Training guide

Academic Recognition for Universities of the Western Balkans

Training guide on Academic Recognition for Universities of the Western Balkans

PREFACE *by Professor Luc Francois,*
Ghent University

The initiative of the European Commission to launch the Erasmus programme in the 1980s caused a profound change in higher education. The student mobility we have intends to offer as many students as possible a broadening and intense intellectual experience.

The increasing internationalization of higher education is not a gratuitous occupation. The development of the system of credits was only a first step. The construction of a curriculum cannot find its origin in the fact that 'it has always been this way' or 'we have a great expert for this course'. The starting point must be the student. What knowledge and capacities must a student have mastered at the end of his education? What insights and attitudes must he have acquired to function at the start of his career in a quickly evolving society that is growing

ever more complex? And above all: how to translate this new approach into the construction of a curriculum, into the method of teaching and the method of evaluating? The answer to these questions leads us to an education system that is competence-oriented, based on well formulated learning outcomes and inevitably leads to greater attention for quality and to the development of quality care systems. Universities have to respond quickly to new evolutions and needs by offering, amongst other things, flexible curricula to its students.

Academic recognition is the point of interest in student mobility. Shortly after the start of the Erasmus programme an ECTS-pilot project was started up to accomplish just that. The core principles with which we started off ECTS in 1988-1989, were 'mutual trust and confidence'. They are still valid today; when there is no basic trust in the functioning and the quality of another university it is not

expedient to sign an agreement on mobility with that other university.

Gradually forms developed that have now become standard: the application form, the learning agreement and the transcript of records. It is not always easy to convince colleagues that the learning agreement is a legally binding document between three parties; the emitting institution, the receiving institution and of course the student himself. At times those of us pioneering the reforms have had to fight heroic battles against professors that weren't interested in agreeing on a learning agreement beforehand and then afterwards decided to fiercely dispute the results the students achieved abroad.

It is vital for the student to know before the start of his exchange programme that all his study results – in so far as they are positive - fully count in his own curriculum without needing additional examination[1]. Nowadays

there is enough information to judge beforehand if the courses a student wishes to follow abroad are of a sufficiently good quality and fit in the curriculum of the student. If we cannot guarantee this academic recognition to the student, we will discourage this segment of our student population and they will increasingly look for a university that is open to their legitimate complaints. Furthermore, not accepting foreign results is a formal token of mistrust towards the partner university.

Europe boasts just short of five thousand institutions that offer higher education. Consequently every university has more than its pick for collaboration. One of the elements determining whether a university will strive for a lengthy and structural cooperation with the other is to what extent the other university treats her own students correctly. Only a full academic recognition of study results obtained abroad is an acceptable token of 'mutual trust and confidence'.

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1. In June 2010, of the 118 students of the Basileus projects surveyed who had completed their mobility period, 26% had to take exams at home because courses abroad were not recognized. Results published by the Ghent University. The full study results can be found here: http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/KBS-FRB/Files/Verslag/4-bis-Valere_Meus.pdf

INTRODUCTION

The preface highlights the complex route universities navigate to achieve recognition for their students. Through a conference on 'Student Mobility and Recognition of Study Periods Abroad (Western Balkans - EU) that took place on 10-12 October 2010 in Ljubljana/Sovenia and its preparatory meetings, the organizing committee led by the King Baudouin Foundation developed a number of recommendations which were then tested and adjusted during the conference workshop sessions.

This guide offers further explanations, definitions, tips and tricks of how to try and implement the recommendations in an environment where budget is tight or there's little or no buy-in.

This guide should be used in conjunction with the ECTS Users Guide[3] and any other guidance you have received from mobility programmes such as Basileus or JoinEU-SEE.

It should be used as suggestions to ease your university's involvement with mobility programmes rather than re-invent the wheel. It is advised to use this guide in conjunction with the ECTS Users guide for training sessions at your universities with the involved colleagues from all faculties. For the sake of clarity, in this guide 'course (unit)' refers to an individual course of for example 3 credits taught by one professor. A series of course (units) comprises a study programme (60 credits a year).

2.   For more information on the conference and access to all presentations, please see
     here: http://www.kbs-frb.be/event.aspx?id=263868&LangType=1033
3.   http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf

Trainingguide

Existing mobility programmes in South East Europe

Basileus I, II and III (www.basileus.ugent.be) are projects with the Western Balkans operated by the Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window (EMECW) and managed by the Ghent University. The programme is a cooperation and mobility scheme in the area of higher education managed by EACEA - currently it is included in the Erasmus Mundus II programme as Action 2 Partnerships. Basileus provides scholarships for exchanges of students, researchers and staff between EU and certain third countries.

