

ECTS Users' Guide Revision

Material for BFUG Board preparation

1. Key Issues

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a fundamental building block of both the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the Erasmus+ programme. The ECTS Users Guide was last revised in 2015, coinciding with a revision of the EHEA's Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). Since that time, the context of European higher education policy has evolved.

As a result, European ministers of higher education agreed in their 2024 Tirana Communiqué to review the ECTS Users' Guide by 2027 in order to "strengthen its key features and adapt it to current developments, including micro credentials". The following developments in higher education policy and reality should be addressed by the revision.

1.1. Micro-credentials and lifelong learning

The discourse around micro-credentials has gained momentum, also inspired by the adoption of a [European approach to micro-credentials as a Council Recommendation](#). It is the only development explicitly mentioned in the Tirana Communiqué.

If micro-credentials become more widespread this will lead to more frequent and smaller-scale transfers of credits. In this scenario, credits will also frequently be accumulated/stacked along individual learning paths – i.e. different from the planned student mobility scenario, based on a learning agreement, that primarily underpins the current version of the Guide.

Micro-credentials at higher education levels are not only offered by formally recognised higher education institutions but increasingly by a diverse set of other providers, including private companies, NGOs, public employment agencies, etc. Furthermore, the Council of the European Union [recommended in 2020](#) that ECTS be used as a credit system also for vocational education and training (VET).

ECTS might hence become increasingly used as a credit system for lifelong learning, by both formally recognised education institutions as well as other providers.

1.2. European Universities initiative

The European Universities initiative has the ambitious goal of 50% student mobility. In this context, mobility will become the norm and part of everyday life in higher education, rather than an exception or something that happens once during a programme of study.

Next to the larger scale in terms of numbers of mobile students, mobility might also more often follow pre-defined opportunities in the curriculum or generic, “non-individual learning agreements” applicable to all students in an alliance programme.

1.3. Joint programmes and European Degree

In part as a result of the European Universities initiative, the number of joint programmes developed by European HEIs continues to increase. The proposal for a European Degree (label) has set out to enhance the conditions for joint programmes and give those a further boost.

ECTS is thus increasingly be used in the context of programmes (and micro-credentials) that are jointly designed and delivered by several HEIs. It will be important that the Guide facilitates cooperation and provides feasible solutions to cooperating HEIs, for example on important matters like grade conversion.

1.4. Automatic recognition

The [EHEA policy commitments](#) as well as the [2018 Council Recommendation](#) apply to automatic recognition of qualifications as well as periods of study. This should be reflected in the corresponding sections of the Users' Guide. It might be explored how grade conversion could be better facilitated to achieve fair transfer of study results.

1.5. Digitalisation and interoperability

Blended and on-line learning have increased substantially in connection with some of the mentioned developments, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic. ECTS is hence more frequently used in “virtual mobility” scenarios.

Another important aspect is the interoperability of HEIs' IT systems to enable a seamless experience for learners before, during and after mobility. Many ECTS documents are nowadays primarily digital and exchanged through the Erasmus Without Papers (EWP) network, part of the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI). The revision of the Guide hence needs to be in sync with forthcoming developments in EWP. Beyond that, the ECTS Users' Guide is an important semantic reference for data models and technical standards, such as the European Learning Model (ELM) used to describe course catalogues and credentials.

2. Revision Process

The revision of the ECTS Users' Guide will be carried out in consultation with an Advisory Group appointed by the European Commission. The work of the Advisory Group will be informed by a thorough background research performed by a team at ICF.

2.1. Background research

The background research will address two dimensions: (a) the level of implementation of ECTS in practice in line with the current Users' Guide and (b) the usefulness of the current Users' Guide as perceived by academics, administrators and students.

Desk research will be performed across 80 HEIs, i.e. 10 each from the following countries: Austria, Bulgaria, France, Ireland, North Macedonia, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. For these 80 HEIs, the research team will analyse all ECTS documents: course catalogues, learning agreements and transcripts of records.

The desk research will be complemented by surveys of students, academics and administrators, as well as two focus groups per country to gather more in-depth insights.

2.2. Timeline

Month/quarter	Actions
January 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">composing the Advisory Groupdetailing the background research methodology
February 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">sampling HEIs for the background researchfinalise Advisory Group composition and ToR (BFUG on 24th/25th)
March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">first meeting of the Advisory Group
Q2 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">carrying out the background research (desk research, surveys, focus groups)first results presented and discussed by Advisory Group
Q3 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">final results of the research presented to BFUG (date tbc)1st draft version of the revised Guide discussed by Advisory Group
Q4 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">additional consultation meetings as needed2nd draft version discussed by Advisory Group
Q1 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">final draft version of the Guide validated by Advisory Groupupdated Guide presented and discussed by BFUG (date tbc)

2.3. Advisory Group composition

The Advisory Group will consider the results of the background research and discuss iterations of the (draft) revised Users' Guide. For practical reasons, the Group should not exceed a size of ca. 15 – 20 members.

