



Higher Education Outward Mobility Credit Transfer and Recognition

A report exploring current practice and
recommendations for UK higher education

September 2019

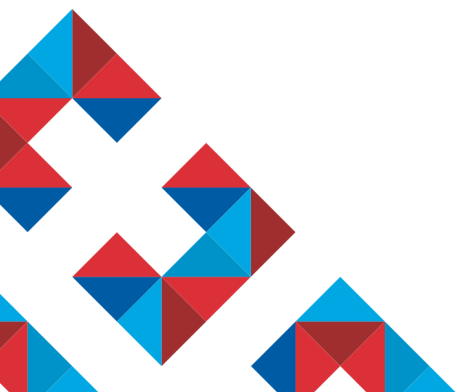


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Introduction

This report aims to help UK higher education institutions (HEIs) improve their credit transfer and recognition processes for students who undertake a study or work placement abroad as part of their study programme.

Many higher education students across the UK undertake an international placement as part of their undergraduate, postgraduate or research programmes. This outward mobility opportunity can take many forms, from a year or semester abroad on study or work placement, a short-term experience overseas, such as a study trip or summer school, through to volunteering.

UK higher education institutions (HEIs) offer a range of mobility opportunities to their students. Erasmus+ is the best known of the schemes, and for the 2016-17 graduating cohort, almost half of mobilities for first degree students (47%) of eight weeks or longer were facilitated through the Erasmus+ programme¹. There are a variety of other national, international and institutional-led outward mobility schemes. A report by the Bologna Follow-Up Group on the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) noted that ‘The international mobility of students is one of the most visible examples and main vectors for the transformation and renovation of higher education systems.’²

Benefits of outward mobility

Placements abroad support student development. Students benefit from an international curriculum, become more interculturally aware, develop professional skillsets and experience personal growth. In the words of Chris Skidmore, Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation:

*“We want all domestic higher education students to benefit from an international experience. Cultural exchange helps build important business, political and diplomatic bridges around the world, not to mention life-long friendships. Supporting students to study abroad helps us to create a new generation of globally mobile, culturally agile people who can succeed in an increasingly global marketplace.”*³

Research by the European Commission⁴ shows that 64% of employers think international experience is important for recruitment, and that graduates with an international background are given greater professional responsibility. Furthermore, 90% of higher education students who had undertaken an international placement said they had seen an improvement in their soft skills, such as knowledge of other countries, their ability to interact and work with individuals from different cultures, foreign language proficiency and communication skills. 99% of HEIs surveyed also reported that internationally mobile students showed a substantial improvement in confidence and adaptability.

¹ UUKi (2019) Gone International: Rising Aspirations. Report on the 2016–17 graduating cohort

² <http://www.ehea.info/cid103329/conference-on-student-mobility.html>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/minister-skidmore-my-vision-for-global-higher-education>

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/erasmus-impact-study_en

Importance of credit transfer and recognition

When students consider undertaking a period abroad, they typically want to understand what happens with the credits they have earned overseas, how the placement is part of their programme, and how their achievements will be recognised. In fact, the importance of recognition arrangements is highlighted in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) list of success factors for International mobility in higher education,⁵ and is an integral aim of the Bologna Process and Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE).⁶

However, approaches to outward student mobility credit transfer and recognition vary across Europe, and this is true within the United Kingdom as well. The European Students Union's (ESU) publication *Bologna with Student Eyes 2018 – The Final Countdown*⁷ identified that 'in credit recognition within a mobility programme (like Erasmus) [...] around one third of the [student] unions [in Europe] still perceived problems in accessibility of these recognition procedures. [...] Almost 30% of the students' unions who participated in this survey listed students' fear of non-recognition of their credits after mobility as one of the biggest barriers to outgoing mobility.' However, ESU also acknowledges that 'mobility programmes (usually Erasmus+) have had a positive effect on recognition since they provided institutions with a framework and streamlined procedures which are non-existent in other forms of recognition.'⁸

About this report

Given the varying practices in the UK and the perceived difficulties faced by many HEIs, the Erasmus+ UK National Agency was asked by its higher education stakeholders to:

- Investigate the current credit transfer and recognition landscape in the UK
- Help identify the barriers to effective credit transfer and recognition
- Provide guidance in overcoming these barriers.

As outward mobility credit transfer and recognition is not limited to mobilities that take place through the Erasmus+ programme, a group of sector bodies came together to work on this request. Together, the Erasmus+ UK National Agency, Universities UK International (UUKi) and the Association of UK Higher Education European Officers (HEURO), with input from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), UK NARIC, Northern Universities Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (NUCCAT) and SEEC, compiled a survey on outward mobility credit transfer and recognition.

The survey ran from 17 April to 10 May 2018, targeting higher education staff working in quality assurance roles, as well as staff working in outward mobility. In total, 66 HEIs from across the four UK nations responded to the survey, providing a picture of credit transfer and recognition nationally.

⁵ <http://www.oecd.org/innovation/policyplatform/48137663.pdf>

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/applicants/higher-education-charter_en

⁷ <https://www.esu-online.org/publications/bologna-student-eyes-2018-2/>

⁸ http://www.ehea.info/media/ehea.info/file/2018_Paris/06/0/BWSE-2018_web_lowres_952060.pdf

This report provides an analysis of the survey results, as well as case studies and examples of good practice. The report aims to provide HEIs with resources to improve their outward student mobility credit transfer and recognition processes. It also provides recommendations so that we treat students equitably and fairly, thereby providing a good student experience, as well as complying with Erasmus Charter for Higher Education requirements.

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Executive summary

This report provides feedback from higher education providers on outward student mobility credit transfer and recognition in the UK. The aim is to capture roadblocks as well as good practice in this area, and to feed into consultations on the UK's new Quality Code for Higher Education⁹, and associated guidance in this area.

The survey received 72 responses from 66 higher education institutions (HEIs) across the four UK nations. The majority of responses were from staff working in international or study abroad offices, alongside a number of responses from staff working in academic quality and registries.

The survey highlighted the lack of a common understanding within the response group of what credit transfer and recognition meant in practice, with the terms 'credit transfer' and 'credit recognition' used inconsistently, and the terms 'credit' and 'grade' transfer often conflated.

We have to question how well students and employers understand these terms if higher education staff face difficulties. It is worth noting that there is a common European definition of credit transfer and recognition set out in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). Erasmus+ accounts for around half of all outward mobilities. Of the survey respondents, all but two of the HEIs offer Erasmus+ mobility to their students.¹⁰

The disconnect suggests that there is more work to be undertaken at the national level to ensure that credit transfer and recognition is adhered to. Without this understanding, it is likely that limited progress will be made on this issue. The results also showed a need for HEIs to be better joined up internally (in terms of their processes and communication between departments), in order to foster support and commitment to overcome internal barriers.

Key findings

Due diligence

All HEIs reported carrying out some type of due diligence when creating new outward mobility partnerships. The most common form of due diligence was 'approval by an internal panel or committee', followed by the use of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) and the use of a risk assessment tool or form.

Ten HEIs reported only undertaking one method of due diligence, six of whom reported only using a risk assessment form/tool. This finding may be due to the type of respondent completing the survey, where different offices are responsible for different types of due diligence.

⁹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

¹⁰ The Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/applicants/higher-education-charter_en states that the institutions who sign up undertake to: 'ensure full recognition for satisfactorily completed activities of study mobility and, where possible, traineeships in terms of credits awarded (ECTS or compatible system). Ensure the inclusion of satisfactorily completed study and/or traineeship mobility activities in the final record of student achievements (Diploma Supplement or equivalent).' and 'Accept all activities indicated in the learning agreement as counting towards the degree, provided these have been satisfactorily completed by the mobile students.' For further details, please see ECHE Annotated Guidelines www.erasmusplus.org.uk/file/13472/download

Credit transfer and recognition policy

Credit transfer and recognition policy and practice vary substantially - across the sector, and often, within institutions. This is perhaps to be expected, given the variety of institutional models and mobility management across the higher education sector, and given that credit transfer and recognition is often led by academic departments.

Around half (53%) of institutions reported having a consistent credit transfer and recognition policy for the whole institution. Of those who did not, around a quarter (26%) indicated that it varied by school or faculty, and 15% by programme.

The majority (89%) of respondents reported having the same process for Erasmus+ partners as for other types of partners. Where the process differed, respondents pointed to the use of credit transfer systems other than ECTS and commented on the relative simplicity of using the ECTS system: https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en.

Level of credit transfer and recognition

In relation to the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE):

- 42% percent of institutions reported that they award full credit for mobility placements
- 35% percent reported awarding partial credit
- 20% reported that mobility was pass/fail only.