The goal is to promote cooperation, capacity building, improve mutual understanding, improve transparency and recognition of studies and qualifications, enhance international cooperation capacity of 3rd countries, increase skills of (vulnerable) students and staff.
Contact: basileus@ugent.be

JoinEU-SEE (www.joineusee.eu) is managed by the University of Graz. In accordance with the overall Erasmus Mundus Action 2 Strand 1 objectives, the JoinEU-SEE programme aims to promote European higher education, to support the improvement and enhancement of scholars' career prospects as well as the promotion of inter-cultural communication and understanding through cooperation with the partner countries in the project consortium.

JoinEU-SEE supports mobility at all level of higher education, including mobility for students (undergraduate, master, doctoral and post-doctoral) and for staff (academic and administrative).
Contact: joineusee@uni-graz.at

Em2 - STEM This third programme will start in the second half of 2011
Contact: em2stem@city.ac.uk

This guide will concentrate on the steps to get more robust recognition procedures in place within your own institution and will hopefully help on the way to creating the 'ideal world' below rather than the 'worst case scenarios' that are all too common.

In an ideal world…
I Higher education legislation is flexible to accommodate 30 or 60 credit mobility windows;
II Universities have at least 30 credit mobility windows incorporated into all Bachelor, Master and Doctorate curricula in the appropriate year of study for students to study similar or complimentary subjects abroad. Ideally the windows form part of a 'process of negotiation' in which the partner programmes get to know each other and see their mutual strengths. That is then translated into the windows;
III Mobility and recognition are facilitated by a binding learning agreement;
IV The learning agreement is discussed and negotiated by the student, relevant professors and signed off by the person who is also responsible for recognizing the credits earned abroad;
V One person should be able to sign all LA's for a particular study programme, ideally the programme coordinator;
VI When the student returns, their learning agreement and transcript are submitted to the relevant body responsible for recognition and the grades are calibrated into the student's overall transcript.

Worst case scenario…
I Higher education law does not facilitate mobility (e.g. windows of 30 credits do not fit with a bachelors, masters or doctorates curricula requirements);
II Many universities believe that course content should be nearly identical for all students meaning that if students go abroad they have to find identical content in the modules they study to what they would 'miss' at home;
III Learning agreements differ in status between students, professors, deans and are often not seen as a binding agreement;
IV There is no clear line of responsibility or authority of who should negotiate and agree upon the agreement and who has the authority to sign and recognize it. Is it the professor, tutor, dean of studies, head of department?
V Students return, universities often do not recognize the learning agreement, professors do not appreciate the validity of the learning and require students to sit the exam they would have taken at home and use those grades. The credits awarded at the host university do not correspond to those of the courses they replace at the home university.

1. http://crilt.ncirl.ie/moodle/file.php/1/moddata/forum/1/46/Writing_and_using_learning-outcomes.pdf

1. Implementing recommendations and dealing with realities

The recommendations below are taken from a longer document that also includes recommendations to governments. Each recommendation is followed by tips, hints and suggestions of how to implement the suggested steps. Where possible there are suggestions of how to deal with likely obstacles and opposition. Also hints of how to achieve it on a low budget. The most self explanatory recommendations are included but without comment.

The complete set of recommendations can be found in the annex or here: http://www.kbs-frb.be/event.aspx?id=263868&LangType=1033

I. *ACTORS*
Monitor the agreements to assure quality control.

A. *Appoint an **Institutional Coordinator** or **Rector's Delegate for International Mobility** and Academic Coordinators for each Faculty or School or Degree Course **allowing them to manage and to sign all relevant documents related to Student mobility** and provide to the **International Relations Offices** sufficient staff experts in mobility issues.*
This is a challenging yet crucial step towards improving recognition processes at your university. If budget does not allow for extra staff appointments to assist students in mobility issues then the bare minimum is to appoint or assign individuals per faculty who are responsible for and have the authority to sign mobility partnerships, learning agreements and the recognition of grades.

By making one person responsible for signing off all documents, they sign the learning agreement before students go abroad and are also responsible for recognizing it when students return. See also recommendation III G.

Recognition regulation should be prepared at central, institutional level and made available (on-line) to all staff and incoming and outgoing students, including the appeal procedure.

This should help avoid individual students referring to individual professors for recognition purposes. If necessary, professors could be consulted before the mobility, but never after the exchange period.

