***Consultation with Key European Stakeholders on the Revision of the ECTS User’s Guide***

***Brussels, 31 January 2014***

1. ***Welcome, introduction and purpose of the meeting***

The Chair, Mr. Adam Tyson (European Commission) welcomed the participants (Annex 1) of the meeting and encouraged the members to be active in the participation during discussions. He outlined the objectives of ECTS as a tool that helps design, describe and deliver higher education programmes. He stressed that the purpose of the Guide is to serve the needs of the whole range of different users that are working directly or indirectly in that system.

At first stage ECTS was a tool for traditional mobility. Afterwards it also became a tool for the cumulative credit and thus, there occurred a need to shift it more for the LOs approaches which are needed in the labor market, as well as for common understanding and flexibility of the programs. ECTS is delivered in different ways not only between countries, but also within the different institutions.

The Chair reminded that in the Bologna Ministerial Meeting in 2012 in Bucharest (Romania) Ministers asked the BFUG to set up an ad-hoc working group (WG) that will revise the ECTS Users’ Guide. The WG, which iscomposed of representatives of 14 countries and 4 different stakeholder organisations, started its work in February 2013. After a series of meetings and hard work by the members the draft could be presented to stakeholders. The current event offered the possibility for key European stakeholders to provide their comments to the draft.

The reviewed guide will be presented to the Bologna Ministers in 2015. In spring 2014 it will be discussed in the Structural Reforms WG, and after that it will be presented to the BFUG.

Mr. Adam Tyson asked Sandra Kraze (EURASHE) and Nevena Vuskanovic (ESU) to present the activity of the WG during the last year.

1. ***Activity of the Working Group***

Sandra Kraze (EURASHE) explained how the WG carried out its work during 2013. The diversity of the group enabled the members to share their experience, with the possibility to reflect on geographical differences.

Nevena Vuskanovic (ESU) presented the drafting process.

For more details please see ppt below:



1. ***After the presentation the participants were divided into 4 parallel groups to discuss ECTS for Accumulation : programme design and programme implementation***

***Question raised in the different groups:***

***The ECTS Users' Guide aims to take into account relevant trends in higher education (i.e. student-centered learning, learning outcomes, recognition of prior learning, web-based learning, meaningful involvement of external stakeholders in programme design etc.). To what extent has it been achieved by the current draft? How could it be improved?***

Lena Oftedal (Norway) summarized the discussion of the 1st group. Questions raised were among others:

• Right level of communication?

• Flexibility VS balance: description of ECTS: "about 30 ECTS"?

• The new draft is more flexible than the previous

• More details/examples are needed on how to write LOs?

* Lifelong learning, non-formal and informal learning should be emphasized more

• Placements are crucial for student mobility: how to include them?

Judit Hidasi (Hungary) presented the results of the 2nd group discussion. It was mentioned that the participants of the group expressed their satisfaction with the whole process and agreed that the guide is very useful. Moreover it was stressed that :

* There is a need for a constructive alignment between LO-LA-LA;
* There should be clear definition for LOs and level description;
* Role of external stakeholders should be indicated;
* Grading distribution tables should not be prescriptive;
* There is a need to be precise in online assessments;
* The issue of hours allocation should be solved;
* Diploma supplement I should be mentioned;
* At first LOs should be defined then the course description;

For more details see the ppt below:



The results of discussion of the 3rd group were presented by Sandra Kraze :

* There is a need to improve the wording of the Guide;
* Examples should be added;
* Clarification of the flexibility of the doctoral programmes is needed;
* Definition of LOs should not be controversial;
* More information should be added about course catalog: whether it is for new or existing students;
* Clarification is needed for the SCL;
* Clarification concerning the credits should be made: whether they can be decimals or whole numbers;
* References are needed in the glossary.

The result of the 4th group was presented by Raimonda Markeviciene (Lithuania), who highlighted the following:

* There are lots of “should” but not what “must” be done;
* Examples are missing;
* The target group needs to be more emphasised and the mobility and programme design need to be more stressed;
* There is a need of glossary and precise definitions, the Guide need to consistent;
* There is a need of clarifications for the joint degrees;
* More attention is needed on the LLL;
* There is a need to clarify how many ECTS should be given for 12 months;
* It should be defined how to formulate the LOs, levels and credits. Levels for the 1st student differ from the 4th year students. Levels should be taken into account;
* Programme level learning outcomes and course learning outcomes should be clarified;
* Training of staff will be required;
* The diploma supplement is not a course description;
* There is a need to change the order of teaching, learning, assessment into learning, teaching, assessment;
* References to ECVAT need to be clarified;
* Mobility section needs elaboration with the practices and methodologies;
* There should be the methodology provided how to include mobility window in a programme.

1. ***Discussion in Plenary***

Additional comments followed the reports from the four groups.