5% stated that they do not award credit. Reasons given for not awarding credit included accreditation issues and certain placements - including some work placements, or summer placements - not being considered an 'integral' part of the degree.

There is a variety of practice in how institutions recognise credit. 39% of institutions reported recognising both credit and grade, 17% credit only, and 41% stated it depended on the school, faculty or programme.



Mobility in the degree calculation algorithm

There is a variety of practice in whether institutions include mobility in the degree calculation algorithm. While just over one fifth of respondents reported they include both credit and grades in the degree algorithm, 18% of respondents said that mobility is not counted. 18% percent also claimed they include credit only, with 22% saying that it depends on the school, faculty or programme.

Use of credit transfer systems

The ECTS system is widely used: 40% of respondents indicated they used the system to both transfer and recognise credit, while 37% reported they use an ECTS compatible system to both transfer and recognise credit.

Use of grade equivalence tables

Only 19% of respondents indicated that they used the ECTS percentile scale as a grade distribution to transfer credit, and 68% said they did not.

49% of respondents said they did use a grade equivalence table, with 13% saying that its use varied by school, faculty or programme.

There are a variety of methods used by HEIs when compiling and using grade equivalence tables. Respondents reported that this was informed by:

- Academics and their knowledge of the partner institution and its grading scale
- External guidance (e.g. from EC, NARIC, partner institutions, admissions offices, Fulbright Commission data on UK-US degree equivalence), sector practice and conversion scales available from NARIC and other HEIs working with the same country/partner
- Reviews of partner HEIs grading scales and regional/country grading scales
- Ratification from an external examiner and an assurance committee
- Use of the Egracons tool <http://egracons.eu/>.

Use of assessment panels

Around 60% of respondents indicate that they have an assessment panel, which considers repatriated study abroad credit for some or all of their study programmes.

Recognition of outward mobility in the degree award title

27% percent of respondents said they recognised mobility in the degree award title. 39% said they did so only for some students, and normally only for students undertaking additional or sandwich years abroad.

Recording credit achieved on the transcript and on the Diploma Supplement/ HEAR/ enhanced transcript

Responses showed a variety of practice in how credit is recorded on the transcript. Most commonly it is recorded in blocks by semester or year. Some respondents do not record credit in this way at all.

Awarding credit for work placements

20% percent of respondents did not award credit for work placements.

Around 60% of respondents required students to complete a home institution assessment in order to award credit (either required of all students, or within certain schools, faculties or programmes). A large number of these respondents indicated that this was the case particularly for language students. Home assessments were reported as taking a variety of forms, for example, short reports, blogs, projects, journals, essays and reflection pieces.

7% percent of respondents indicated that they internally moderate assessed work undertaken at partners.

Institutional policy on retrieval of failure on mobility

Respondents indicated that students are encouraged to resit at the host institution, if such an option exists. In some cases, where resits are not available, or instead of resits, some respondents offered retakes, additional modules, or other forms of reassessment at the home institution.

Some respondents mentioned that failures were considered on a case by case basis by departments or by academic boards and committees or that the retrieval of failure process was agreed at the programme approval stage.

Some institutions with 'year abroad' in degree titles indicated that students who failed would have this removed. Others indicated that the mobility would not be included on their transcript.

Personal opinions on repatriation of credits and grades

69% of respondents indicated they personally believed that repatriating both credit and grades motivated students. In comments however, this view was more nuanced, with some respondents suggesting that it could be a barrier either way, with students worried about the impact on their studies of 'taking time out' where credit was not recognised, or overly concerned about their academic performance abroad.

Barriers to transfer and recognition of credit

Almost all respondents reported encountering barriers to credit transfer and recognition. These included internal barriers such as:

- Inconsistency in the process within and across departments
- The administrative burden and resource involved in creating and maintaining accurate grade conversion scales
- Issues with internal systems recognising mobility credits
- A lack of buy-in from academic staff, that is, a lack of belief in the value of mobility, a lack of understanding towards the credit transfer system, and a distrust in the grading mechanisms of overseas institutions.

Some respondents noted a similar lack of understanding and trust in the process amongst students.

Respondents also identified a number of technical barriers, including mapping of modules, semester matching, handling failures and deferrals and recognition of credit for awards with PSRB accreditation. Some also pointed to difficulties in obtaining information on grade scales from partners and understanding of credit systems internationally.

Success in overcoming barriers

56% of respondents reported that they had success in overcoming barriers to transferring and recognising outward mobility credit, while 44% of respondents reported they had not.

Where respondents reported a successful approach, they pointed to, for example:

- Taking a flexible approach to modules studied abroad or programme degree structures at home
- Choice of partners, that is, finding partners that offer very similar programmes abroad
- Centralising the study abroad programme so that all programmes use the same system
- Building an evidence base and external guidance to assist in mapping of grades
- Creation of conversion tables
- Leveraging the expertise of academic mobility coordinators in academic schools and recognising their value.

Several respondents indicated that they were unaware of other practices or policies in this area, and that more information would be helpful.

Several respondents suggested that a sector-wide grade conversion process would be beneficial and that Egracons could be a valuable tool.

Recommendations

Drawing on the information contained in this report, the following recommendations are proposed to UK HEIs for improving their approach to outward student mobility recognition:

1. **Whole institutional approach to recognition**

HEIs should seek to adopt a consistent, institution-wide outward student mobility recognition policy. If responsibility for recognition lies solely with the outward mobility officers, it can be difficult for them to secure the changes needed in their institution, and the institution is thus at risk of not meeting its obligations towards recognition, such as those they signed up to through the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. Creation and adoption of this approach should involve senior management, academics and administrators across the institution. A number of the main barriers identified in our survey could be addressed in this way - including improving understanding of what full recognition means, gaining buy-in from academic staff and developing internal systems which facilitate the recognition process. A consistent approach will also help to ensure that all students at the institution receive the same level of recognition and can better understand, and trust, what recognition they will get for their mobility period. Ensuring that periods spent studying, and where possible working, abroad are recognised will help to address one of the key barriers to student take-up of outward mobility opportunities.

2. **Due diligence and partnership management**

When students are sent to another HEI to undertake a period of study, this is normally undertaken through a partnership with that HEI. It is important that institutions consider the UK Quality Code and QAA Advice and Guidance on Partnerships¹¹ for such partnerships, just as they do for other types of arrangements between two or more organisations to deliver aspects of teaching, learning, assessment and student support.

The guiding principles (which are not mandatory) provide a framework for institutions to consider when establishing new or looking at existing higher education provision. They are not exhaustive and there is no one sized approach, but HEIs should take a risk-based approach that befits the nature and status of the partnerships involved. For partnerships the guiding principles are:

- I. The awarding organisation will be accountable for assuring the overall quality and academic standards of the provision, regardless of the type of partnership.
- II. The awarding organisation will have in place appropriate governance to authorise and oversee the development and closure of partnership arrangements and to monitor their effective operation.
- III. Due diligence enquiries are completed and legally binding written agreements are signed prior to the commencement of student registration - due diligence enquiries are refreshed periodically and before agreements are renewed.
- IV. Provision delivered through partnership arrangements will be subject to quality procedures that are at least as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those used for the provision delivered by the awarding organisation.

¹¹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/partnerships>

- V. Awarding organisations that make arrangements for the delivery of learning opportunities with others, retain the authority and responsibility for awarding certificates and records of study in relation to student achievement.
- VI. All awarding organisations maintain accurate, up-to-date records of all partnership arrangements that are subject to a formal agreement.
- VII. Awarding organisations monitor and evaluate their partnership arrangements to satisfy themselves that the arrangements are achieving their stated outcomes and that academic standards and quality are being maintained.

By ensuring that outward mobility partnership arrangements are effectively managed and overseen, HEIs should be confident in providing recognition for credits earned overseas.

3. **Provide students with clear information on recognition**

All students should be informed in advance how their outward mobility period will be recognised. This information should be communicated in a way that is clear and easily understandable to the students.

4. **Avoid double assessment**

HEIs should ensure that students are not required to be assessed in both their home and host country for their credits earned overseas to be recognised. This does not mean that HEIs cannot require students overseas to complete additional assignments, however these should be credited in addition to, and not instead of, any credits they successfully complete at the host institution.

For students who are mobile through the Erasmus+ programme, the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education: Annotated Guidelines¹² specifically state: 'All the credits that the student earns during the mobility period and which were originally agreed in the learning agreement should be recognised by the home institution without the need for the student to take any further courses or exams'.