B. *If needed, the Institutional or Faculty Coordinator may refer to a **board of Academics** when dealing with procedures related to specific disciplines.*
It could be that different programmes have certain requirements as to content that must be covered during a full programme of study. Therefore, a consultative board of academics could be set up.

However, this should not be to approve or disapprove mobility or to dictate that it is not possible for certain courses. It should be to advise on the suitability or compatibility of a suggested mobility study proposal and the courses offered therein. If it is not compatible then the board should be able to suggest a different mobility route.

II. *TOOLS & INSTRUMENTS*

A. *Create **flexible curricula,** possibly including mobility windows of **30-60** credits to be obtained abroad.*
ECTS provides a tool whereby programmes can be made up of ´building blocks´ or courses (some compulsory, others optional) that all fit together to create a harmonized degree programme. By unpacking, re-evaluating and re-designing courses so that a 20 credit module, for example, would feel similar in so far as workload and assessment in any European country, the system aims to create an environment that facilitates flexible learning routes and mobility.

Mobility windows are therefore much easier to introduce if a programme has already been divided up into its relevant courses, each with its own learning outcomes and range of assessment methods. Therefore the first step is to see how your university is progressing with ECTS implementation. If it is in name rather than nature then this must be addressed otherwise it will be extremely difficult to include mobility windows.

B. *Issue the **diploma supplement** [4].*
The diploma supplement is essentially a certificate in a standard format issued by a university to state what a student studied and what his or her grades were. It is without value judgments and has been designed solely to aid recognition and transparency. An explanation of wording, content and use of the diploma supplement can be found in pdf on the European Commission's Education and Training website[5].

It is an administrative task to issue a diploma supplement and should not cause too many problems as it does not call for a change of structure. It facilitates mobility because it is a uniform document to present similar information.

C. *Publish online a **detailed catalogue in English** of degree courses containing all relevant academic and logistical information.*

D. *Provide a **website of the Institution in English.***
If your university does not have internal resources to translate university, programme

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4. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc1239_en.htm
5. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ds/ds_en.pdf

and course information and insufficient budget to outsource the translation, there are a number of alternative solutions available. Talk to language department professors to see if the English translation could be built into an assignment. Or advertise a volunteer translation job to students or even a summer internship. It is a source of work experience for them which is invaluable on their Curriculum Vitae.

E. Increase the offer of _degree courses in English, of courses of English language and organise internationally recognized tests of the English language_ such as TOEFL [6] or IELTS [7].

A number of discussions took place on this point at the conference. What incentives exist and what incentives can be used to encourage staff to provide their courses in English? Some universities offered financial incentives although this is not possible for all institutions and also creates problems of its own (for example French language professors are penalized for having a course they could not teach in English). However, it may be possible to encourage professors by alluding to increased chances of selection for teacher exchange. If a professor has experience teaching in English then they are more eligible for teacher exchange. If this succeeds then it will be a good 'advert' for other professors to teach in English and provides a solution with less financial burden. However, finding teaching exchanges for a number of these teachers will be essential to continue a trend of offering courses in

English.If possible, it really is worth providing conditions for obtaining internationally recognized language certificates (TOEFL, IELTS, etc) at your institution. It is fairly easy to become a certified testing location and this could also provide an extra source of revenue for your department if the general public could sit their TOEFL exams at your institution.

To become an ETS Certified Test Administration Site, you will need an existing language lab, computer lab or other secure room with ideally at least 15 Internet-connected computers that can be reserved for ETS testing purposes 15 to 30 times per year. TOEFL will compensate you and your staff for managing your site's testing. Details found on the TOEFL website[8].

F. Calculate _statistical distribution of the grades_ for each degree course to allow an accurate conversion of grades of exchange Students according to the procedure described in the new ECTS guide.1 Refer national (or institutional) grading scale to the ECTS grading table [9].

Recognition of credits and conversion of grades should be performed according to the new procedure, recommended by the ECTS guide (February 2009 edition). This is currently under development and will likely be revised in 2011. The Ghent University is working on a procedure for the new grading scale which they will later share.

G. Publish online _all procedures_ related to Student mobility in the national language and in English.

See recommendations II C+D.

H. Keep record of the credits (courses, internships, etc.) taken abroad and recognized in the past for each degree course and provide information in advance to perspective outgoing Students.

Keeping a record of credits that have been recognized provides a practical way of communicating timely information to prospective outgoing students. It shows the courses where the 'leg-work' and negotiation has already been completed and therefore should face less opposition from the professors involved at the home institution.

I. Allocate a sufficient number of credits to the preparation and writing of the _thesis_. Allow and encourage the Students to prepare it abroad. In this regard, it can be useful to ask in advance to the partner Institution a list of potential thesis Supervisors and subjects.