* Status and purpose of the guide should be better clarified – differing views on level of prescriptiveness
* Linguistic check is needed
* Open Educational Resources, ICT-based learning, MOOCS are mentioned, but their assessment should be better elaborated
* Deferring views whether doctoral studies need ECTS at all
* Need to help academic community to share good practices
* Guide focuses too much on the formal part of education, need to implement LLL in HE
* Start with qualifications frameworks
* Workload should be kept as element of ECTS
* Who is legitimised to award ECTS?
* Transfer of credits should mainly be based on learning outcomes, less on workload

1. ***Parallel sessions on “ECTS for Transfer”:***

Discussion was conducted in two groups on mobility and recognition in order to answer to what extent the ECTS Users’ Guide aims addressed all types of mobility (i.e. credit mobility, degree mobility, virtual mobility, etc.) and enhanced recognition.

***Parallel session on “ECTS Implementation”***

***Discussion in small groups on the question:***

***“The ECTS Users’ Guide aims to improve implementation of ECTS in Bologna countries. To what extent has this aim been achieved by the current draft? How could it be improved?”***

Participants were divided into 4 groups. In small groups they discussed their opinions and then the rapporteurs made their reports.

Maria Sticchi-Damiani (Italy) presented the results of the first group

* The Guide should be compatible with other instruments:
  + Other tools to help HEIs with LOs, etc.
* More examples need to be provided in annex (although there is a risk that users will use them as models).
* Source of inspiration for those HEIs that want to improve their credit system.
* The course catalogue should be developed in steps: first it has to be fully set up and regularly updated, then translated into English.
* HEIs should absorb these principles into their own framework:
  + 1st step: top-down: EQF requires LOs,
  + 2nd step: bottom-up: develop their own framework.
* LOs/workload: still necessary to use both as a guarantee to the student.
* LLL: not enough developed: need to integrate non-formal/informal in the various sections of the Guide.

Nevena Vuskanovic (ESU) presented the results of the second group:

* the emphasis should be on the implementation of LLL throughout the various chapters;
* SCL & LOs are not at the same level of implementation in the EHEA;
* There is a need to have proper definitions of LOs;
* It is unclear what the legal status of the document is;
* Definition of year should be made: whether it is academic or solar year?;
* Conversion tables need to be re-written;
* There is a need to specify link between grades and LOs and assessment;
* Target group and train teachers should be emphasised;
* Is the Guide focusing on the present or on the future?
* The Guide is not the EU document, it is something that 47 ministers have thought and agreed about;
* Guide needs to be more user-friendly for academics;
* The term "delivery" should be changed as it doesn't reflect the student-centered learning;
* There is a need to define traineeships/internships/work placements;
* There is a need to focus on level 6 and above;
* "intended LOs" rather than "expected LOs" should be used;
* There is a need to better define workload;
* There is a need to add visual elements;
* There is a need to have good references in Annexes.

For more details see the ppt below:



Regine Bolter (Austria) presented the results of the third group:

* Credit mobility well addressed in the Guide with responsible person and LA;
* Degree and virtual mobility are not included:
  + Example of MOOCs could be put in Annex;
* Need to emphasize in the paragraph on agreed mobility that the sending institution should "guarantee academic recognition";
* Guide should not be too strict about naming courses and on using the recognition document;
* Timing for the release of the ToR should be explicit;
* Guide should have provisions on how to deal with re-assessing students that failed courses abroad, as well as with courses taken abroad that do not count towards the sending HEI's degree (how many can be accepted, etc.);
* Refer to quality of mobility in the Bucharest Communiqué, in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, in the EAR-HEI manual;
* Grades:
  + we could start using them,
  + better description with visual elements is needed,
  + leave some flexibility of not using 1-to-1 matches in grades: not always necessary to transfer,
  + include fail grades in the distribution tables.
* Importance of work placements: more on LOs and how to define them for placements;
* 1 ECTS is not equal to 1 ECVET;
* Re-think audience of the Guide;
* Trust between HEIs is the basis for recognition.

Janerik Lundquist (Sweden) presented the results of the fourth group:

* In Sweden, HEIs don't translate grades in mobility, because they are never objective;
* The checklist of the course catalogue is too detailed:
  + Open to individual solutions?
  + Take out some things?
* Need to differentiate between mobile and LLL students; between credit and degree mobility;
* Golden rule for recognition: what about degree students? Or other educational components taken in a LLL prospective?;
* Pathfinder group needs to be taken up;
* Some quotes are not correct in the N.B. boxes;
* LA document is very important;
* Need to better explain and describe the LA for traineeships;
* In-country mobility should be mentioned for credit mobility;
* Procedures for credit mobility should be explained in a flowchart;
* Need to stress mutual trust between HEIs you cooperate with: make it explicit in the Guide.