5. **Diploma supplement or HEAR**

HEIs should issue either a diploma supplement or HEAR record to students in recognition of the mobility period in line with the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

For students who are mobile through the Erasmus+ programme, the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education: Annotated Guidelines¹³ specifically state:

'Learning agreements are binding for all the parties and require that, on successful completion of the mobility period, the sending institution recognises credits earned by the student and documents these credits in the student records, so that they can be identified in a transparent way.

[...]

Recognition / transfer procedures should ensure that the student's mobile activities at the partner institution are recorded in a transparent way (indicating the original course / subject titles at the host institution in the national language and English) and that the credits

^{12/13} www.erasmusplus.org.uk/file/13472/download

gained abroad have been recognised as an integral part of the student's degree programmes.

[...]

The institution should issue a Diploma Supplement (or equivalent) to accompany every degree successfully completed by a student, using where applicable the template developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO / CEPES.

This Supplement should include a record of the period of mobility under the Programme.

[...]

Any mobility activity abroad should be made explicit in the relevant part of the Diploma Supplement: alongside modules / units taken at the home institution, the Diploma Supplement should list recognised modules / units / training activities undertaken during the student's mobility period and indicate the location of these mobility activities'.

6. **Failure on mobility**

Institutions should develop a policy for retrieval of failure whilst on mobility. The policy adopted should ideally be institution-wide and students should be informed of the policy before departure. It should also encourage students to take up referral opportunities at partner institutions. Module retrieval can be undertaken at home on return, however, it may put an undue burden on students.

7. **Make use of the tools and resources identified in this report**

There are a number of tools and resources flagged up in this report to support UK HEIs in improving their approach to outward student mobility recognition. Using these resources will mean that you will not have to develop approaches from scratch or 'reinvent the wheel' and can instead benefit from the experience and expertise of the wider sector. For reference, the resources in this report are listed in Annex 1.

A note on grade transfer

If your institution does either transfer grades for outward mobility periods, or is considering doing so, we recommend, as above, the use of a consistent, institution-wide approach.

If possible, the development and use of grade conversion tables is considered good practice. The Egracons tool can support you in this but is not the only approach available. Other resources include grade distribution tables or information from your partners. If your institution is a member of UK NARIC, additional resources are also available.

Many survey respondents noted that ECTS can assist even with partners outside of Europe, due to its relative simplicity and widespread acceptability.

Recognition

According to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, UNESCO and the Council of Europe's legally binding text concerning the recognition of foreign qualifications,¹⁴ recognition is 'a formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of a foreign educational qualification with a view to access to educational and or/employment activities.'¹⁵ The Convention also states:

'Article V.1 Each Party shall recognise periods of study completed within the framework of a higher education programme in another Party. This recognition shall comprise such periods of study towards the completion of a higher education programme in the Party in which recognition is sought, unless substantial differences can be shown between the periods of study completed in another Party and the part of the higher education programme which they would replace in the Party in which recognition is sought.'

In the 2012 Bucharest Ministerial Communiqué of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA),¹⁶ it was emphasised that 'fair academic and profession recognition, including recognition of non-formal and informal learning, is at the core of the EHEA. It is a direct benefit for students' academic mobility, it improves graduates' chances of professional mobility and it represents an accurate measure of the degree of convergence and trust attained.' The Communiqué highlights the European Area of Recognition Manual¹⁷ and recommends it as a set of guidelines and good practice for HEIs in their internal recognition procedures.

For HEIs offering outward mobility placements through Erasmus+, **the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE)**, which provides the quality framework for cooperation activities an HEI may carry out within the programme, obliges HEIs to:

- Ensure full recognition for satisfactorily completed activities of study mobility and, where possible, traineeships in terms of credits awarded (ECTS or compatible system)
- Ensure the inclusion of satisfactorily completed study and / or traineeship mobility activities in the final record of student achievements (Diploma Supplement or equivalent). [...] Any mobility activity abroad should be made explicit in the relevant part of the Diploma Supplement [or equivalent]: alongside modules / units taken at the home institution, the Diploma Supplement should list recognised modules / units / training activities undertaken during the student's mobility period and indicate the location of these mobility activities.¹⁸

¹⁴ Officially The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region.

See https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/lrc_EN.asp

¹⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168007f2c7>

¹⁶ <http://www.ehea.info/cid101043/ministerial-conference-bucharest-2012.html>

¹⁷ <http://eurorecognition.eu/emanual/>

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/applicants/higher-education-charter_en



European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions

The European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions¹⁹ was created by the European Area of Recognition Project (EAR)²⁰ and is a recognition manual for credit evaluators.

The manual consists of shared standards and guidelines on credit transfer decisions, recognition of study periods abroad, and admissions and selection procedures for applicants seeking entry to further study, including examples of best practice. It aims to provide HEIs with a tool to enable them to apply the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The manual is in seven parts, including a focus on what is needed at an institutional level for recognition processes to be fair and run smoothly. It also highlights reliable information instruments, such as the Diploma Supplement.

This is the second edition of the manual, building on the European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual, which was developed in collaboration with organisations from across the EHEA, including HEIs, National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs), the European University Association (EUA) and the European Student Union (ESU). It has been endorsed by the Ministers of Education from the EHEA as an instrument to foster a fair recognition culture and support quality enhancement in recognition procedures, according to the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Diploma Supplement and the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

Following the Berlin Ministerial Meeting in 2003, the UK and other Bologna signatory countries committed to introduce the Diploma Supplement. As such, all students graduating from 2005 onwards should receive a Diploma Supplement, or equivalent, on successful completion of a higher education qualification by the awarding HEI, alongside their diploma or degree transcript.

The Diploma Supplement was designed by the Council of Europe, UNESCO/CEPES and the European Commission. It aims to provide information about the qualification the student achieved to support recognition by educators, employers, individuals and others. It provides institutional details, course content, modules covered and information about the national education system. You can see an example Diploma Supplement at https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/sites/default/files/dsupplementexamples-en_3.pdf.

In the UK, it is possible for HEIs to instead issue the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) which incorporates the template for the Diploma Supplement.

The HEAR is specific to the UK and is the product of the Burgess Implementation Steering Group. It derives from a 2007 report *Beyond the Honours Degree Classification*.²¹ The HEAR is a concise, electronic document produced by higher education institutions, which provides a record of a student's achievement during their time in higher education.

¹⁹ <http://eurorecognition.eu/Manual/EAR%20HEI.pdf>

²⁰ <http://eurorecognition.eu/>

²¹ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/beyond-the-honours-degree-classification-burgess-group.aspx>

The HEAR conforms to the data fields for the European Diploma Supplement template, but it differs from the Diploma Supplement in a number of ways, including:

- It is an electronic rather than paper document
- It is an on-going record that is updated throughout the student's journey with the institution (although the HEAR Diploma Supplement is the exit document issued on completion of the qualification). It can be accessed by the student at any time
- It contains information about the student's academic and non-academic achievement that can be verified and validated by the institution.

More information about the HEAR can be found at www.hear.ac.uk/about.

Relationship between the Diploma Supplement and the HEAR

The Diploma Supplement template and the guidelines governing its completion are inflexible. This is because the document is jointly owned by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES.

Higher education institutions have the option to apply for the Diploma Supplement Label – a quality label which requires applicants to follow stringent guidelines to ensure consistency in the content and format of the document.

Because of the differences between the Diploma Supplement and HEAR, there has historically been uncertainty as to whether the HEAR complies with the Diploma Supplement template, and whether it meets the Diploma Supplement Label requirements. Some HEIs were understandably reluctant to introduce either document until the issue is resolved.

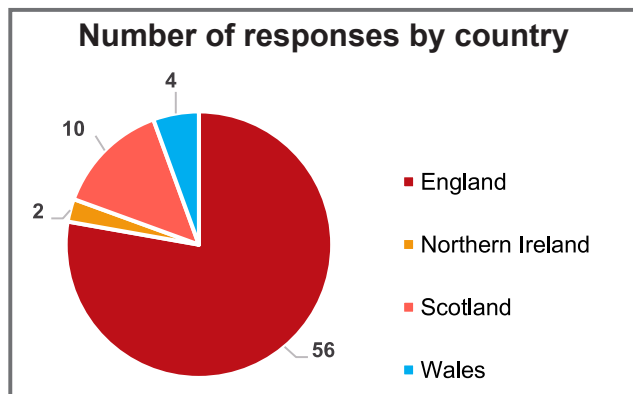
In October 2012, the Burgess Implementation Steering Group published their final report entitled *Bringing It All Together: Introducing the HEAR*. The report proposed that higher education representative bodies recommend the HEAR to be adopted sector-wide for students entering higher education in the academic year 2012-2013 (Universities UK and GuildHE have subsequently commended the HEAR to the sector).