Students that must follow all taught courses at their home university should still have a mobility opportunity. This could be for thesis preparation and potentially be a smaller window of less credits. The recommendation also ties in with Recommendation IV B. If there are language difficulties, a student can more easily work independently to develop their thesis proposal with a cooperative professor than follow taught classes they cannot understand sufficiently well.

J. Organize _mobility or welcome days_ to encourage interaction of incoming Students with potential outgoing Students.

Engage the student parliament or student organisations in this process. With a small budget students are capable of utilising their network and organising receptions or parties for new and outgoing students. The experience is a valuable way to develop further skills (organisation, budget management, delegation, networking) than those developed during their course programme.

Furthermore, previous exchange students should be encouraged to present about their experiences to practice their presentation skills (an extremely important skill when they join the work force and excellent for their CVs).

K. Provide outgoing Students with _additional funding_ or loans ensuring that they will not lose, when abroad, the ones they are already receiving at home.

If budget does not allow providing additional funds to exchange students then investigate if there is a route to award scholarships or subsidies to former exchange students who return and tutor prospective outgoing students. Encourage students to investigate whether there are national or regional funds, grants or scholarships for exchange and assist them to apply if so. They should also be encouraged to look for similar funding opportunities in their host country. Any student that accesses extra funding should report back to you so you can maintain records (in the same spreadsheet or database described in recommendation III B.) and inform future students of the opportunity.

6. http://www.ets.org/toefl/
7. http://www.ielts.org
8. http://www.ea.toefl.eu/index.php?id=3161
9. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf (see page 41 to 43)

III. RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCEDURES

A. *Select very carefully the partner Institutions checking in advance the* **equivalence or the compatibility of the study programmes.** *In addition, agreements with Institutions providing* **complementary programmes** *can also be useful to provide the Students with further interesting opportunities.*

Signing new agreements is a strategically important choice. Before doing that, a university must make sure that course programs are either similar or complementary. This should be done in coordination with course and programme leaders. See also recommendation II H.

B *Monitor the agreements to assure quality control.*

This can be done by a simple checklist and spreadsheet and should concentrate on the student experience, academic provision and administrative ease. Using a scoring system for each of the points set out below will help you easily monitor the quality of the partnerships over academic years, identify areas for improvement and also identify upward or downward trends in quality.

The student experience would explore quality and ease of access to accommodation, student networks, registration at the host university and overall experience. The academic provision would score whether the course provided matches that adver-tised, how the student assessed the academic level and quality of the course and the teaching and how complimentary it is to a particular study programme at the home university. The administrative quality would be an assessment of the ease of working with the partner university from the perspective of the mobility administrators at the home university. Therefore, questioning the quality of the learning outcomes, ease of communication, ease of receiving transcripts of grades and ease of resolving miscellaneous issues that can arise during the course of a student's mobility window.

C. *To introduce/develop the* **learning outcomes** *approach and define them in order to contribute to the mobility of students by facilitating the recognition of their qualifications, to improve the transparency of qualifications, to simplify credit transfer and to provide a common format that helps promote lifelong learning and can assist in creating multiple routes through and between different educations systems.*

Learning outcomes are one of the single most important components of making student mobility possible. Learning outcomes are part of the conceptual model of student-centred higher education. Statements of intended learning outcomes are used to express what students are expected to be able to do at the end of the learning period. Learning outcomes can be generic or subject specific, encompassing

skills as well as content and normally addressing cognitive development. Learning outcomes are important for two main reasons: firstly, they help to ensure that students come away from a study programme with a range of skills and knowledge to use in future study or in the labour market; secondly, they make it possible for modules to be recognized without content being analyzed to see if they are identical. The key question for graduates shifts from 'What did you study?´ to 'What can you do as a result of your study?´

Dr Declan Kennedy, Department of Education, University College Cork, has written 'Writing and Using Learning Outcomes- A Practical Guide' which has been translated into Spanish, German, Albanian, Serbian, Lithuanian and Hungarian. The English pdf is readily available on the internet[9].

Dr Kennedy describes ECTS as the currency of mobility and learning outcomes are the language. A simple google of 'Writing and Using Learning Outcomes A Practical Guide Declan Kennedy' will provide you a wealth of information on the subject including training material and presentations he has delivered

internationally. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Use the information already available, identify a cooperative professor and examine how their course could be translated into learning outcomes- or how to improve on the learning outcomes if they already exist.