To ensure that revision is informed by a broad range of perspectives and will meet a high degree of acceptance across the HE community, different stakeholder perspectives are essential to include:

- academics/teaching staff;
- institutional leadership;
- institutional management/administration (e.g. international offices, recognition officers, internal quality assurance officers);
- students/learners;
- quality assurance agencies;

- other providers of micro-credentials (i.e. not officially recognised higher education institutions).

The individuals on the Group should combine a range of perspectives, including that of managing “regular”/“traditional” study programmes, micro-credentials and joint programmes.

Members of the Advisory Group might be nominated by different organisations or countries, but should be nominated in their individual capacity. That is, if their affiliation changes during the work of the Advisory Group they remain on the Group, unless the European Commission considers it preferable to replace the member.

The Advisory Group should be regionally balanced, including also some individuals from non-EU EHEA countries. To inform the revision by the widest possible range of perspectives, advisory group members should preferably be from countries that are *not* covered in the background research.

Name	Institution	Country	Areas of expertise			
			Academic	Leadership	IO/recog.	QA
Frederik De Decker	Ghent University	BE (Fl.)		X		X
Robert Wagenaar *	University of Groningen	NL	X	X		X
Raimonda Markeviciene *	Vilnius University	LT		X		X
Volker Gehmlich *	Hochschule Osnabrück	DE	X	X		
Ronny Heintze	AQAS (QA agency)				X	X
Melita Kovačević	University of Zagreb	HR	X	X	X	X
Leonardo Marušić	University of Zadar		X	X	X	X
Ana Tecilazić	Algebra University		X		X	X
Jonna Korhonen	Ministry	FI		X		X
Padmasheela Kiiskilä / Henri Pirkkalainen	Tampere University			X		X
Chiara Finocchiertti	CIMEA	IT		X		X
Jakub Brdulak	SGH Warsaw School of Economics	PL	X	X	X	X
Peter Ondrejčka	Ministry	SK		X	X	X
NN		UA				
NN		AM				
NN (org. to nominate)	EUA	n/a				

NN (org. to nominate)	EURASHE	n/a
NN (org. to nominate)	ESU	n/a
NN (org. to nominate)	ENQA	n/a
NN (org. to nominate)	EQAR (?)	n/a
NN (org. to nominate)	EI-ETUCE (?)	n/a

*NB: Individuals marked with a * were also part of the last Advisory Group (2012-2015)*

In addition to stakeholder and country experts, it would be useful to involve European Commission services/experts responsible for key related initiatives:

- ESCI: person with good technical knowledge of EWP from DG EAC B1 or contractor (if not covered by colleagues already involved)
- ELM and EDC: person from DG EMPL or contractor with intimate knowledge of the ELM data model and concepts
- possibly someone from DG EMPL or Cedefop to cover use of ECTS in VET (?)
- as senior adviser, Professor Ann Katherine Isaacs, who played a key part in drafting the 2015 Users' Guide.

2.4. Draft Terms of Reference

(following the BFUG format)

Period of work:

February 2025 until the first BFUG meeting of 2026

Co-chairs:

European Commission

Composition:

see above

Reference to the Tirana Communiqué:

To support the implementation of the ECTS, including learning outcomes, we invite the BFUG to review the ECTS Users' Guide 2015 by 2027, to strengthen its key features and adapt it to current developments, including micro credentials.

Main goals:

Propose a revised ECTS Users' Guide for adoption by the 2027 Ministerial meeting

Outcomes:

Revised ECTS Users' Guide – for consideration at the first BFUG of 2026

Specific tasks:

- Identify areas that need revision in light of EHEA developments
- Provide input to the research design (?)
- Consider the findings of the research
- Conduct wider consultations of stakeholders as appropriate
- Review draft versions of the revised Users' Guide
- Propose a draft revised Users' Guide to the BFUG

Meetings:

Up to 6 meetings, 3 on-site in Brussels and 3 online

Liaison with other working structures:

Coordinate with ESG revision?

Contribution to enhancing mobility:

ECTS is a main mobility tool, keeping the Users' Guide up-to-date thus contributes to a smooth mobility experience. The research will yield insights into the current obstacles and barriers experienced in practice, especially with a view to seamless recognition of study periods abroad, and the revision will aim to address those.

Correlation with initiatives outside the Bologna Process:

Erasmus+ programme

Reporting:

- Draft ToR submitted to 1st BFUG of 2025
- Research results presented at 2nd BFUG of 2025
- Draft revised Users' Guide submitted to 1st BFUG of 2026

Dissemination and enhancing knowledge sharing:

Feedback on ECTS and the usefulness of the Guide encountered in these activities should be fed into the AG discussions. Once the draft revised Guide has been validated by the BFUG, dissemination activities could commence to inform the academic community of the forthcoming changes and improvements.

Tackling transversal topics:

Micro-credentials are tackled by the revision of the Guide.