The survey

The survey on outward student mobility credit transfer and recognition ran from 17 April 2018 to 10 May 2018, targeting higher education staff working in quality assurance roles, as well as those working in outward mobility.

The survey looked to establish what types of mobilities respondents offered, as well as their approach to credit transfer and recognition.

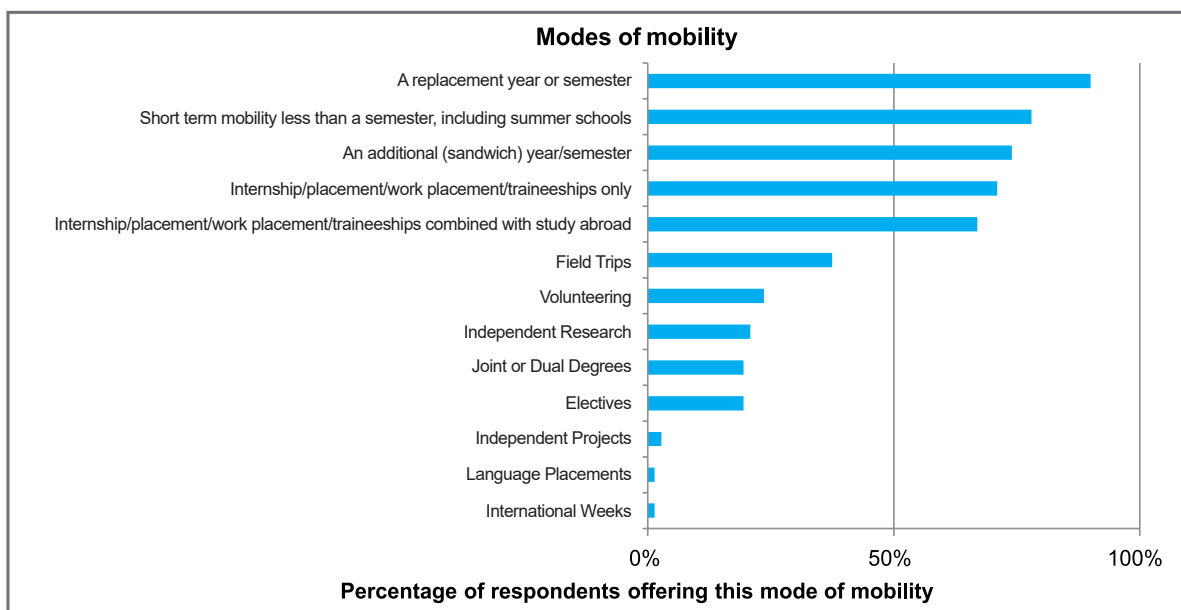


66 individual HEIs responded to the survey, representing institutions in all four nations of the United Kingdom. In addition, in some cases multiple responses were received from individual institutions, providing answers from different departments within the institution.

Most responses (over 50) came from staff working in international or study abroad offices, but responses were also received from staff members in academic registry offices, quality assurance offices, careers or placement offices and academic schools.

The vast majority of HEIs who responded to the survey offered outward mobility placements to students through both the Erasmus+ programme and through other schemes and arrangements. Only two HEIs limited their mobilities to countries within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), with all other HEIs also offering mobilities further afield.

HEIs reported offering a wide range of mobility opportunities to their students, including study abroad, traineeships and volunteering. The graph below shows that the mobility offer in the UK is not only growing but diversifying, with mobility for research, electives, volunteering, field trips and study visits. This reflects UUKi's Gone International: Rising Aspirations report (2019), which also found an increase in the number of students undertaking short-term mobility opportunities.



Preparation and planning

Due diligence

As with any collaborative arrangement, it is important that HEIs undertake due diligence on the partners they work with for outward student mobility placements.

As expected, all HEIs reported that they carried out some type of due diligence, but the nature of this varied by institution. The majority of HEIs undertook multiple steps when carrying out their due diligence process, though 10 respondents only undertook one form of due diligence. The most common forms of due diligence were:

- Approval by an internal panel or committee (69% of HEIs)
- Confirmation that the partner holds an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (68%)
- A risk assessment tool or form (67%)
- A visit to the partner (61%)
- Other (19%).

When a HEI only undertook one form of due diligence, in all but one of the cases, the action undertaken was one of the top three above. In the other case, the HEI required a member of staff to make a proposal and for it to be approved by the exchange coordinator at the HEI.

Other less common forms of due diligence include:

- Approval by a senior member of staff (such as a PVC or Head of School)
- Research on the institution and explicit faculty sign-off
- An external panel or committee
- Review of the partner's health and safety and equality policies
- Existing relationship with the partner through collaborative projects or previous staff mobilities.

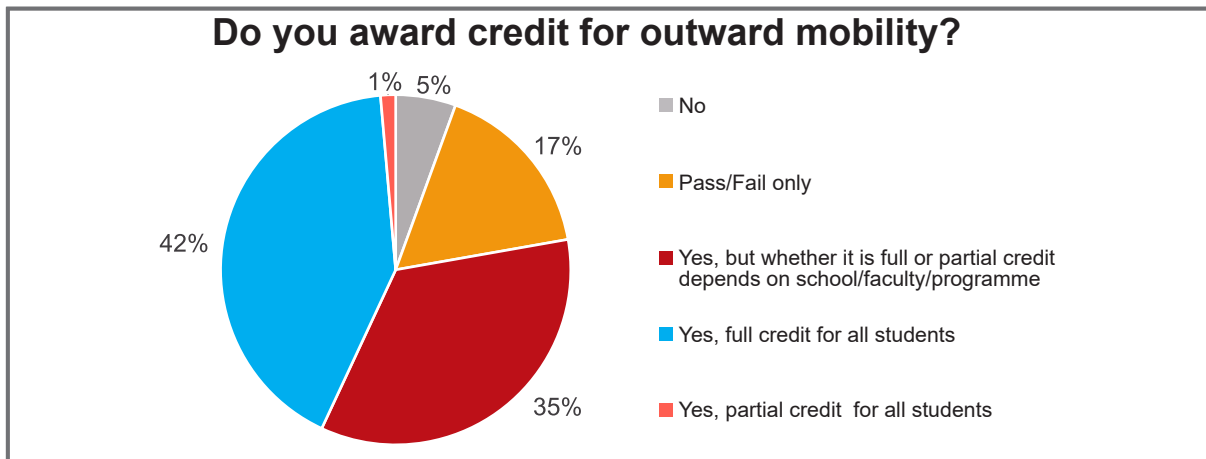
Policies

Reassuringly, all of the HEIs surveyed reported having policies on credit transfer and recognition that apply to outward mobility. 53% of HEIs have a consistent policy across the whole institution. The remainder of HEIs reported that the policies they have in place were school/faculty specific or programme specific. For those who had consistent policies across the institution, there were reports of variations in how these were applied.

Interestingly, 11% of HEIs had a different process in place for the recognition of credit through Erasmus+ to that for other types of partners. Where this was the case, it was often because HEIs found the systems easier to map due to the use of ECTS credits through the Erasmus+ programme. For others, it was due to partnerships with the United States of America having different arrangements around credit and assessment.

Credit transfer and recognition

42% of HEIs said that they awarded full credit for all mobile students, whilst 5% of HEIs said that they did not award any.



The latter figure is a particular concern: all HEIs participating in the Erasmus+ programme, as part of their Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) accreditation, commit to 'full recognition for satisfactorily completed activities of study mobility and, where possible, traineeships in terms of credits awarded'. This includes ensuring 'that the student's mobile activities at the partner institution are recorded in a transparent way (indicating the original course / subject titles at the host institution in the national language and English) and that the credits gained abroad have been recognised as an integral part of the student's degree programme. All the credits that the student earns during the mobility period and which were originally agreed in the learning agreement should be recognised by the home institution without the need for the student to take any further courses or examinations.'²²

When it comes to credit transfer and recognition, the majority of HEIs used either the ECTS system or an ECTS compatible system. In a minority of cases, neither type of system was used, but this tended to be with partners who were based outside of Europe.

When HEIs did not award credit, or only awarded partial credit, the following reasons were given:

- Accreditation issues, normally with relation to Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)
- Calculating how these credits contribute towards the HEI's programme is problematic
- Full credit for work placements only being given if it is an integral part of the degree
- Pass/fail only for one semester exchanges, full credit for full year exchanges
- Conversely, full credit for one semester exchanges, but only pass or fail for students who complete a full additional year abroad
- Short term experiences (e.g. summer programmes) not being credit bearing.

The fact that, for a number of HEIs, the approach varies by programme, school or faculty raises a concern that students mobile at the same time, from the same home institution, would not have the same level of credit recognition.