D. *Increase the **mutual trust and confidence** by encouraging **exchanges of International Relations Officers, Academic Coordinators, and other Academics for periods of collaboration, training, teaching and research**.*

Budget will likely be restricted for these activities. However, many mobility programmes have provision for teacher or research exchanges. It is also worth exploring cost-neutral researcher or teacher exchanges where two researchers or teachers could swap for a semester (classes, apartments, cars, etc). It is not a common initiative but is possible if you find two individuals willing to pilot the process. If they return enriched by the experience, it will likely lead to others wanting to try.

The advantage of staff or older researchers taking part is that the responsibility to find an

exchange partner and arrange logistics can lie with them rather than the administrative office. Whichever way it is possible for your institution to foster exchange amongst staff and researchers, all initiatives should be publicised, promoted and visibly supported. This will increase mutual trust and confidence between institutions, but more importantly it will also increase mutual trust and confidence within your own institution. Staff who have had or seen worthwhile experiences in foreign universities are much more likely to actively promote and support mobility amongst their students.

E. *Select very accurately outgoing Students making sure that the mobility grants are awarded to the most motivated and dedicated Students.*

Applications should be well written, clear, contain all necessary information, include a well written motivation letter (if required) and letters of recommendation.

However, this is just the first selection step. Taking extra time during selection, for example holding short interviews to ensure selection of the right candidates for mobility can reduce wasted time at the end of the process.

Note that this recommendation does not say the most 'academically strong' students. Academic ability is important and can be judged from transcripts and professor recommendation.

However, experience shows that highly dedicated and motivated students often get the most out of their mobility windows academically and personally.

Therefore, an interview with the candidate is essential to judge a student's motivation for applying and to see if their dedication is enough to persuade you to overlook a more average academic performance.

" I went to Ireland. I could barely speak any English but I was desperate to go. My professor originally said no, actually he continued saying no, but I kept going to his office to persuade him and I think I eventually wore him down. He said I could go but was already telling me when I would have to take the re-sit exams if I failed. But anyway, I went, I learnt English, I passed all of my exams with high marks and I had the time of my life. I think he was quite surprised." Christophe Perrin, French. Since studying abroad in 1998 has built a successful career in France, Germany, UK and The Netherlands.

9. http://crilt.ncirl.ie/moodle/file.php/1/moddata/forum/1/46/
    Writing_and_using_learning-outcomes.pdf

F. Use the official European forms recommended by the ECTS users guide [10].

The ECTS users guide is easily available online follow this link or google the pdf. The advantage of all using the same forms means that document recognition is less problematic.

The user guide also has copies of the forms (partially displayed on the following pages)

G. Make sure the learning agreement is signed by a person (Academic Coordinator, etc) with sufficient authority to guarantee the full recognition of the academic activities performed abroad even in case of change of the staff of the Institution.

Two key points here: 1) somebody has to be appointed Academic Coordinator and take on the responsibility of reviewing and signing learning agreements; 2) departments, faculties, professors and deans have to recognise that individual or post as having the authority to sign learning agreements and guarantee their full recognition on return.

This is one of the most controversial recommendations to implement and therefore one of the most challenging.

The first point is likely easier to solve because most universities will have staff playing a similar role centrally or in faculties. It should

be formalised in a formal committee meeting that they are the individual or that is the role responsible for reviewing and signing learning agreements.

Persuading professors and deans to recognise the authority of that signature is more likely if it is discussed, agreed upon and negotiated before any learning agreements are signed.

The academic coordinator should initiate a number of conversations with influential or problematic deans and professors.

The situation should be discussed regarding hypothetical student examples to ensure that the dean and academic coordinator are discussing the same thing.

If appropriate, an academic coordinator could enter into signed agreements with deans of faculties that the deans agree to categorically uphold academic coordinator signed learning agreements.

This is only possible if the academic coordinator takes time to build trust with deans that they will only sign learning agreements when they are sure of the quality of the host institution and its courses and that the planned study is complimentary to the degree course.

H. Keep in touch with outgoing Students while they are abroad providing counselling and eventually helping them in changing the learning agreement using the change form.

When students sign the learning agreement they should receive a copy of the change form with instructions of why it would have to be used. Students should receive an email two weeks into their mobility window enquiring into whether they had settled in sufficiently and whether they have any issues. Change forms should be mentioned again with the form attached. A similar email should be sent at the middle and/or towards the end of the mobility period. It is much easier for students to get the required information and approvals while they're at their host institutions.
(Also see recommendation Ⅳ E.)

I. Make sure the hosting Institution send the transcript of records in time. This document should provide the statistical distribution of grades of the degree course involved (point Ⅱ F).

