The Modernisation of Higher Education

The ECTS User's Guide and the importance of Learning Outcomes

Professor Anthony Vickers
September 2019
Baku, Azerbaijan

University of Essex

The ECTS User's Guide and the importance of Learning Outcomes

The ECTS User's Guide

ECTS

ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer, based on the principle of transparency of the learning, teaching and assessment processes. Its objective is to facilitate the planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes and student mobility by recognising learning achievements and qualifications and periods of learning.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are statements of what the individual knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. The achievement of learning outcomes has to be assessed through procedures based on clear and transparent criteria. Learning outcomes are attributed to individual educational components and to programmes at a whole. They are also used in European and national qualifications frameworks to describe the level of the individual qualification.

ECTS - History

- ECTS was first introduced in the academic year 1989/90
- The aim was to give fair recognition for studies undertaken by mobile students.
- ECTS is defines by the Users Guide which was last updated in 2015.
- ECTS is the most commonly used credit system in European higher Education Area.
- The ECTS system originally had a grading scale which was designed to allow partners to convert grades between two local systems. This is not now part of the Users Guide.

ECTS – Key Features (taken from the guide)

"ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent, which normally comprises a number of educational components to which credits (on the basis of the learning outcomes and workload) are allocated. ECTS credits are generally expressed in whole numbers."

"Learning outcomes are statements of what the individual knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process."

"Workload is an estimation of the time the individual typically needs to complete all learning activities such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, work placements1 and individual study required to achieve the defined learning outcomes in formal learning environments."

"Allocation of credits in ECTS is the process of assigning a number of credits to qualifications, degree programmes or single educational components. Credits are allocated to entire qualifications or programmes according to national legislation or practice, where appropriate, and with reference to national and/or European qualifications frameworks."

"ECTS documentation: The use of ECTS credits is facilitated and quality enhanced by the supporting documents (Course Catalogue, Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records, and Work Placement Certificate). ECTS also contributes to transparency in other documents such as the Diploma Supplement."

ECTS - Credits

*"Credits are allocated to entire qualifications
or study programmes as well as
to their educational components (such
as modules, course components, dissertation
work, work placements and
laboratory work)."*

**BEng Electronics
3 years 180 ECTS**

Year 1 60 ECTS	→	8 modules of 7.5 ECTS
Year 2 60 ECTS	→	8 modules of 7.5 ECTS
Year 3 60 ECTS	→	6 modules of 7.5 ECTS, 1 module of 15 ECTS
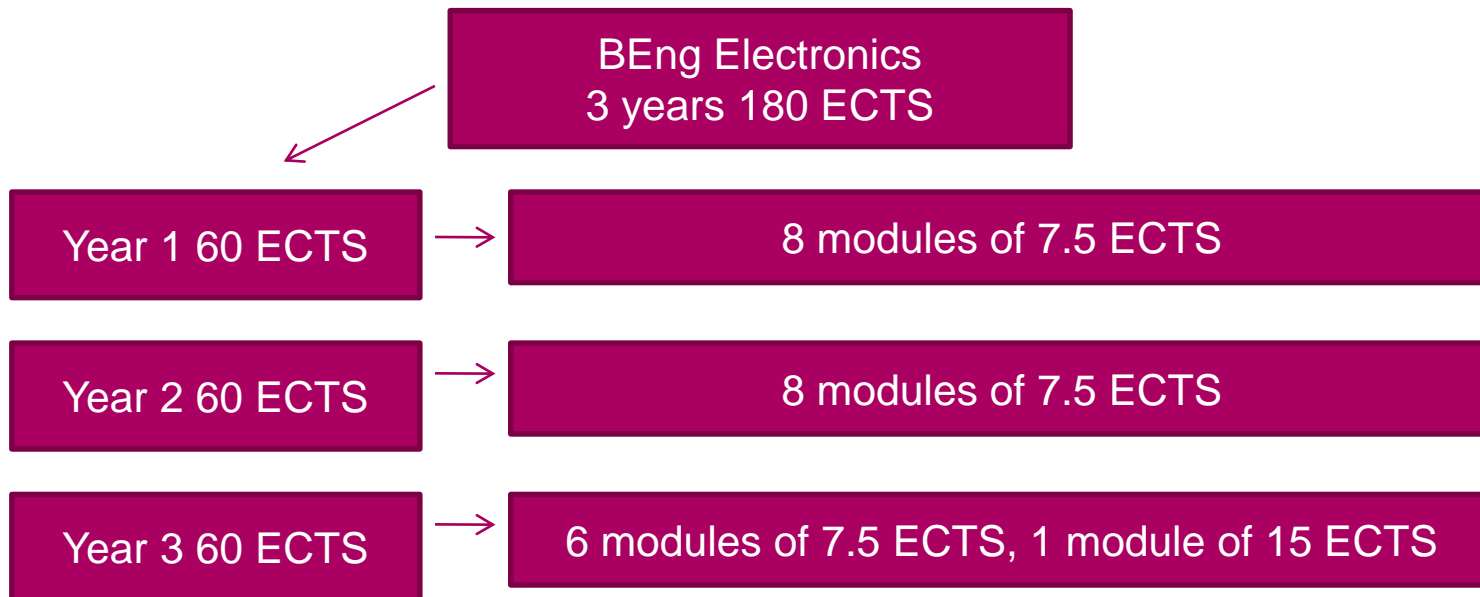
ECTS – Course Catalogue