1. ***Discussion in Plenary***

After the rapporteurs have made their reports some comments were made:

* Translation scheme of EU grading system,
* Distribution is still needed,
* Grading should be more transparent with the distribution table because it is not monitored,
* Need to have pilot projects like ECTS on grades,
* Grading cultures are reflected in the distribution:
  + Tables in each subject areas to compare,
  + Not so difficult in practice because it's already in the HEI data,
  + Explain it to people because it's logical.
* Criteria VS normative base of marking system,
* Need to be transparent to students,
* An idea would be to work on pass/fail for transfer only:
  + BUT grades are crucial for grants, so a fair translation is crucial,
  + Need to ensure that the other HEI is LO=based.
* Grades should also transfer because of scholarships, traineeship opportunities, etc. but maybe the Guide needs to explain when it's applicable to be used so that it's not misunderstood.
* How can it be improved?

**After the comment made Adam Tyson (EC) mentioned the pointes below:**

* Reinforce the point on trust: aim of Bologna to create a framework on which trust can work;
* Don't try to solve all the problems in HE:
  + other tools are there,
  + follow what's happening in other Bologna WGs and mention how link those with the Guide (e.g. ESG, 3rd cycle, etc.).
* Placements/traineeships/internships: concern on how to apply ECTS in those situations. How?
  + Need clarification on terminology (are they all the same?),
  + If it is an educational component, it already has LOs and ECTS because of programme design BUT how to document it for LLL purposes?
  + Is WBL different? Yes, it refers to learning happening entirely in work situations (job-related),
  + Need to reinforce the LA on LOs, assessment, etc. of placements; it is important for the employers and need to be included in the Diploma Supplement BUT what if it is not part of a degree?
  + What about professional qualifications that have placements?
  + How to consistently assess if LOs have been fulfilled in the placements? E.g. via feedback from employers, report from students, mentor visiting the workplace, etc.
* How to deal with virtual mobility?
  + Virtual mobility is not very implemented yet,
  + The Guide needs to prepare the ground for the future, especially concerning grades.
* Is degree mobility included in the scope of the Guide?
  + It is the competence of national authorities, not of HEIs,
  + Countries need to define what is "substantial difference" (cf. LRC) for them,
  + The Guide should only refer to the cycle, not to how many ECTS the BA or MA has,
  + Do not go in detail on degree mobility.
* How to deal with failed courses?
  + Re-assess those ones only; sometimes the student can even re-sit the exam at the receiving institution,
  + Provisions for this should be dealt with bilaterally between HEIs.
* Is the checklist too detailed?
  + 58 specific points for the course catalogue, although it's good to provide practical information,
  + There should be even more information, as it ensure student protection,
  + JPs: mobility can change a lot in a consortium, you can’t have too detailed information.
* Course catalogue:
  + For prospective students: they need a summary upfront,
  + For current students: provide it during the programme,
  + The online course catalogue is easier to update because it's an IT system BUT there is a risk of duplication of information between the summary and the detailed information,
  + HEIs should be asked to indicate facilities for disabled students and for students with special needs.
* LA should be drawn also for JPs BUT it is a basis of design of the programme to have clarity on mobility trajectory.
* Is the DS still a key document of ECTS?
  + It will be linked as an online document,
  + Need to integrate the LOs from the mobility period in the DS.
* P. 16: selection of partner institution: add "that they are quality assured by their national systems".
* Who should give ECTS for LLL purposes?
  + Need to have a clear statement in the Guide: only HEIs that are fully accredited,
  + Not the same in every country: this should be defined at national level but institutions that deliver HE degrees could also allow ECTS even if they are not HEIs,
  + National promotion of the Guide: lack of international approach implies national mistakes.
* How helpful is it to say that 1 ECTS does not equal 1 ECVET?
  + Different ECVET systems in each sector,
  + Some ECVET institutions are HE and they claim they use ECTS but nobody knows how,
  + Important that there are pathways between VET and HE and other ways of learning (non-formal/informal),
  + Need to figure out how to transfer ECVET into ECTS,
  + Add this sentence to the Guide (Adam's suggestion): "HEIs need to be open to incorporate and recognise learning that was acquired in other for a, and which could be expressed in ECVET.

1. **Summary and follow up (Chair)**

* Legal status of the document:
  + Guidance tool with good practice.
* Integrate LLL in a main-stream way:
  + How to deal with online learning,
  + Integrate LLL in the various chapters rather than as a separate chapter.
* Workload:
  + Credits are allocated on the basis of LOs on which workload given an indication of work required by the students.
* Learning Agreement should be more structured around actions before/during/after the mobility.
* Add more examples:
  + Danger that they can be used as models,
  + Faculty members who are new to ECTS will find them particularly useful.
* Grading tables:
  + How to integrate them.
* The WG will take on board the issues mentioned during the consultation. Participants were asked to send their detailed comments to the European Commission. In March the European Commission will report to the Structural Reforms WG on progress and the draft will be submitted to its meeting in May.