This is where good working relationships are crucial. By spending a little time managing your contacts within your university's network of partner institutions, it will be much easier to push and see results when you ask for transcripts to be sent on time or

as soon as possible if they're already late. Therefore, if there is any opportunity to meet your counterparts at partner universities, do so. If budget does not facilitate then making informal and friendly initial contact by telephone can build rapport which should be nurtured by occasional emails and phone calls to discuss how students are, future mobility cooperation, etc.

This will ensure smoother communication when deadlines are looming and staff is more worried about their own students' transcripts rather than those on exchange. This then mitigates the risk that the delayed paperwork gives further fuel to less positive colleagues about the benefit of mobility windows.

ALL'S FAIR IN LOVE AND WAR. BUT IS IT IN RECOGNI-TION AND MOBILITY?

J. Provide full recognition of the academic activities performed abroad certified by the transcript of records and previously included in the learning agreement. The recognition should be awarded by the Academic Coordinator, upon approval, if appropriate, by specific Faculty or degree course boards (point Ⅱ D and Ⅲ B) but not by the individual Professors to avoid possible re-evaluation of the Student. A flexible approach is recommended and fair recognition rather than perfect equivalence is to be applied.

Education and Culture DG
lifelong learning Programme

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LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME / ERASMUS – ECTS
STUDENT APPLICATION FORM

(Photograph)

ACADEMIC YEAR: 20_____/ 20_____

FIELD OF STUDY: _____

This application should be completed in BLACK and BLOCK letters in order to be easily copied and/or telefaxed.

SENDING INSTITUTION: Name and full address: _____
_____
_____

Departmental coordinator – name, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail : _____
_____

Institutional coordinator – name, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail : _____
_____

STUDENT'S PERSONAL DATA (to be completed by the student applying)

Family name:_____	Firstname (s): _____
Date of birth:_____	
Sex: M ☐ / F ☐ Nationality:_____	Place of birth:_____
e-mail address:_____	
Current address:_____	Permanent address (if different): _____
_____	_____
Current address is valid until:_____	_____
Tel. no (incl. country code nr.): _____	Tel:_____

19. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf (see page 48)

LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME/ ERASMUS – ECTS

LEARNING AGREEMENT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 20............./ 20................ STUDY PERIOD: from ....to ....

FIELD OF STUDY: ....

Name of student: ....
Student's e-mail address: ....
Sending Institution: .... Country: ....

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED STUDY PROGRAMME ABROAD/LEARNING AGREEMENT

Receiving Institution: .... Country: ....

Course unit code (if any) and page no. of the information package	Course unit title (as indicated in the course catalogue)	Semester (autumn/spring)	Number of ECTS credits

Student's signature.. Date ....

SENDING INSTITUTION

We confirm that the learning agreement is accepted.

Departmental coordinator's signature   Institutional coordinator's signature

....

Date:...   Date:...

LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME/ ERASMUS – ECTS

TRAINING AGREEMENT and QUALITY COMMITMENT

I. DETAILS OF THE STUDENT

Name of student:..
Subject area: .... Academic year: ....
Degree: ....
Sending Institution: .... Country: ....

II. DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED TRAINING PROGRAMME ABROAD

Host organization:..
Planned dates of start and end of the placement preriod: from .... till: .... (................ months)
Knowledge, skills and competence to be acquired: ....
Detailed programme of the training period: ....
Tasks of the student: ....
Monitoring and evaluation plan: ....

III. COMMITMENT OF THE THREE PARTIES

By signing this document the student, the sending institution and the host organisation confirm that they will abide by the principles of the Quality Commitment for Erasmus student placements set out in the document below.

The student ....

Student's signature:.. Date:...

The sending institution ....

We confirm that this proposed training programme agreement is approved.   On satisfactory completion of the training programme the institution will award ....ECTS credits and will record the training period in the Diploma Supplement.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS
Make your mobility a very responsible choice

A Inform *yourself well in advance before your mobility period*

Information distribution about the opportunity to study abroad, the process (warning students that there is a long lead time) can help students plan ahead.

When students enrol on their study programme, a leaflet advertising the opportunities would be a good first step. This should then build on by an introductory presentation.

The most practical time to do this is before a normal lecture when all of the students are expected to be in a lecture hall for class.

An enthusiastic professor and a student who took part in a mobility window are very good ambassadors to promote mobility.

