum criteria
FX	—	FAIL: some more work required before the credit can be awarded
F	—	FAIL: considerable further work is required

***ECTS Grading Scale 2004: limited to 'grouped' grade distribution***

ECTS Grade	% of successful students normally achieving the grade	Comment
A	10	The use of words like “excellent” or “good” is no longer recommended as they do not fit with percentage based ranking of the ECTS Grade Transfer Scale.
B	25	
C	30	
D	25	
E	10	Fail – some work required to pass
FX	--	
F	--	FAIL – considerable further work required

“The main requirements for establishing ECTS grades are: the availability of sufficiently detailed primary data, cohorts of sufficient size to ensure validity, proper statistical methods and regular quality control of the results obtained through the use of the scale.”

Achillis heel: organising the grades in fixed percentage groups

# ECTS Grading scale / table

From ECTS Grading scale to Grading table to Grading distribution: doing justice to learner performance (2)

***ECTS Grading Table 2009: skipping the letter scale (A-E-FX/F) (proved not to work in practice)***

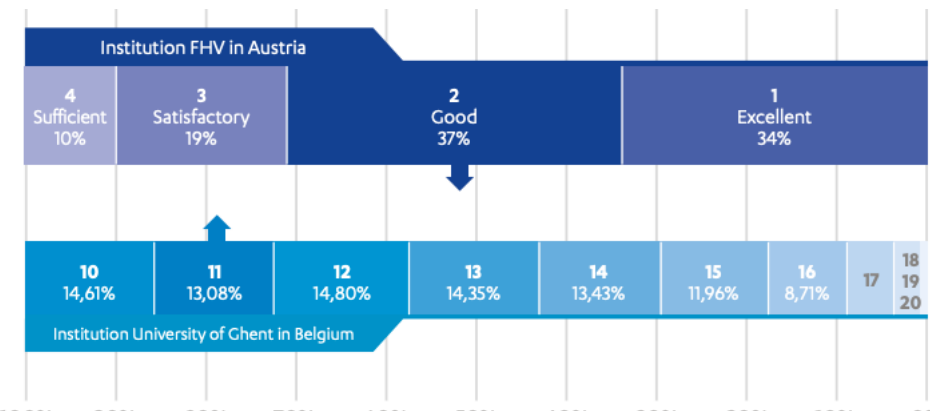
National / institutional grade country / system A	Grading percentage*	National / institutional grade country / system B	Grading percentage*
30 lode	5.6%	1	20%
30	15.7%	2	35%
29	0.5%	3	25%
28	12.3%	4	20%
27	11.8%		
26	9.0%		
25	8.2%		
24	11.3%		
23	2.7%		
22	6.0%		
21	2.3%		
20	5.7%		
19	1.9%		
18	6.9%		
Total	100%		100%

\* Based on the total number of grades awarded in the degree programme concerned during two preceding years.

## ECTS Grading Distribution and Conversion Model 2015

Grades used in institution (from highest to lowest passing grade)*	Number of passing grades awarded to the reference group	Percentage of each grade with respect to the total passing grades awarded	Cumulative percentage of passing grades awarded
10	50	5%	5%
9	100	10%	15%
8	350	35%	50%
7	300	30%	80%
6	200	20%	100%
Total:	1,000	100%	

\* Grading systems/approaches may be established at national level.



## Conversion tables: challenges in a nutshell – Example of EMJM Euroculture

## EUROCULTURE ECTS GRADING CONVERSION TABLE 2024-2025

[illegible]

## From ECTS Grading scale to Grading table to Grading distribution: doing justice to learner performance (3)

### Conclusion (1)

- 35 years of experiencing with grade conversion and recognition has not resulted in a feasible and satisfying solution in transnational context
- The ECTS scale / table / distribution models did not obtain wide application / acceptance

### Why?

- Require additional - time consuming - administrative activities
- Require the involvement of local Exam Board / academic expert(s) for conversion decisions
- Composition of reference groups perceived as too complicated and time consuming
- Application of the European Grade Conversion System (EGRACONS) rather limited / disappointing



# ECTS Grading scale / table

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From ECTS Grading scale to Grading table to Grading distribution: doing justice to learner performance (4)