²² www.erasmusplus.org.uk/file/13472/download

Understandably, the approach to credit award and transfer can look different when we are looking at forms of mobility that are not based around studying. The obvious example, and an increasingly popular form of international mobility, is work placements. Whilst only 5% of HEIs do not provide credit in general for outward study mobility periods, in contrast 20% of HEIs do not give credit for a work placement.

For those who do give credit for a work placement, approximately half apply a consistent approach across the HEI, and half have approaches that vary by faculty or programme. When it is the latter, a variety of approaches are taken: the most common is that such HEIs award credit for compulsory work placements only. Some noted that credits may not be awarded in the case of a short work placement.

For those who reported applying credit for all work placements, awarding credit based on an assignment or examination was also common. However, a number of HEIs awarded credit based on both the satisfactory completion of the work placement and the assignment. For other HEIs, work placements are considered an integral part of the course, and credit is awarded based on the achievement of pre-identified learning objectives and mobility length.

The requirement for students to complete a home institution assignment or assessment is seen at 64% of the respondent institutions. Again, the approach often varies by faculty or programme (41%), but for a large number of respondents, this was the case - in particular for language students. Home assessments took the following forms:

- A short report on their experience (often used for monitoring purposes)
- Blog
- Project
- Brief assessment of the knowledge gained and skills developed
- Journal
- Returner's questionnaire/ online survey
- Essay
- Reflection piece.

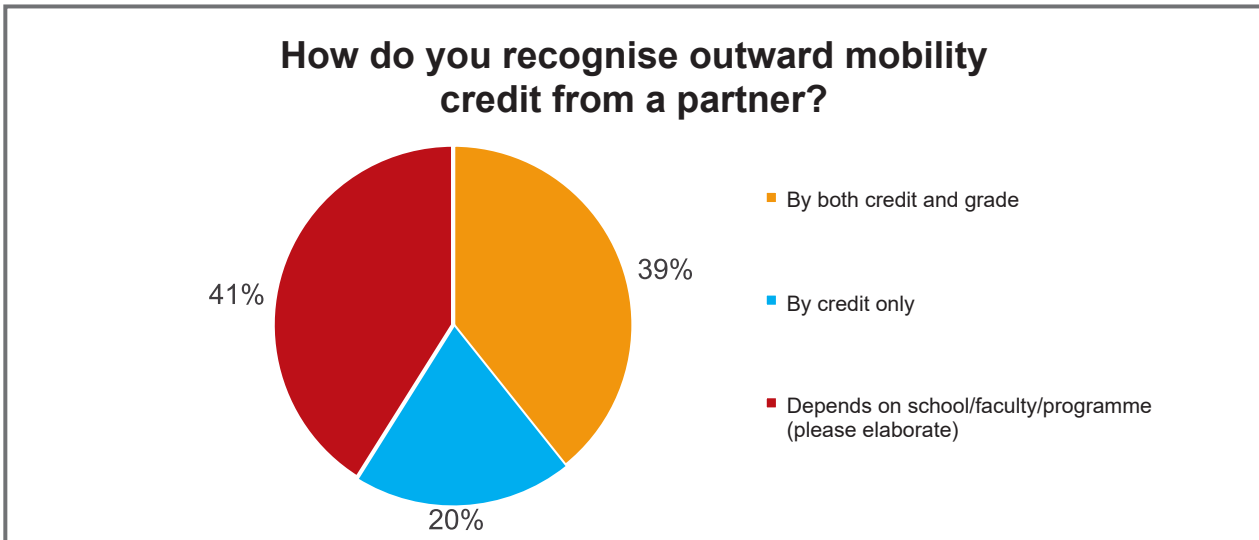
In terms of Erasmus+, the ECHE says 'All the credits that the student earns during the mobility period and which were originally agreed in the learning agreement (or a revised version of it) should be recognised by the home institution without the need for the student to take any further courses or exams'.

Regardless of scheme, HEIs should be careful about how this is approached. As one respondent to the survey stated: "The students obtain credit for the home assessment rather than the credit from their outward mobility. It is this that contributes towards the credits for their award". In effect the student is being assessed twice.

A number of institutions hold assessment panels to consider repatriated study abroad credit, with a view to making recommendations on approval of study abroad credit to boards of examiners. Such panels provide a level of consistency across the institution in the interpretation of credit and grade transfer.



Grade transfer



For those institutions that do award credit, it was encouraging to see that 39% of HEIs also recognise the grade that their partners award students while on placements. Once again, the approach taken by a large number of institutions depended on the student's school/faculty/programme at the home institution, meaning that the student experience would vary within an institution.

A variety of reasons were given for the approach varying across the institution, including:

- Dependent on the scheme used for outward mobility
- Dependent on the length of the mobility, i.e. yearlong, semester or short term
- Dependent on whether the placement was compulsory or not
- Dependent on whether the student was studying a language degree or not
- Not all schools having grade conversion mechanisms in place
- Dependent on whether the mobility was an additional 'sandwich' year.

When it came to work placements, a number of HEIs awarded grades to students who had undertaken these, but the approach varied across HEIs as to whether this was also on the basis of an assessment or assignment or on the basis of the placement itself, or both. Awarding credit on a pass/fail basis only was also common.

For those HEIs who do convert grades, 19% of HEIs confirmed that they consistently used the ECTS percentile scale as a grade distribution to transfer credits, whilst an additional 7% said it was dependent on the faculty or programme. The vast majority did not use this system.

Grade equivalence tables are acknowledged to be crucial to improving the quality of grade transfer from outward mobility placements. 62% of HEIs who convert grades use grade equivalence tables to support this process, including 13% where the use of such tables depends on the faculty or programme. Institutions take a variety of approaches to compiling grade conversion tables, many of which take time and input from an internal panel of colleagues, and in some cases external examiners, with only one HEI specifically mentioning the Egracons policy.

What is Egracons?²³

'The **Egracons (European Grade Conversion System)** project was a Lifelong Learning project (2012-2015) co-funded by the European Commission. The aim was to facilitate exchange mobility by working out a conversion system based on ECTS grade conversion tables as recommended in the European 2015 ECTS Users' guide²⁴. The project [...] aimed to build up a wide-spread awareness and common understanding of the different grading systems in Europe and to enable an accurate interpretation of grades (or marks) given abroad, leading to a fair and manageable conversion of these grades to a local grade in the home institution.[...]

The project mapped grading practices in countries and individual institutions leading to a full description of the grading systems in use in Europe. It also developed an online, web-based Egracons tool that allows direct and automatic conversions of grades on the basis of annual, statistically-based grading tables supplied by individual institutions as part of an overall database.[...]

The Egracons project [...] developed a user-friendly web-based tool for grade conversion (<https://tool.egracons.eu>) that is available free of charge to all participating European HEIs (and beyond) provided [they] supply their grade distribution tables. The tool enables a transparent interpretation of students' accomplishments abroad. In order to do so, it collects grade distribution tables from as many HEIs as possible. The tool enables both single conversion (a single student grade to a single grade) and multiple conversion (all the grades of a TOR) from a university abroad to the home university. The grades of several students can also be exported to a separate Excel document. [...]

The Egracons project's country reports describe grading practices in all European countries with HEIs that take part in Erasmus mobility. [...] Detailed explanations of distinctive features and grading cultures per country and institution are provided, including the range of grades, condoning, the average distribution of grades, required overall averages or not, specific bands within grades, differences among disciplines, etc. This allows for a better interpretation of each grading system and hence of the grades suggested by the online tool.

Following the recommendations of UNESCO, the Egracons conversion tool will link degrees to ISCED codes. The ISCED fields of Education and training are used by UNESCO/Eurostat/OECD to classify degrees into disciplines. A new classification was agreed upon in 2013 by UNESCO. The ISCED-2013 F classification comprises about 80 fields of education (detailed level = four digits).'²⁵

²³ <http://egracons.eu/>

²⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/index_en.htm and http://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/docs/ects-users-guide_en.pdf

²⁵ Description from <http://egracons.eu/page/egracons-project-and-tool>

A number of HEIs use existing academic knowledge of the partner institution's grading scales to map to their scales, or take time to become familiar with the grading scales and descriptors at the partner institution. HEIs also commonly refer to sector practice, sometimes specifically looking at the conversion scales used by other UK HEIs working with the same country or partner. Reference was also made to tools and information provided by UK NARIC, and in the case of partners in the USA, the Fulbright Commission on UK-US degree equivalence.

What happens when students fail credits on their placement abroad?

If a student fails credits on their placement abroad, the survey results indicate that, in general, students are encouraged to follow the retrieval policy of their host institution and to resit at the host institution, if this is possible.