B Make sure you have a good knowledge of the English language *and/or of the* **language of the host country.**

This is important if students will be following taught courses. It is worth investigating whether your university language department would be able to offer students language courses at a discounted price or whether the price could be subsidised by some kind of internal waiver or exchange of resources across faculties.

If students are keen to study abroad, do not speak the language of study but have identified a professor in a university that speaks their language who is willing to supervise thesis proposal writing or similar (see recommendation II 1.) then it could become an alternative to the more traditional study abroad opportunities.

C. Fill in the application forms *very accurately to provide the host Institution with all the information necessary for your acceptance.*

Workshops 'completing your application form' would be ideal and could be staffed by former student exchange volunteers with the final check being made by the exchange coordinator.

If time or budget does not allow this, then an example of a perfectly completed application form could be distributed to students who are interested in applying that they can use as a guide.

D. Fill in the learning agreement *very precisely and make sure you have it signed before departure. If necessary, follow up changes with the* **change form.**

Make sure students have this information before they leave and copies of the relevant change forms they may require. An email half way through the study period asking if everything is going well and reminding the students about the change form could remind students to submit it and potentially mitigate problems when students wish to declare changes upon their return.

E. Keep in contact with your home university.

Universities can easily make use of free social media for this purpose and encourage students to interact with each other and with their administrative support or exchange coordinator. Set up a group on Facebook or a discussion group on yahoo groups for students to sign up to before departure.

It will encourage networking between the students studying in different countries and enable the administrator to see various discussions and intervene where necessary (for example suggest that a change form should be submitted).

Case studies

A number of examples below show different university's steps towards easing the facilitation of recognition. They are by no means prescriptive lists merely a snapshot into how different institutions are handling similar issues.

La Sapienza's (Rome) approach to recognition

1. The recognition process is entirely managed by the academic coordinator and administrative staff.
Students submit both the learning agreement to be approved and the transcript of records to be recognised to the office in charge which will take care of recognition up to the registry office.

2. A database of all courses previously recognised at partner universities is kept by the administrative staff for the benefit of future mobility flows.

3. Each faculty has an academic coordinator and experienced administrative staff to support students.

4. Scholarships are awarded to ex-erasmus students to support Erasmus offices.

5. The university plans to become TOEFL and IELTS testing centres.

University of Bitola's pre-mobility and recognition steps

BEFORE MOBILITY

1. International relations officer announces the list of Universities eligible for mobility and their web pages. Good and complete information on the other university is a prerequisite for successful student mobility.

2. The student consults the ECTS study programme coordinator about the available courses to be taken and fills the application form and learning agreement.

3. The student and the ECTS institutional coordinator sign the learning agreement, (after previously signed internal agreements by the ECTS departmental coordinator, ECTS study programme coordinator and vice dean for teaching).

4. The application form, learning agreement and transcript of records are sent to the host institution by the institutional ECTS administrator, who coordinates all other activities related to mobility.

5. After receiving a positive answer from the host institution, (learning agreement signed) the student takes up their mobility window.

AFTER MOBILITY

1. The student submits the transcript of records to the ECTS institutional coordinator.

2. The ECTS institutional coordinator forwards the transcript of records to the ECTS departmental coordinator to compare the list of examinations passed with the courses of the learning agreement.

3. If the list is identical, all the credits will be transferred and registered in the transcript of records from the home institution.

4. If the list is not identical, only the credits of the courses set out in the learning agreement will be registered in the transcript of records. The other courses passed, will be registered as additional activities in the diploma supplement.

Recommendations

FOR THE GOVERNMENTS:
Make mobility an important element of evaluation of the higher education institutions

A. Indicate **Student mobility as a strategic target** considering that, as stated in the Leuven Communiqué of the Bologna Process, **in 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad**[11].

B. **Change or adapt the national rules to allow the transparent description of study periods abroad in national certificates.**

C. Provide **financial incentives to the Institutions** able to increase quality (credit recognition, overall student satisfaction, etc.) and quantity of Student exchanges.

D. Encourage Institutions to publish all **mobility data and other information required by the ECTS users guide**[12] **on their websites.**

E. **Simplify visa issuing procedures** for study, training and research periods for exchange students.

F. Provide exchange Students with **logistical support** (accommodation, etc).

FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS:
Make mobility part of the institutional strategy

I. ACTORS

A. Appoint an **Institutional Coordinator or Rector's Delegate for International Mobility and Academic Coordinators** for each Faculty or School or Degree Course allowing them to manage and to sign all relevant documents related to Student mobility and provide to the International Relations Offices sufficient staff experts in mobility issues.

B. If needed, the Institutional or Faculty Coordinator may refer to a **board of Academics** when dealing with procedures related to specific disciplines.

