

ECTS Grading Table

Introduction

The ECTS Grading Table was introduced in the ECTS users' guide in 2009 as a replacement for the previous ECTS grading scales. It allows universities to ensure fair transfer and recognition of grades of mobile students.

Background

It is well-known that European educational systems have developed different approaches to grading which are deeply rooted in their pedagogical and cultural traditions. It is to be pointed out, moreover, that not only do they have different grading scales, but they also use them differently in the various institutions and subject areas. While it is essential to acknowledge these differences, it is also important to make them transparent within the European Higher Education Area, so that grades attributed in all countries, institutions or subject areas can be properly understood and, when necessary, compared by people with different cultural backgrounds. Mobile students have a right to a fair treatment of their grades when credits are transferred from one institution/country to another, as grants or other benefits may depend on their level of performance. Transparency of performance levels is equally important for graduates applying for a job in their own or in another country.

To tackle this problem, ECTS guidelines now suggest that, in addition to using the grades of their national grading scales, European institutions use *grading tables* as a translation device into other grading systems. Such grading tables are based on the statistical distribution of positive grades (pass and above) in each programme. They show how the national scale is actually being used in that context and allow for comparison with the statistical distribution of grades in a parallel reference group of another institution.

The statistical distribution is based on the passing grades given for each course unit (= the level where ECTS credits are assigned as shown in the Transcript of Records) aggregated over the previous two or three years for a specific reference group of students, usually all students of a group of homogeneous programmes within a study field. Each reference group reflects its own grading culture.

The data, when presented as tables, show how national grading scales are actually being used in individual institutions. For example, teachers in French institutions are more consistently using the lower half of their scale, while their Italian counterparts are making more use of grades in the upper half of the scale. This is reflected in the statistical distribution shown in the grading table (see the example below). As for the choice between degree or study field, the data from many institutions shows that the differences in grading between the teachers may generally be more consistent within the study field. Although these patterns had already been perceived by practitioners on an impressionistic basis, it is interesting to find that they are supported by statistical evidence. The grade distribution table developed for a specific reference group allows for a single grade obtained for a course unit abroad (and hence indicated in the Transcript of Records) to be positioned in the context of the home university's grading table, thus making it

possible to understand the level of the student's performance abroad and compare it with that of students with a similar position in the home context. This in its turn leads to a more objective conversion of grades.

In order to make such conversions possible, institutions should provide the statistical distribution of their own grades completed for each ISCED study field. Universities can limit themselves to determining the actual percentage of students in the reference group that receive each 'local' grade. This **ECTS grading table** can be produced for national grading scales of any size, from data concerning a given reference group which are easily available in institutional records. When included in the Transcripts of Records and Diploma Supplements of the students, the table will facilitate the interpretation of each grade awarded to them and will not require any further calculation.

Example

Italy (Example of passing grades between 18 and 30 lode)

18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	30 lode
6.9%*	1.9%	5.7%	2.3%	6.0%	2.7%	11.3%	8.2%	9.0%	11.8%	12.3%	0.5%	15.7%	5.7%
100*	93,1	91,2	85,5	83,2	77,2	74,5	63,2	55	46	34,2	21,9	21,4	5,7

France (Example of passing grades between 10 and 20)

10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
34.79%	18.59%	18.45%	12.05%	9.46%	3.65%	2.30%	0.43%	0.22%	0.06%	0%
100*	65,21	46,62	28,17	16,12	6,66	3,01	0,71	0,28	0,06	0

*Distribution of the grade within the reference group

*Accumulated percentage of students obtaining the grade or lower in red

From this example we see that, in this case, 30 lode in Italy (obtained by 5.7% of the students) can be converted to 15 in France (obtained by 6.66%, which is closest to 5.7%). A grade below 25 becomes 10 in France. To sum up, ECTS grading table allows for simple, transparent interpretation and conversion of grades from one system or context to another, and therefore does justice to the level of academic performance of all learners. Used correctly, it bridges different grading systems as well as different cultures in the European Higher Education Area and beyond.

To use the **ECTS grading table** the following steps should be taken:

1. Identify the reference group for which the grade distribution will be calculated (normally all students of an ECTS study field per study cycle (e.g. Ba/Ma) but in some cases a wider grouping of students such as the institution itself might be chosen).
2. Collect all passing grades awarded over a period of (at least) two academic years for the reference group identified. Fail grades/marks are therefore not included. Only the final official grades/marks at the end of the academic years under consideration (i.e. after possible resits) are taken into account and the total number of exam results per grade

should be calculated as well.

3. Calculate the grade distribution in terms of accumulated percentages for the reference group.
4. For every course unit, include the grading percentage of the student as compared to the reference group in every Transcript of Records/ Diploma Supplement.
5. Compare the percentage table of the other institution's reference group with your own. The corresponding position of each student within the 2 reference groups is compared. On the basis of this comparison, individual grades can be converted.

The first four steps in the procedure concern all programmes and are purely administrative tasks. The academic responsible for credit transfer may get involved in step 5.