

CURRICULUM STRUCTURE, CONTENT, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT IN EUROPEAN UNDERGRADUATE DENTAL EDUCATION

Appendix 1 - European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)

ECTS is a standard for comparing the study attainment and performance of students of higher education across the European Union and other collaborating European countries. For successfully completed studies, ECTS credits are awarded. One academic year corresponds to 60 ECTS-credits that are equivalent to 1500–1800 hours of study in all countries irrespective of standard or qualification type. The system also facilitates the recognition of periods of study abroad and thus enhances student mobility in Europe.

The ECTS guidelines relating to; information (on courses available), agreement (between the home and host institutions) and the use of credits (to indicate student workload) are intended to reinforce the mutual trust between institutions whose students undertake study in other countries.

ECTS was initially established for credit transfer, however there is also a grading system defined in the ECTS framework. Many different grading systems co-exist in Europe and the interpretation of grades varies considerably from one country to another. The ECTS grading scale has been developed in order to provide a common currency and facilitate the transfer of students and their grades between higher education institutions. National and local grading systems can be used at the same time or be interchangeable.

For all students both local and foreign, the use of ECTS makes study programmes easier to read and to compare and facilitates mobility and academic recognition. The scheme could be of help for schools organising and revising their study programmes. It has the capacity to make Dental Education in Europe more attractive for students from other countries.

Some key features of ECTS as applicable to dental education (1)

- ECTS is based on the convention that 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student during one academic year. The student workload of a full-time study programme in Europe amounts in most cases to 36/40 weeks per year and in those cases one credit stands for 24 to 28 working hours. Workload refers to the notional time an average learner might expect to complete the required learning outcomes.
- Credit is also a way of quantifying the outcomes of learning. Learning outcomes are sets of competences, expressing what the student will know, understand or be able to do after completion of a process of learning, short or long. Credits in ECTS can only be obtained after completion of the work required and appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes achieved.
- The allocation of ECTS credits is based on the official length of a programme cycle. The total workload necessary to obtain a dental degree following the proposed model and lasting five years is expressed as 300 credits.

- Student workload in ECTS includes the time spent in attending lectures, seminars, independent study, practical and clinical work, preparation for and taking of examinations, etc.
- Credits are allocated to all educational components of a study programme (such as modules, courses, placements, group discussions, seminars, clinical sessions, dissertation work, etc.) and reflect the quantity of work each component requires in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of study in the programme considered.

If the performance of the student is documented by a local/national grade it is good practice to add an ECTS grade, in particular in case of credit transfer. Each institution makes their own decision on how to apply the ECTS grading system to their own system.

The key documents of ECTS:

- Information package/course catalogue: of the institution. This should be published in two languages (or in English only for programmes taught in English) on the web and/or in hard copy in one or more booklets. The Information package must contain items from a checklist, including information for host students from abroad.
- Learning agreement: contains the list of courses to be taken and agreed upon by the student and the responsible academic body of the institution concerned. In case of credit transfer, the Learning Agreement has to be agreed upon by the student and the two institutions concerned before the student's departure and to be updated immediately when changes occur.
- Transcript of records: documents the performance of a student by showing the list of courses taken, the credits gained as well as the local grades and possibly ECTS grades awarded. In case of credit transfer, the Transcript of Records have to be issued by the home institution for outgoing students before departure and by the host institution for incoming students at the end of their period of study.

Requirements

Requirement – ECTS
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. ECTS should be incorporated throughout the programme of study.2. ECTS should be based on learning outcomes rather than on a certain amount of clinical or other type of work.3. Calculation of ECTS should be organised in modules or blocks rather than in disciplines or small subjects to enhance student's mobility and transferability;4. Any ECTS system should not be so prescriptive as to limit the flexibility to tailor the undergraduate programme to suit an individual country's needs.5. If a grading system is to be used it must be based on clearly defined criteria.6. Schools are recommended to accept the curricula for the exchange period of the guest institution, when sending students for an exchange.

Recommendations

Recommendations – ECTS
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Schools are recommended to reach consensus on the amount of workload that is related to 1 ECTS2. Schools are recommended to prepare the key documents of ECTS3. Schools should base their action on ECTS user's guide which can be found in numerous EU languages on: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm

References

1. *European Commission.(2003) European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) Key Features Available at:*
<http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/ECTS%20Key%20Features.1068807879166.pdf>
(accessed: 17 June 2010).