II. TOOLS & INSTRUMENTS

A. Create **flexible curricula**, possibly including **mobility windows of 30-60 credits** to be obtained abroad.

B. Issue the **diploma supplement**[13].

C. Publish online a **detailed catalogue in English** of degree courses containing all relevant academic and logistical information.

D. Provide a **website of the Institution in English.**

E. Increase the offer of **degree courses in English, of courses of English language** and organise **internationally recognized tests of the English language** such as TOEFL[14] or IELTS[15].

F. Calculate **statistical distribution** of the grades for each degree course to allow an accurate conversion of grades of exchange Students according to the procedure described in the new ECTS guide[1].Refer national (or institutional) grading scale to the ECTS grading scale

G. Publish online **all procedures** related to Student mobility in the national language and in English.

H. Keep record of the credits (courses, internships, etc.) taken abroad and recognized in the past for each degree course and provide information in advance to perspective outgoing Students.

I Allocate a sufficient number of credits to the preparation and writing of the **thesis**. Allow and encourage the Students to prepare it abroad.
In this regard, it can be useful to ask in advance to the partner Institution a list of potential thesis Supervisors and subjects.

J. Organize **mobility or welcome days** to encourage interaction of incoming Students with potential outgoing Students.

K. Provide outgoing Students with **additional funding or loans** ensuring that they will not loose, when abroad, the ones they are already receiving at home.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCEDURES

A. Select very carefully the partner Institutions checking in advance the **equivalence or the compatibility of the study programmes**. In addition, agreements with Institutions providing complementary programmes can also be useful to provide the Students with further interesting opportunities.

B. Monitor the agreements to assure quality control.

C. To introduce/develop the **learning outcomes** approach and define them in order to contribute to the mobility of students by facilitating the recognition of their qualifications, to improve the transparency of qualifications, to simplify credit transfer and to provide a common format that helps promote lifelong learning and can assist in creating multiple routes through and between different educations systems.

D. Increase the **mutual trust and**

11. http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/
    leuven_louvain-la-neuve_communiqu%C3%A9_april_2009.pdf
12. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf

13. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc1239_en.htm
14. http://www.ets.org/toefl/
15. http://www.ielts.org/default.aspx

confidence by encouraging **exchanges of International Relations Officers, Academic Coordinators, and other Academics for periods of collaboration, training, teaching and research.**

E. **Select very accurately outgoing Students** making sure that the mobility grants are awarded to the most motivated and dedicated Students.

F. **Use the official European forms recommended by the ECTS users guide**[2].

G. **Make sure the learning agreement is signed by a person (Academic Coordinator, etc) with sufficient authority to guarantee the full recognition of the academic activities performed abroad even in case of change of the staff of the Institution.**

H. Keep in touch with outgoing Students while they are abroad providing counselling and eventually helping them in changing the learning agreement using the **change form**.

I. Make sure the hosting Institution send the **transcript of records** in time. This document should provide the statistical distribution of grades of the degree course involved (point B2-f).

J. Provide **full recognition** of the academic activities performed abroad certified by the transcript of records and previously included in the learning agreement.

K. **The recognition should be awarded by the Academic Coordinator**, upon approval, if appropriate, by specific Faculty or degree course boards (point B1-b and B3-2) but **not by the individual Professors to avoid possible re-evaluation of the Student.**

L. A flexible approach is recommended and **fair recognition rather than perfect equivalence is to be applied.**

IV. FOR THE STUDENTS:
Make your mobility a very responsible choice

A. **Inform** yourself well in advance before your mobility period

B. Make sure you have a good knowledge of the **English language** and/or of the **language of the host country**.

C. Fill in the application forms very accurately to provide the host Institution with all the information necessary for your acceptance.

D. Fill in the **learning agreement** very precisely **and make sure you have it signed before departure**. If necessary, follow up changes with the **change form.**

E. **Keep in contact with your home university.**

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Make your mobility a very responsible choice

Luc François - *Ghent University* ● Valère Meus - *Ghent University* ● Delfien Cloet - *Ghent University* ● Pieter Blondeel - *Ghent University* ● Luciano Saso - *University of Rome* ● Julijana Kristl - *University of Ljubljana* ● Fuada Stankovic - *University of Novi Sad* ● Neda Bokan - *University of Belgrade* ● Ulrike Krawagna - *University of Graz* ● Sylvia Schweiger - *University of Graz* ● Elizabeth Heath - *SPARK* ● Stefan Schaefers - *King Baudouin Foundation*