



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

Common Pitfalls in ECTS and DS Label requirements as they are implemented by HEIs

Dr. Gregory Makrides
Bologna Expert Cyprus
President, European Association of ERASMUS Coordinators

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Introduction

Good and bad practices for ECTS and DS Label applications

- **What are the mistakes? What are the common pitfalls?**
- **Learn from the mistakes, learn from the bad practices!**
If you avoid them you get closer to good practices!



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DS LABEL pitfalls

By section

Section 2

2.3 The University is private and does not explain the type of accreditation is undergone and by whom.



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Section 3

3.1 The precise level of the degree is not specified, that is First Cycle or Second Cycle . Should indicate besides the name of the degree the level.

3.2 The length of a two year programme is exactly 120 ECTS and should not indicate min 120. If a students ends up with say 126 ECTS because s/he takes an additional unit of interest then it is fine but it is an exception to the rule, which appears in the transcript of records.



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3.2 The length of the programme, where possible should be indicated in addition to the number of years with the number of credits

(180 ECTS or 240 ECTS for first cycle, 120 ECTS for second cycle)

3.3 For access requirement to Master it is given the access requirement for the Bachelor. For Master (second cycle), indicate that a first cycle is required or work experience etc.

(p.s. as many universities are trying to make the issuance of the DS automatic they try to minimize the different parameters and make it more standardized....this is where they leave DS with incomplete information and therefore non-transparent)



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DS LABEL pitfalls

Section 4

4.1 not reporting the mode of study.....full time etc

4.2 is often completed to a minimal extent even only providing a web link which is clearly indicated as not acceptable in Annex 3 of the DS application form.

Applicants should follow the spirit of the guidance given for section 4.2 in Annex 2 of the DS application form.



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4.3 The total number of credits is not shown.

- The total number of credits in 4.3 should be shown at the end of the list of units taken.
- While a degree is reported as a four year 240 ECTS credit degree the column in section 4.3 that indicates the ECTS credits adds up to 480 (basically the case belongs to a university that used two type of credit systems, its own and the ECTS...but when you provide a transcript without indicating clearly which of the two credit systems is representing then it becomes misleading information)

Another problem is when failure courses/units/modules are shown in the DS or when repeated units are shown twice with the old and the new grade.



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4.3 The total number of credits is not shown (continued)

- The same problem appears for a 2 year Second Cycle which shows a total number of ECTS in section 4.3 to be 240 instead of 120.
- A case that indicates a two year degree with 90 ECTS shows a total number of ECTS in 4.3 equal to 240 ECTS.
- The distribution of ECTS credits in some DS examples (transcript of records) is not well explained and the total number of ECTS earned credits appear less than the expected total (Master Business Administration). If transfer credit is given or a project is done it should be reflected on the transcript.



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4.3 Other important weakness is that much of the information of the DS Master is given in the national language which may not be accepted if your national language is not a widely European spoken language. The DS is in English and the sub-section . It would have been accepted if indicated “Latin characters giving the sound of the national language”.

- In one of the first cycle transcripts(BA in Nursing) the 2007 Spring appears three times with a total of 55 ECTS. This has to be examined for a possible mistake or further explanation should be given. This may be a problem in the software or the information is entered incorrectly reporting the semester the credits are taken....but certainly such an example is not sent together with a DS Label application.**



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- **In one of the second cycle transcripts (Master in ICT in Learning) there are no four distinct semesters, the 2008 spring appears twice with a total of 60 ECTS credits. This has to be examined for a possible mistake or further explanation should be given.**
- **In some cases Institutions provided a transcript for students receiving a first cycle degree that contained only courses for one academic year. It is likely that this is due to the student being directly entered into the third year of a first cycle degree with recognition of prior learning. This prior learning recognition should be shown on the transcript.**
- **One of the Master degree DS is without 120 ECTS in its transcript even though there is a clear indication that the programme is two years (80 local credits or 120 ECTS). The total does not indicate that the student has graduated, so it is incomplete.**



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- **The transcript does not indicate the semester and year the courses are taken and therefore it provides incomplete information.**
- **A case indicates a two year degree with 90 ECTS . A 90 ECTS Master degree is a Second Cycle degree of one and a half years.**
- **If you have a first cycle degree of 210 ECTS it may be fine as long as you indicate that this is a 3,5 years degree programme, not a 3 year nor a 4 year degree programme.**



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4.4 Mistake in the presentation of the grading scheme, D and D+ are in the wrong place, that is D+ comes before D and not after D in the sequential listing of grades.