## Conclusion (2)

### Suggested way forward for a successful approach

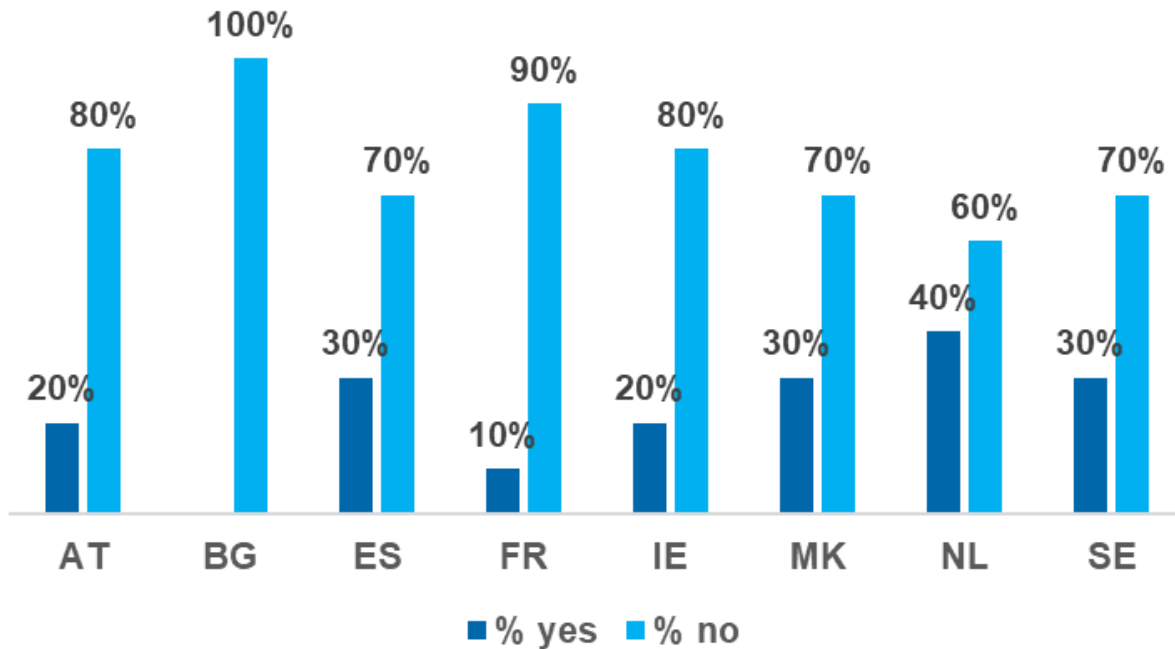
- Keep / make model as simple as possible: avoid conversion if not absolutely required (in those exceptional cases use EGRACONS)
- Accept the national grading table(s) and % grade distribution(s) as they are: include these in Transcript of Records + DS (including short explanation)
- Keep distribution percentages but base these on already existing (reference) groups avoiding additional work. Reference groups to be based on organisational structure of HE institution:
  - Faculty / School making a distinction between first and second cycle (BA and MA)
  - Depending on the grading culture distinguish between first BA and later years (knowledge acquisition and knowledge application)

Assumption: grading culture in all academic fields in same Faculty / School is comparable

