

## **APPENDIX 3:**

### **Feasibility Study Information Package and Questionnaire**

#### **EXTENSION OF ECTS - FEASIBILITY STUDY**

This information package is designed to help the process of gaining feedback for the project. It contains:

1. Information on the context of the initiative
2. The main issues for consultation
3. Feature and principles of a European credit system
4. ECTS – a brief introduction
5. Questionnaire

## **EXTENSION OF ECTS - FEASIBILITY STUDY**

### **Context**

The European Commission (DGXXii) has established a steering group to undertake a light-touch feasibility study into the possible development of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). As part of the project, members of the steering group are consulting appropriate individuals within their countries. This consultation is taking place in order to gain feedback and opinions concerning the potential for developing ECTS as a European credit system to facilitate education, vocational training, professional development and, therefore to promote lifelong learning.

The broad aim of the initiative is to investigate the possibilities of widening and deepening ECTS. In the last ten years many European member states have introduced their own different national credit-based education innovations. Most European States have also introduced reforms to their education and training systems designed to adjust them to the realities of the global market. In addition, ECTS is being introduced in well over one thousand European higher education institutions.

National governments, the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council of Ministers are increasingly concerned with promoting lifelong learning and improving the education and training of citizens. They seek to reduce the national and international barriers that prevent mobility and restrict the full recognition of educational and vocational awards. Legal regulation and fostering transparency, mutual trust and confidence helps to achieve this.

Against this background of change the time is now appropriate to investigate the potential of the ECTS mobility scheme to form the basis of a genuine European credit framework designed to aid local, regional, national and international recognition.

### **Main Issues for Consultation**

Discuss the opportunities for, and barriers to developing an integrative common European credit framework, derived from ECTS, designed to encompass education, training, professional development and, therefore, to promote lifelong learning.

1. Are there benefits in developing the European credit framework to facilitate:
  - accumulation in higher education programmes;
  - post-school adult and vocational education;
  - different modes of education (part-time, full-time, open and distance etc.);
  - professional education and training?
2. What are the main national, regional and local issues (political, legal, social, technological economic etc.) to consider in further developing a European credit framework?
3. How would you like European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to be developed?

### **Features and Principles of a European Credit System?**

A wide diversity of higher education systems exists within Europe. Similarly, there exists a wide range of credit systems designed to achieve a variety of different national objectives. This creates a problem for any consultation process designed to gain insights into the barriers and advantages of developing any over-arching European credit structure. We all have different models in mind when considering such issues. The following is a hypothetical model to bear in mind when considering the first steps of any possible extension of ECTS to become a European credit framework. Any such framework would involve the following features and principles:

- The principle of being non-invasive. It must respect the educational autonomy of countries and institutions;
- Must improve the international transparency of existing national/regional educational systems and qualifications;
- Must be compatible with any existing national/regional educational systems. It must be flexible enough to accommodate all the different European national educational structures including credit-based/non-credit based, modular/non-modular, unitised/non-unitised systems etc;
- Be capable of being applied to all types of higher education programmes and all modes of delivery (full-time, part-time, open/distance learning, vocational and professional learning) and thereby enhance lifelong learning;
- The use and evolution of existing ECTS features (credits, international credit transfer, transcripts, credit allocation principles, information packages etc.);
- Avoid any unstructured 'cafeteria style' international freedom to 'pick and mix' units or modules to form a recognised educational programme of study.
- Compatibility with the 'Diploma Supplement' initiative that is designed to explain and make transparent higher education academic and professional qualifications;
- Would contain no detailed notion of 'levels' in its early stages. Such definitions could only arise in the longer term, after considerable convergence between European national qualification structures;

### **European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) – A Brief Introduction**

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was initially developed in a pilot scheme 1988-1995 that included 145 EU and EEA higher education institutions. It was established within the Erasmus programme as a means of improving academic recognition for study abroad.

Since the initial pilot, ECTS has moved well beyond its restricted stage towards a much wider use as an element of the European dimension in higher education. The current *ECTS Extension Project* is designed to investigate the possibilities of further radically expanding ECTS - to see if it has the potential to become a European credit accumulation and transfer scheme encompassing post-school adult and vocational education, different modes of education (part-time/full-time/open and distance), and lifelong-learning.