In some cases, UK HEIs allow students to make up credits when they return, however this is not always possible. Where reassessment is not possible, as long as it was only one or two modules and the overall period is passed, students are still credited with having a year abroad. For others, failure of credits means that students would be considered to have failed their year abroad, and in some cases, this requires them to repeat the year of study.

In cases where it is possible for students to be reassessed at the home institution, a variety of mechanisms exists, including:

- An internal module which could replace a small shortfall in credits from an exchange
- Students are required to undertake additional work and assessment at the home institution. For some, this takes place over the summer period
- Students are required to take additional/replacement modules/credits on their return
- Resits offered at the home institution based on the material studied abroad for that module or as a remote arrangement in agreement with the partner.

Degree award algorithms and titles

82% of HEIs factor study abroad into their student's degree calculation algorithms to some extent, but only 21% factor in the credit and grade consistently.

For 22% of HEIs, whether they do or not, and to what extent, depends on the faculty or the individual programme, and another 22% say it depends on whether the placement was an additional year or a replacement year.

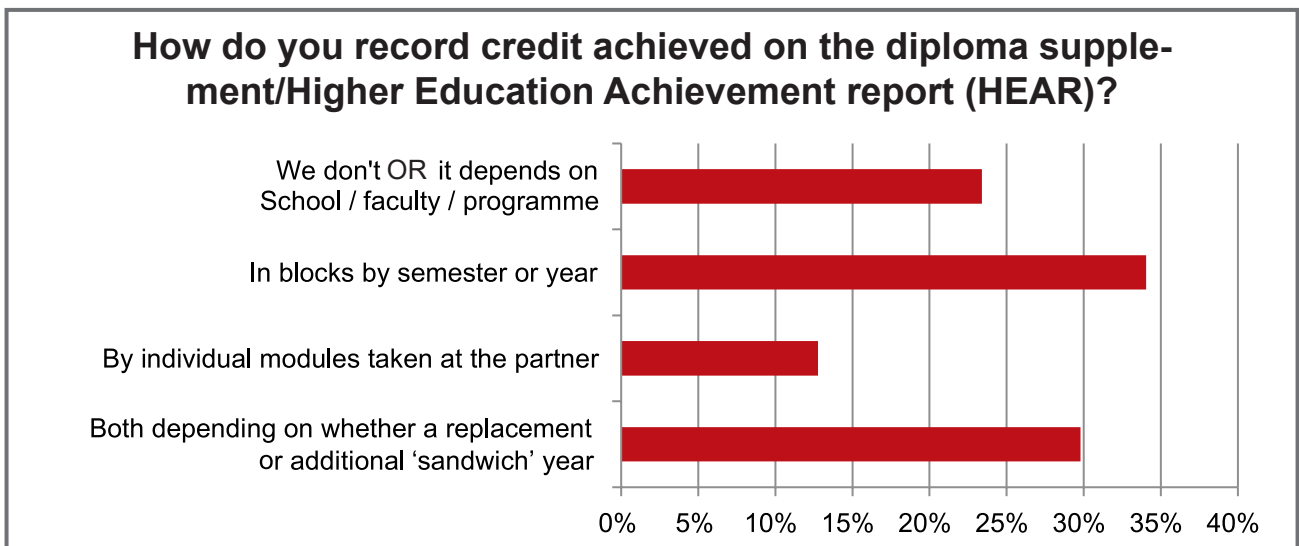
On a related note, a number of UK HEIs recognise outward mobility placements in the degree award titles of their graduating students. 66% of respondents indicated that their HEI did this to some extent. For many, but not all HEIs, this is only the case if a student undertakes a full academic year abroad, and it may also be dependent on the policy of the particular faculty.

Use of the Diploma Supplement or HEAR

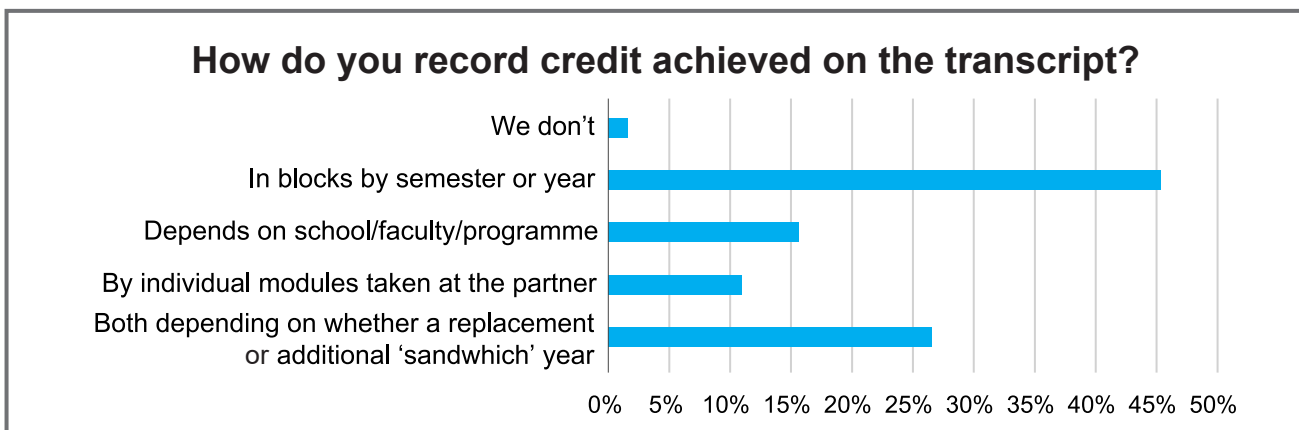
75% of the HEIs who responded to this survey used either the Diploma Supplement or the HEAR. 2% of respondents did not know whether they issued a Diploma Supplement or the HEAR, which means a concerning 23% of HEIs issue neither. Considering the requirements of both the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Erasmus+ programme, these results indicate there is still a substantial amount of work to be undertaken by HEIs in this area.

(The results echo the findings of the 2011 UK Higher Education International Unit European Activity Survey of UK HEIs, which found that of 70 responding HEIs, only 79% then used the Diploma Supplement).

For those HEIs who used either the Diploma Supplement or HEAR, the extent of the information recorded varied. This indicates that a percentage of that 75% may still not record credit from outward mobility placements on the Diploma Supplement or HEAR, even if they do issue one.



In addition to use of the Diploma Supplement or HEAR, we also asked HEIs on their approach to recording credit on student transcripts. Over 95% of HEIs reported doing this, however the way in which they did this varied.



Some commented that the way in which it was recorded depended on the length of the mobility or, alternatively, how they received the transcript. In the case of placements in the USA, some HEIs only receive one grade for the study period as a whole. The use of shell modules, due to an inability to record titles of modules obtained abroad, was commonly referred to.

Barriers

Almost all respondents reported encountering barriers to credit transfer and recognition. These included internal barriers such as:

- Inconsistency in the process within and across departments
- The administrative burden and resource involved in creating and maintaining accurate grade conversion scales
- Issues with internal systems recognising mobility credits
- A lack of buy-in from academic staff, in terms of a lack of belief in the value of mobility, a lack of understanding of the credit transfer system, and a distrust in the grading mechanisms of overseas institutions.

Some respondents also noted a lack of understanding and trust in the process amongst students.

Respondents also identified a number of more technical barriers, including mapping of modules, semester matching, handling failures and deferrals and recognition of credit for awards with professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditations. Some also pointed to difficulties in obtaining information on grade scales from partners, and understanding of credit systems internationally.

It was reported that quality assurance requirements in the UK often appear strict compared to other countries and so contractual requirements are sometimes problematic, including issues around the use of external examiners. Survey responses may also indicate an institutional disconnect between the international or study abroad office and the quality assurance office, resulting in patchy or inconsistent knowledge of quality assurance and study abroad requirements.

In a number of cases, respondents commented that inconsistency across departments has prompted a move to pass/fail systems only.

Common themes amongst responses to this question included:

- No sector-wide grade conversion process
- Lack of consistency across and within departments in how grades are converted
- Issues with using either centralised or decentralised school grade conversion tables
- Issues for joint honours students where schools take different approaches
- Mandatory modules and mapping of modules to ensure that learning outcomes are met
- Calendar structures and matching up of semesters, particularly for institutions with 'long thin' modules and trimesters
- Handling full or partial failures or deferrals
- Recognition of credit for awards with PSRB accreditation
- A perceived difference in ease of acquiring top grades in different regions, and how to allow for cultural/institutional elements of grading



- Acquiring grading scales of partner institution for mobile students
- Lack of consistency in credit systems across host institutions even in same country
- Willingness by academics to accept the value of overseas experience
- Uncertainty and lack of trust from students in the validity of the process and complaints and appeals arising from grade conversion
- Unwillingness of the institution to include overseas credits and mobility on transcripts
- Administrative burden and lack of resource in maintaining accurate conversion scales
- Technical issues with institutional systems not allowing for the recording of overseas credit.