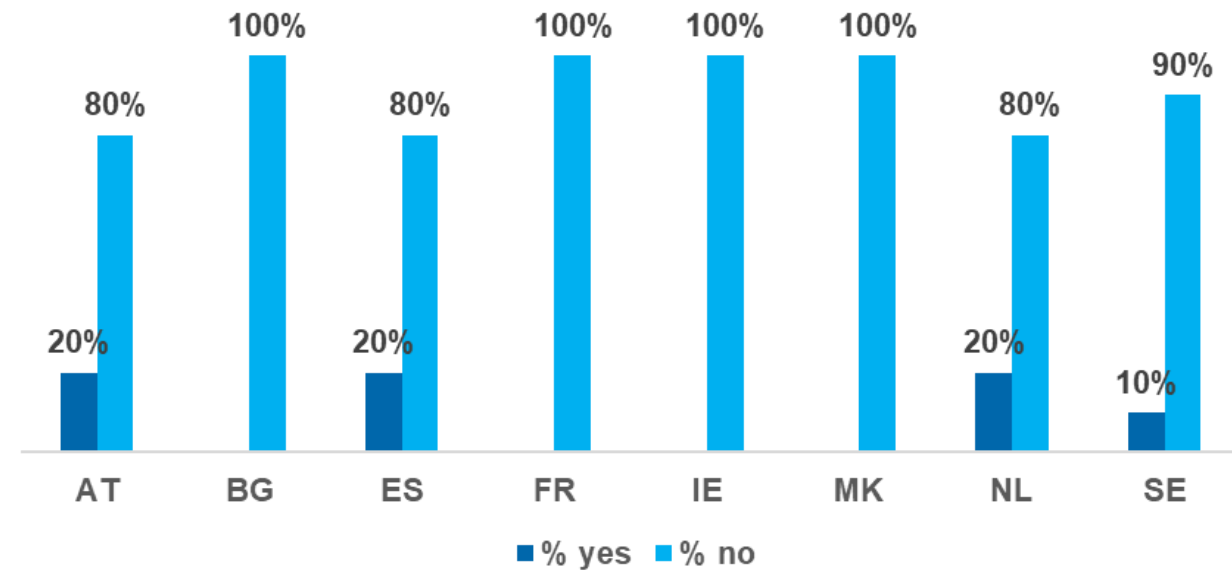


# Grade conversion – research findings

HEIs making grade distribution available  
(publicly or to partners):