Currently, ECTS is an instrument to create transparency, to build bridges between institutions and to widen the choices available to students. It is being used by over one thousand European higher education institutions. It is basically a mobility scheme designed to ensure that studies undertaken in a *host* institution are fully recognised when the student returns, to their *home* institution. The system makes it easier for institutions to recognise the learning achievements of students through the use of commonly understood measurements - credits and grades - and it also provides a means to interpret national systems of higher education.

ECTS system is based on three core elements: information (on study programmes and student achievement), mutual agreement (between the partner institutions and the student) and the use of ECTS credits (to indicate student workload). These three core elements are made operational through the use of three key documents: the information package, the application form/learning agreement and the transcript of records. Most of all, ECTS is made operational by students, teachers and institutions who want to make study abroad an integral part of the educational experience.

In itself, ECTS in no way regulates the content, structure or equivalence of study programmes. These are issues of quality which have to be determined by the higher education institutions themselves when establishing a satisfactory basis for cooperation agreements, bilaterally or multilaterally. The code of good practice associated with ECTS facilitates transparency and academic recognition.

Full academic recognition is a *conditio sine qua non* for student mobility in the framework of the Socrates/Erasmus programmes. Full academic recognition means that the study period abroad (including examinations or other forms of assessment) replaces a comparable period of study at the home university (including examinations or other forms of assessment), although the content of the agreed study programme may differ.

The use of ECTS is voluntary and is based on mutual trust and confidence in the academic performance of partner institutions. Each institution selects its own partners. ECTS improves information on curricula, promotes academic recognition and can be used within and between institutions. However, it is not yet a truly international credit accumulation and transfer (CATS) scheme. It is this possibility that is being investigated now.

*(The above information is largely based on the ECTS User's Guide (1998) published by the European Commission. The full Guide can be accessed and downloaded (in a number of languages) from the Commissions web site: '<http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg22/socrates/ects.html>'.)*

Stephen Adam. - Rapporteur for the ECTS Extension Project (30.3.99).

## QUESTIONNAIRE:

The European Commission (DGXXII) is investigating the feasibility of developing, from the existing European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) mobility scheme, a genuine European credit accumulation framework that includes all modes and systems of higher education. This questionnaire is designed to gain feedback on this matter from a wide range of experts from different European states.

Attached, please find further details of the project explaining: the context of the work; the main issues for consultation; a brief explanation of ECTS (the existing credit transfer mobility system); and a description of possible principles and features behind any European credit accumulation system. You may find it useful to consult these before completing this questionnaire.

Please answer the following questions, designed to identify the national and international advantages, disadvantages, issues and opinions relating to the evolution of a European credit accumulation framework. Please use the box provided for your answer, and where appropriate, answer with a simple yes or no.

### A. *General information:*

1.	Names(s) of experts(s) consulted:
2.	Indicate your role(s) and official position(s):
3.	Date of meeting:
4.	Place of meeting:

### B. *Questions on your national/regional educational system:*

5.	Does your education system use credits? (If your answer is no, please go to question 8.)
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6. Indicate how your system uses credits. Does it use credits in any of the following ways?

- Credit Accumulation YES/NO
- Credit Transfer YES/NO
- Vocational Education YES/NO
- Professional Education YES/NO
- Lifelong learning YES/NO
- Other (please specify)

***C. Problems associated with the introduction of a European credit accumulation framework.***

7. Is your national credit system compatible with the existing European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)? If your answer is no, please explain the incompatibility.

8. What do you think are the main (national and international) barriers and difficulties associated with the development of a European credit accumulation framework? Are there any specific legal barriers that might prevent its introduction in your country/region (if there are, please give brief details)?

9. Is there anything to prevent a European credit system including any of the following?

- Vocational Education YES/NO
- Professional education YES/NO
- Lifelong Learning YES/NO
- Part time Education YES/NO
- Distance Education YES/NO

***D. Advantages of creating a European credit accumulation framework:***

10. What do you think are the main advantages associated with the development of a European credit accumulation framework?

11. How would you like to see the existing European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) developed?

12. Do you agree with the principles of the simple credit model described in the accompanying papers? If you answer no, please explain your objections.

13. Do you think a European credit system could increase the transparency between education systems?

***E. Conclusion:***

14. Please add any other comments, suggestions, problems, advantages or recommendations you want to make:

15. Having completed this questionnaire do you think it is timely and worthwhile to attempt to develop a European credit accumulation framework?

***Thank you, for contributing to this part of the feasibility study. We will send you the outcomes of the process once it has been completed. Please return this questionnaire to:***

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