"Credit transfer and accumulation are facilitated by the use of the ECTS key documents (Course Catalogue, Student Application Form, Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records) as well as the Diploma Supplement."

http://www.rgu.ac.uk/future-students/study-abroad/incoming-students/ects-course-catalogue/ects-course-catalogue/

http://www.uia.no/en/student/ects-course-catalogue

refer to page 54 of the Users Guide for course Catalogue content

ECTS – Mobility & Recognition

- Quality assured mobility requires the following;

  - A good partnership (what are good partnerships?)
  - Learning agreements agreed and signed before the period of mobility
  - A transcript of records provided by the Host partner
  - Recognition preferably in the form of a transcript/DS from the Home Institution.

Programme Design and Transparency

Part 2: Information on programmes

General description:

• qualification awarded

• level of qualification

• specific admission requirements

• specific arrangements for recognition of prior learning (formal, non-formal and informal)

• qualification requirements and regulations

• profile of the programme

• key learning outcomes

• occupational profiles of graduates with examples

• access to further studies

• course structure diagram with credits (60 per full-time academic year)

• examination regulations, assessment and grading

• graduation requirements

• mode of study (full-time, par t-time, elearning...),

• programme director or equivalent.

refer to page 54 of the Users Guide for course Catalogue content

Learning Outcomes

- Learning outcomes are an essential part of ECTS.
- We will first look at <u>learning outcomes used at programme level</u> by ECTS label holders and assess them.
- <u>At module level</u> Learning Outcomes need to be written in an holistic way taking into account the Learning that will be undertaken by the student and the Assessment they will way to demonstrate they have acquired the learning outcome (LOLA).
- We will deal with LOLA in more detail in the session tomorrow when we develop individual modules.

University of Essex

UK - Programme Specifications

• In the UK Programme specifications are a means of providing transparent information about programmes of study in higher education, in a consistent, accessible format.

• Each programme specification identifies the learning outcomes for an award, of which a student should demonstrate positive achievement, and the relationship of that programme to the Framework of Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

University of Essex – Programme specifications

http://www.essex.ac.uk/programmespecs/

Transparency through the Diploma Supplement

- The Diploma Supplement is the key transparency document for qualifications.

