

ECTS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

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This article deals with the role of ECTS in facilitating lifelong learning, open learning opportunities and the recognition of prior learning and experience.

Lifelong learning – open learning opportunities. The higher education learning landscape is changing with the rapid development of more diversified and flexible learning opportunities – including blended learning, new forms of open online learning, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Open Educational Resources (OER), work-based learning, self-directed learning, individual learning pathways, continuing professional development (see chapter 3). A growing number of learners follow ‘stand-alone’ educational units or courses, without pursuing a specific qualification. Higher education institutions are faced with the need to satisfy a diversified student group and provide opportunities for individual learning pathways and different modes of learning. Consequently, many are diversifying and offering educational components with innovative modes of learning and teaching for all, through new technologies and Open Educational Resources. The strength of ECTS is that it can be used in all these lifelong learning contexts, applying the same principles for credit allocation, award, accumulation and transfer. In the same way as credits are allocated to component parts of programmes, credits allocated for open learning and other modes of lifelong learning are based on the workload typically needed to achieve the defined learning outcomes. Providers of all ‘formally’ (i.e. in the same way and meeting the same standards as conventional higher education institutions) quality assured higher education such as open learning are encouraged to use ECTS with the same transparent mechanisms as described in this Guide. This will greatly facilitate transition between different modes of learning, recognition and transfer,

while increasing learner and stakeholder confidence in the outcomes of open learning. 44 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is increasingly recognised to be essential for those working in regulated professions. This is particularly true in the healthcare professions. CPD has a cross-border dimension which is increasingly significant. Whether voluntary or mandatory, it is perceived by professionals and providers alike as a mode of lifelong learning. It embraces formal, non-formal and informal learning. While elements of CPD may be converted into second cycle (Master) qualifications or into professional doctorates (depending on the national jurisdiction), CPD as a purely professional practice has a specific character: it may be self-managed and evaluated by peer-reviewed self-evaluation. Considerations of employability, continued right to practice, safeguarding standards of professional practice, protecting the public and, in the healthcare professions, patient safety nevertheless mean that its attainment must be measurable, verifiable and certified by a recognised/authorised authority. How this is to be achieved remains a matter of debate within the CPD community. Both the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and ECTS are perceived to be relevant, since CPD may be located at any of the eight EQF levels. However, the interface between the two systems is not yet sufficiently permeable and the different professions have differing cultures and national sub-cultures. Discussion on relations between the European credit systems is on-going and it is hoped, will lead to greater clarity on the use of credits for CPD. Meanwhile CPD providers at levels five to eight of the EQF are encouraged to consider the appropriateness of ECTS credits for purposes of transparency, recognition, accumulation and transfer, using the methodology outlined in this Guide. Nota Bene 45 Credits awarded for all forms of higher education including continuing and professional education may be recognised and accumulated towards a qualification or not, depending on the desire of the student and/or the requirements for the award of the qualification. Some independent learners may only be interested in following an educational component without wishing to obtain a qualification, but the allocation and recording of credits may allow them to use these in the future if they wish. Documenting all learning achievements and awarding an

appropriate number of ECTS credits at the level of the learning makes it possible for this learning to be recognised in a transparent, authenticated way so that the credits may contribute to a future qualification. Validation and recognition instruments in formal education should adapt to the developing of more diversified, flexible education environment, acknowledging new forms of open learning made possible by technology. The correct use of ECTS will greatly improve and facilitate this process. Higher education institutions should be competent to award credits for learning outcomes acquired outside the formal learning context through work experience, voluntary work, student participation, independent study, provided that these learning outcomes satisfy the requirements of their qualifications or components. The recognition of the learning outcomes gained through non-formal and informal learning should be automatically followed by the award of the same number of ECTS credits attached to the corresponding part of the formal programme. As with formal education, the award of credits is preceded by an assessment to verify the achievement of learning outcomes. The assessment methods and criteria should be constructed to measure the achievement of the required learning outcomes at the appropriate level, without reference to specific learning activities or workload. For example, 'participation in classroom discussion' of the subject matter would no longer be considered in assessment, whereas the corresponding learning outcome of 'constructing arguments while interacting with a group' would become relevant. Appropriate staff should be appointed in each department or subject area, who should have the formal authority and training to award credits for learning outcomes acquired outside the formal learning context on the basis of transparent criteria established and published by the Institution. It should be understood that they will be expected to report on, and document, their decisions through regular reports to an appropriate committee (e.g. at departmental, faculty or institutional level). There is a wide range of assessment methods for recognising prior learning and experience. One of the assessment tools is a portfolio method. Portfolios include documents that learners have collected in order to reveal individual skills acquired in various ways. A portfolio takes into account a collection of materials that verify skills and knowledge

acquired through previous experience in non-formal and informal learning. A portfolio includes references from employers and supervisors; it may include a performance appraisal, CV and other documents. By using a portfolio the assessor analyses a range of information that learners have provided. Learners may require help and advice when preparing their portfolios. Nota Bene Institutions should develop recognition policies for non-formal or informal learning. These policies should include elements such as advice, feedback to learners on the results of the assessment and the possibility for learners to appeal. Institutions should also create facilities for advice, counselling and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. These may take different forms depending on national and institutional practices (e.g. they may exist within single higher education institutions or as joint centres for several institutions). Institutions' policies and practices should be published prominently on their websites. Recognising non-formal and informal learning helps make HEIs more socially inclusive. Widening access opportunities for learners from professional life and a range of non-traditional learning environments helps make lifelong learning a reality. Institutions should be particularly open to the recognition of vocational education and training.

Література.

1. <http://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/lifelong-learning-open-learning>