Overcoming barriers

The survey aimed to identify where and how institutions had overcome the barriers referred to above. In just over half the responses, HEIs indicated that they were aware of their institution succeeding in overcoming barriers to transferring and recognising outward mobility credit.

The following suggestions for overcoming barriers were provided by respondents:

- The study abroad programme was centralised and since then all programmes use the same system
- Finding partners offering very similar programmes to their own. In some courses, degree structures have become more flexible to allow students to study abroad
- Taking a flexible approach to modules studied abroad, where possible
- Use of longstanding personal knowledge/expertise of individual academics plus evidence gained from participation in QAA reviews and external validation events
- Regular communication with partners and programme teams in home institution
- Establishing a cross-institutional working group to address the issue, including multi-faculty partners
- Raising awareness of the Erasmus+ programme and global mobility amongst academic and professional services staff across the institution

- Compiling a body of evidence to assist in mapping the grades and a clear procedure for doing so
- The careful selection of partners.
- Recognising credits on a pass/fail basis
- Ensuring that there is consistency in the use of any discretionary range for grade conversion across departments
- Using an enhanced transcript and including the period abroad on transcripts
- Taking a top-down approach, supported by senior management
- Creating conversion tables endorsed by senior management.

Good practice elsewhere in the sector

A number of respondents said that they are not aware of good practices or policies in this area, and that this would be helpful. To help with this, we have provided some examples in the case studies included in this report.

Additionally, there were a number of responses highlighting Egracons, all of which said that they thought it was a good system, but that it was not used in their institution.

A number of respondents were keen to improve their institutional approach to credit transfer and recognition. In order to support this, they requested the sharing of evidence-based examples of good practice which they could use to introduce improvements within their own institutions. Requests were also made to share grade conversion tables.

Though grade transfer is to be recommended, we must recognise that pass/fail does recognise credit and it avoids comparability problems, complaints and appeals. However, this is different from recognition of study abroad in the degree award title.

HEI staff views on credit and grade transfer

As part of the survey, we asked respondents to provide their personal views on whether repatriating both credit and grade from an outward mobility period motivates students. Overall, two thirds of respondents said that they believed that repatriation of credit and grade is a motivation for students. Those who supported both credit and grade repatriation emphasised the impact that this has on the motivation of the learners. Lack of recognition of a student's effort and achievement was also identified as a barrier to mobility - echoed by the European Students Union (ESU) findings, which found that 30% of student unions in Europe identified this as the biggest barrier to mobility.

It is therefore clear that both credit and grade transfer and increased recognition reflect student demand. When students have worked hard, but their grades are not transferred, many feel that their hard work has not been recognised. Additionally, it was suggested that credit and grade transfer normalised the outward mobility experience and demonstrates that the placements have as much academic value as a semester or year at their home institution.

Nevertheless, for many of the respondents, including a number who believed that credit and grade transfer could be a motivation, the most important thing was the transfer of the credit earned, with a number of respondents advocating for a pass/fail system. The main reason given was that credit transfer on a pass/fail model means that the student is incentivised to pass, but not worried about receiving lower grades than they do in the UK. This may be particularly the case when deciding to study in English or in the host country language. The latter is perhaps more beneficial but may impact on the grade achieved. However, if there is no need to pass, it was noted that students did often perform worse on their year abroad.

Where grade transfer is mandatory, respondents were concerned about this having a detrimental effect on the student's wellbeing and the experience while abroad, as students abroad face additional challenges to those who are not mobile, such as adjusting to a new culture. Some reported seeing students becoming 'over-concerned' with performance on their year abroad, thus detracting from the other non-academic benefits of the experience. Others highlighted that while grade transfer can be a motivation to achieve while abroad, it is a hindrance to attracting students to the opportunities in the first place, and can lead to higher incidences of withdrawals, as students become worried that the placement will have a negative impact on their degree outcome.

For a few, neither credit nor grade transfer was seen as necessary - even though credit transfer is a requirement of the ECHE. Reasons given included evidence in their own institution of high numbers of students having a successful year abroad without repatriation of credit or grade, and the concept of mobility placements being experiential rather than academic, or a break from academic pressure at home. In contradistinction to these viewpoints, as another respondent highlighted, an outward mobility period as part of a degree, 'is not a gap year', and there is concern that such a perception can be detrimental to achieving institutional support for these opportunities.



Case studies

CASE STUDY 1: UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Glasgow sought to introduce a process for converting overseas grades to ‘home’ grades that was fair and transparent, and which commanded support from staff and students.

Grade conversion was identified as a significant barrier to mobility exchange: put simply, in most subject areas, this lacked consistency and failed to involve students in processes. The first stage was to gain an awareness of existing practices and perceptions. This indicated a strongly held belief in some subject areas, shared by staff and students, that mobility results in poorer grades. Procedures were also haphazard.

The second stage explored existing conversion protocols. There was an attempt to establish the reliability of conversion protocols by examining the grades awarded by the host university, the converted grades, and the relationship between converted grades with the final grades awarded in the Senior Honours year at Glasgow. This work (which examined the coursework grades of some 300 students of Law over a three year period) was carried out by a graduate in statistics. It resulted in recommendations as to central procedures for data capture and longer term analysis allowing the reliability and validity of conversion tables to be continually assessed.

The third stage was a consultation exercise seeking to promote (a) new processes which stressed efficiency, transparency and fairness and based upon (b) standardised conversion tables, but which (c) were to be considered as starting points only for the conversion process. This approach was based upon longstanding School of Law practice, and which involved ‘self-assessment’ by students. This had been shown to (i) enhance student understanding and ‘buy-in’ by relying upon a system of self-assessment of grade conversion based upon evidence gathering by students themselves; and (ii) to reduce considerably the level of student dissatisfaction by speeding-up the process, reducing administrative burden on staff, and building up a clear picture of assessment outcomes at partner institutions.

The fourth step was the publication of new guidance to staff and to students, and the promulgation of unified conversion tables as starting points for conversion. Centralised guidance is now provided by a grade conversion subcommittee reporting to the Academic Standards Committee which is charged with centralised oversight. Further information can be found on the University of Glasgow website: www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/students/goabroad/semesterorfullyearabroad/.

“The outcome of the reforms was commended as ‘best practice’ by the British Council. Students and staff now have clear guidance on grade conversion, but some misconceptions persist. Nevertheless, those Colleges and subjects that have embraced the reforms are reporting greater uptake of mobility. The tables are available centrally and endorsed by Senate – this has definitely driven a change in culture, and students now actively engage with grade conversion.”

Prof Jim Murdoch, former International Dean: Mobility.

CASE STUDY 2: Liverpool John Moores University

Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) aimed to introduce and formalise an International Mobility Coordinator (IMC) role across the institution with one IMC in every School across every Faculty. The IMCs were to be formally appointed with a minimum number of hours to be assigned the role within the Work Allocation Model.

At a point where LJMU were looking to diversify and significantly increase student mobility uptake it was recognised that academic buy-in and support was paramount in reaching targets and delivering a 'one university' student experience. Some Schools or academic programmes had Erasmus Coordinators in place at the time but the roles and level of activity varied across the University.

The project began in October 2016, with a formal proposal approved at SMT level in February 2017. By September the same year, all 21 IMCs were in post. The Project Lead supplied advertisement emails, role descriptors and proposals for collating interest, including interview questions. Faculty Deans were responsible for ensuring appointments were made and they were encouraged to advertise widely and to hold interviews.

IMCs act as the link between the central study abroad team and the academic departments and programmes. They circulate promotion, approve students' applications for outbound mobility, and liaise with academic programmes regarding the students' grades and attendance records to ensure their suitability for participating in mobility. For Study Abroad, the IMCs work with academic programme leaders to ensure the proposed host is suitable and complete students learning agreements to ensure credit and grade transfer. When students have completed a study abroad period, the IMC collates the transcripts and passes to Registry for conversion.

An IMC Network was set up to support a closer relationship between the central team and the Schools, ensuring sharing of information and feedback at meetings every three months (during term time). The Network enables the IMCs to share best practice, discuss problem cases and build partner knowledge.

LJMU has seen an increase in student awareness, interest and uptake of mobility. The IMCs also function as mobility champions in their Schools and help grow the awareness and understanding of LJMU mobility schemes among their academic colleagues. Establishing the IMC role has allowed for more accurate recording of mobility numbers as well as collection of student feedback for promotional purposes.