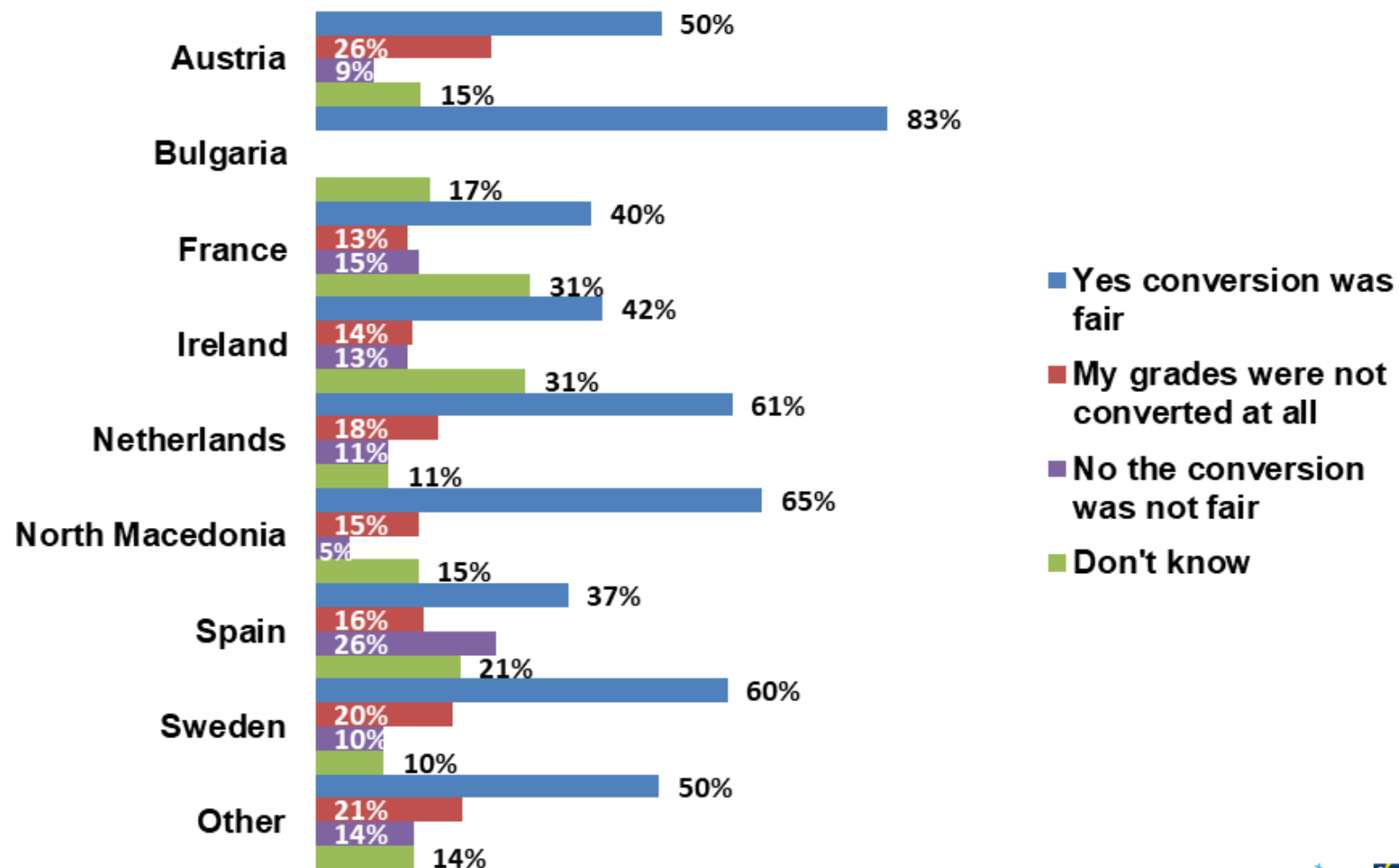


HEIs in EGRACONS:



# Grade conversion – research findings

Student survey: did students perceive grade conversion as fair?



# Grade conversion – research findings

- Focus groups:
  - Many HEIs do not convert/transfer grades at all
  - Several HEIs use their own approaches (e.g. national or own conversion tables, based on their own understanding of other countries' grading schemes)
  - Some HEIs continue to use the pre-2009 grading table (A-F)
  - Only a small minority of HEIs fully use ECTS grade conversion
- Suggests that many grade conversions perceived as fair were not based on ECTS grade conversion methodology

# Main questions

- Pros and cons of a reference grading scale with absolute definitions?
- Pros and cons of grade conversion based on grade distribution?
- Which approach would be the fairest for learners?
- Which approach would have the highest chance of being used by HEIs in practice?
- Should grade conversion be a key feature?

Lunchbreak

Revised ECTS Users' Guide –  
Work in two parallel sessions

# Accumulation – main changes

- Use "learning opportunity" as universal term throughout
  - Can be full degree programme
  - Can be a component of a full degree programme
  - Can be short stand-alone learning opportunity, e.g. leading to micro-credential
- Clarified full qualification vs other learning opportunity part
- Bring back more guidance on formulating learning outcomes
- RPL: emphasise that it is an EHEA commitment
- Quality assurance: link indicators to key features

# Transfer – main changes

- Clarify concepts and terminology for transfer vs recognition
- Align "automatic recognition" with EU Council Recommendation
- Clarify scenarios for recognition, incl. clear attention to joint programmes
- Clarify that possible ECTS reference grade would be mapped from national/local grade
- Clarifications around the Course Catalogue



# Accumulation – main questions

- Is the applicability for programmes, their components as well as short stand-alone learning opportunities clear?
- How much detail should be included on how programmes should be organised, especially re. flexibility?
- Are the quality assurance (QA) indicators too detailed or appropriate?

# Transfer – main questions

- Are the concepts of transfer vs recognition explained clearly in detail?
- Are the different scenarios for recognition clear?
- Is “automatic recognition” clearly understood and compatible with the Council Recommendation?

Reporting back & wrap-up

# Next steps

- Further comments & suggestions in the document – by 8 Sep 2025
- Incorporate changes per today's discussions – by 19 Sep 2025
- Additional round of written comments – by 28 Sep 2025
- Update to BFUG Board – by 10 Oct 2025
- BFUG Board – 4 Nov 2025
- Next AG meeting – 5 Nov 2025

# Consultation session

# Consultation session (tbc)

- Possible topic: Use of ECTS outside Higher Education
- Format: small focus group with European and national stakeholders that have experience in using ECTS in VET
- Key questions:
  - Is the draft Guide clear enough that it's open for use in VET and does the content of the Guide enable this?
  - Are there any roadblocks, e.g. key features that are inherently difficult for VET or guidance that does not make sense for VET at all?

Thank you!