- [Diploma Supplement model](#)

- In the UK the Diploma Supplement is known as the Higher Education Achievement Record ([HEAR](#))

Programme Design and Transparency

Part 2: Information on programmes

General description:

• qualification awarded

• level of qualification

• specific admission requirements

• specific arrangements for recognition of prior learning (formal, non-formal and informal)

• qualification requirements and regulations

• profile of the programme

• key learning outcomes

• occupational profiles of graduates with examples

• access to further studies

• course structure diagram with credits (60 per full-time academic year)

• examination regulations, assessment and grading

• graduation requirements

• mode of study (full-time, par t-time, elearning...),

• programme director or equivalent.

refer to page 54 of the Users Guide for course Catalogue content

Key Learning Outcomes at Programme Level

UK Example

http://www.essex.ac.uk/programmespecs/progspec.asp?prog=BENGH610++11

Learning Outcomes at Module Level (LOLA)

• Learning outcomes are an essential part of ECTS.
• At module level Learning Outcomes need to be written in an holistic way taking into account the Learning that will be undertaken by the student and the Assessment they will way to demonstrate they have acquired the learning outcome (LOLA).

ECTS Users Guide

Question: How many occurrences of the phrase "learning outcomes" appear in the current Users' Guide?

Answer: 163

The ECTS Users' Guide – an extract

ECTS key features

ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer, based on the principle of transparency of the learning, teaching and assessment processes. Its objective is to facilitate the planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes and student mobility by recognising learning achievements and qualifications and periods of learning.

ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent, which normally comprises a number of educational components to which credits (on the basis of the learning outcomes and workload) are allocated. ECTS credits are generally expressed in whole numbers.

Learning outcomes are statements of what the individual knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. The achievement of learning outcomes has to be assessed through procedures based on clear and transparent criteria. Learning outcomes are attributed to individual educational components and to programmes at a whole. They are also used in European and national qualifications frameworks to describe the level of the individual qualification.

Workload is an estimation of the time the individual typically needs to complete all learning activities such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, work placements[1] and individual study required to achieve the defined learning outcomes in formal learning environments. The correspondence of the full-time workload of an academic year to 60 credits is often formalised by national legal provisions. In most cases, workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, which means that one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work. It should be recognised that this represents the typical workload and that for individual students the actual time to achieve the learning outcomes will vary.

What are Learning Outcomes?

- "Learning outcomes are statements of what the individual knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process."
- They must be assessed.
- They clearly involve students in undertaking work and therefore have a workload associated with them.
- They need to contain an appropriate verb (Blooms Taxonomy).
- They need to be obtainable and measureable.
- Learning Outcomes need to be written in a holistic context taking into account the Learning and Assessment. (LOLA)
- Feedback should be given in relation to Learning Outcomes.

An example Process from the UK

• Generate the programme specification taking into account the relevant Benchmark Statements. The programme specification will list the programme learning outcomes. (http://www.essex.ac.uk/programmespecs/progspec.asp?prog=BENGH610++10)

• Create a structure of modules across the study programme taking into account the level. In each year set the appropriate workload to meet the learning outcomes. In this example all modules are either 7.5 or 15 ECTS credits.

• Write the module learning outcomes relating them to the programme learning outcomes and taking into account the learning, teaching and assessment methods or strategies. The workload within a module should be distributed amongst the activities in an appropriate way to enable the students to meet the learning outcomes.

• https://www.essex.ac.uk/undergraduate/our-courses

• http://www.modules.napier.ac.uk/

• Take care that you assess the learning outcomes you wrote and that any other skills required have already been demonstrated.

What LO's are not!

• A set of statements that are for administration purposes only.

• Written with no thought given to the learning or assessment.

• Written without careful choice of the verb. (for example "describe, identify, analyse, explain" and not "know, understand, learn, appreciate".)

Final Remarks

The ECTS Users Guide is essential Reading

Designing degree courses using a learning outcome approach can be adopted but staff must be appropriately trained.

Questions & Discussion