"Since being in the role I have been able to signpost, encourage and assist students to engage in a wide variety of international opportunities open to them. Numbers of students applying within our School have subsequently increased and the academic departments are engaging more actively with the international mobility agenda than before."

Paula Baines, IMC for Liverpool Screen School, Liverpool John Moores University

CASE STUDY 3: UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON

The University of Northampton introduced accreditation of short-term mobility programmes through a formalised academic framework.

The Faculty of Education and Humanities has a long history of encouraging students to participate in international mobility opportunities and experiences. This is primarily through the Erasmus+ programme but also through short study trips in international contexts. These shorter enhancement activities are for the most part self-funded but closely linked to the programmes the students are enrolled on and the modules they are studying. Current fieldtrips include those focused on 'Children in Society' in Sweden, 'Alternative Education' in the Netherlands and 'Civil and Human Rights' in Atlanta, Georgia.

The international experiences attract a wide range of students, including those who are also considered important in terms of widening participation.

For many participants, the focus and topics studied are important but also the actual experience itself at a personal level. For some this is their first time travelling as independent travellers, for others the first time without family or children. The international trips are therefore designed to be enhancement activities that give the students a new perspective on their existing studies combined with other social and personal development opportunities.

Faculty staff wanted to explore if these experiences could also be the foundation for accreditation and to feed into a more formalised academic framework. A new module at level 5 was conceived that explicitly recognised the academic potential of these international experiences. The module 'Learning through Educational Visits and Exchanges' was validated and put onto the award map of students on the BA (Hons) Education Studies and BA (Hons) Childhood and Youth programmes. This module awards 10 ECTS and is open to all students who have previously attended one of the international experiences accompanied by faculty staff. It was later extended to incoming Erasmus+ students who were able to reflect upon their experiences in the UK context during their mobility period.

A set of *principles of guided experiential learning* was designated to ensure there was a clear interplay between the international experience and the accredited element namely that the experience must include:

- The opportunity for the student to participate in and experience an activity in a real-life context.
- Clear links to academic considerations underpinned by theory and making links to existing knowledge.
- Close collaboration with academic staff, through guidance and support.

The module enables students who have participated in field trips, study visits or short exchanges outside of their home country to have credit for such experiences. The core of the module was designed to consider this experiential learning in a reflective and critical way, underpinned by academic considerations. The module also provides the learner with the opportunity to examine, analyse and reflect upon specific features of the country visited to allow for international and comparative study. This is done primarily in the context of education, life experience or services for children and young people due to the nature of the programmes the students are studying.

The majority of the module content is delivered through the field trip itself, with support from the accompanying tutor on return - whereby those who choose the module have a short series of seminars that relate to both experiential learning and comparative study. The module acknowledges the importance of experiential learning and in particular experiences undertaken in international contexts. There were a number of important considerations that had to be encountered. These included a clear alignment to the programme learning outcomes, identification of which existing modules would be replaced by the new module and confidence that the international experience meets the principles of experiential learning highlighted above. To this end, close partnerships with academics and professionals from the country and location of the visit were key. It was seen as vital therefore that each field trip takes place in a location where there are existing staff mobility arrangements either through the Erasmus+ scheme or other bilateral arrangements.

Tips from University of Northampton

- Ensure that the accompanying tutor is familiar with the international context and can guide the participants during the international experience
- Develop the narrative of reflection and experiential learning during visits and other aspects of the field trip
- Ensure that staff mobility underpins the international opportunities, is robust and meaningful and seeks reciprocal opportunities.

Annex 1 – Resources

Resource	Link
2012 Bucharest Ministerial Conference of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) , 2012	http://www.ehea.info/cid101043/ministerial-conference-bucharest-2012.html
UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Partnerships , The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), 2018	https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/partnerships
Work Programme of the Bologna Follow-Up Group 2007-2009 on the Europe of Higher Education: Strengthening Pan-European Mobility , European Higher Education Area, 2008	http://www.ehea.info/cid103329/conference-on-student-mobility.html
ECTS Users' Guide , European Higher Education Area, 2015	http://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/index_en.htm and http://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/docs/ects-users-guide_en.pdf
Egracons (European Grade Conversion System)	http://egracons.eu/
The Egracons Grade Conversion Tool , Egracons	https://tool.egracons.eu
Erasmus Charter for Higher Education , European Commission	https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/applicants/higher-education-charter_en
Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2014-2020 Annotated Guidelines , European Commission, 2016	www.erasmusplus.org.uk/file/13472/download
The Erasmus Impact Survey , European Commission, 2014	https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/erasmus-impact-study_en
European Area of Recognition Project	http://eurorecognition.eu/
The European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions , 2nd edition, EAR HEI, 2016	http://eurorecognition.eu/Manual/EAR%20HEI.pdf
Bologna with Student Eyes 2018 – The Final Countdown , European Students Union, 2018	https://www.esu-online.org/publications/bologna-student-eyes-2018-2/

Example UK Diploma Supplement , Europass, 2008	https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/sites/default/files/dsupplementexamples-en_3.pdf
Higher Education Achievement Report	www.hear.ac.uk/about
International mobility in higher education , OECD, 2010	http://www.oecd.org/innovation/policyplatform/48137663.pdf
Beyond the Honours Degree – the Burgess Group Final Report 2007 , Universities UK, 2007	https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/beyond-the-honours-degree-classification-burgess-group.aspx
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Glossary

Glossary of terms

Bologna Process:

The Bologna Process is a mechanism promoting intergovernmental cooperation between 48 European countries in the field of higher education. It introduced a common degree structure in the European Higher Education Area comprising of three cycles, bachelors, masters and doctoral levels, which member states have adopted into their national systems.

Burgess Implementation Steering Group:

In 2007, Universities UK and GuildHE published Beyond the Honours Degree Classification: the Burgess Group final report. This recommended the introduction of a new Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), building upon the European Diploma Supplement, to enable institutions to provide a fuller record of student achievement. The Burgess Implementation Steering Group (BISG) was established by UniversitiesUK and GuildHE to trial the HEAR and make recommendations on implementation. Since then, the BISG has developed, tested and trialed the HEAR in 30 institutions across the UK.

Diploma Supplement:

The Diploma Supplement is a document accompanying a European higher education diploma (degree transcript), providing a standardised description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies completed by its holder.

ECTS percentile scale:

ECTS provides a credit and grading system to facilitate the transfer of academic results (expressed in terms of grades) between different national assessment systems. The ECTS grading scale is based on the class percentile of a student in a given assessment, that is how he/she has performed relative to other students in the same class (or in a significant group of students). It thereby helps the home institution to interpret and transfer grades from partner institutions.

Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE):

The award of an ECHE is a pre-requisite for all higher education institutions located in a Programme Country to participate in Erasmus+ activities – including learning mobility of individuals and/or cooperation for innovation and good practices.

Lisbon Recognition Convention:

The Lisbon Recognition Convention sets standards for the recognition of qualifications. The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region was developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and adopted by national representatives meeting in Lisbon on 8 - 11 April 1997.

Module retrieval:

See retrieval of failure.

PSRB accreditation:

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) are professional and employer bodies, regulators and those with statutory authority over a profession or group of professionals. PSRBs engage with higher education as regulators. They provide membership services and promote the interests of people working in professions; accredit or endorse courses that meet professional standards, provide a route through to the professions or are recognised by employers. (Definition from HESA)

Repatriated study abroad credit:

This is credit which a student has obtained at a partner institution and which the home institution accepts as contributing towards the home degree programme and which is in line with an agreed learning agreement.

Retrieval of failure:

Awarding credits for failed modules/courses if certain conditions are met. This will normally be undertaken at the partner institution as a referred assessment, but it can also be undertaken at the home institution on return from study abroad.

Shell module:

A shell module is a module representing a semester of study (30 ECTS) or a whole year of study (60 ECTS). It will comprise and reflect a collection of modules which are not individually recorded. It is normally used by institutions to record a period of study at a partner institution for an additional (sandwich) year which do not contribute to the degree classification and where it is not required to record individual modules.

Glossary of acronyms

EAR	European Area of Recognition Project
ECHE	Erasmus Charter for Higher Education
Egracons	European Grade Conversion System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ESU	European Student Union
EUA	European University Association
HEAR	Higher Education Achievement Report
HEURO	Association of UK Higher Education European Officers
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
NUCCAT	Northern Universities Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
SEEC	Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer
UNESCO/CEPES	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/Centre Européen pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (now closed)
UUKi	Universities UK International

This report was produced by colleagues from the Erasmus+ UK National Agency, Universities UK International (UUKi) and the Association of UK Higher Education European Officers (HEURO) in September 2019.

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