Section 5

5.1 Appears empty as I am sure that the students could have access to further studies.

5.2 Professional status is not given the required information. It is given the web page of the university where the information could be found. Not a good practice.



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Section 6

6.1. Additional information, it is written “ Not Applicable” while there is evidence that there was transfer of credit from other institution. As the coding and other info appears different and the other institution name is not provided it is not transparent if the name of the other institution is not mentioned.

Section 7

7.1. No date is added.

The sub-sections of 7 are not presented, which violates the guidelines for the DS structure.

Make sure all sections are shown and make sure you do not make new sections of your own...this is a common structure for all Europe...no changes or re-numbering is allowed.



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Section 8

- The institution may have a special status within the country and at the International Level and the National Structure (Section 8) may not cover it, it is good that an explanation is given but this should have been in addition to the standard Section 8 provided by the Ministry of Education of the country. We advice that in DS both parts are included in Section 8 for better transparency.
- Eventhough this institution has a special status within the country and at the International Level and the National Structure may not cover it, it is good that an explanation is given but this should have been in addition to the standard Section 8 provided by the Ministry of Education of the country. This may be the case for joint degrees when the degree is issued and signed by two universities from two different countries...then the section 8 should include both versions, one from each country that award the joint degree.
- The Section 8 for first cycle is different from the section 8 of second cycle, even though the semester and year of graduation is the same....not possible.

DS General Remarks



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Web based examples of the DS are sometimes missing. In some cases a DS example is provided but not a transcript. In cases where the transcript is not incorporated in section 4.3 within the DS but is attached to the DS it is advised that applicant Institutions provide on their website one single file that contains the DS and the transcript.

- **The phrase “is issued in a widely spoken European language” is not written.**
- **Sections 5 and 6 are switched. New subsections in 2.1 and 7 are added.**
- **The sample put on the website is put after the deadline of 1 October 2012 or it is replaced later as the date on the sample is after 1 October 2012.**
- **The website is not easily accessible in order for users to easily find the information.**
- **The required structure in the DS guidelines is not followed.**

DS General Remarks



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- **The statement that the DS is given automatically and free of charge to all graduates was not found on the suggested website link, nor at copies of DS.**
- **The submitted DS may not include the suggested preamble but in case it is included it has to be almost the same with the suggested one.**
- **The information can easily be found through the link but if one begins from the front page of the website it is not easy to reach the information.**
- **The website during the assessment days in down.**

DS General Remarks



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- **Significant alteration to the preamble which alters its meaning.**
- **No information provided against some sections.**
- **Mixed language in the DS**
- **The public statement does not hold all three postulates: automatically, to all the students, and free of charge;**
- **In some cases pdf file of the filled in example of the DS could not be opened;**



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ECTS Pitfalls

- **No evidence of description of graduation requirements is found.**
- **In the course structure some courses are designated as compulsory and some compulsory-selectable. This is confusing as it is not clear/transparent what it means "compulsory-selectable" and it is not clear how the semester accumulates the 30 ECTS or the 60 ECTS for the year. In the course catalogue, for example in Mathematics, the first semester is constructed with only 25 ECTS and the second with only 24 ECTS, which makes the first year 49 ECTS. If there is an intension to provide selectable course this is missing. Also after the presentation of the six semesters there is a list of courses for which it is not clear how they are linked to the course or whether they are part of selectable.**



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ECTS Pitfalls

- **The degree programmes are not well presented as 60 ECTS per year and 30 ECTS per semester.**
- **The course units are not described with learning outcomes is an analytical approach indicating the work load of the students for each learning outcome. As a consequence there is no evidence how the total ECTS per course is computed and there is no explanation whether this is validated.**
- **The student files of incoming and outgoing students are incomplete. Some learning outcomes are signed after the mobility has started. Some recognition of credits is signed after the issuance of the transcript. In at least one case there is a mismatch of ECTS credits recognized than those shown on the learning agreement without indication of any official and certified modification to the learning agreement.**



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ECTS Pitfalls

Incoming Students:

- **Grading system of applicant institution appears different for incoming students than the one using for its own students. The home grading scheme should be transparent and documented to the incoming students and provide evidence how this is translated to the grades given in the transcript of the incoming students**
- **Poor clear audit trail from the learning agreement to the host transcript to the home transcript. It should be very simple to track each course through this route to see that the codes(if applicable), the titles, the grades, and the credits are preserved. Some Institutions still remove the original title of a course and replace it with something anonymous like "Erasmus module 1". This is not an aide to transparency.**



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ECTS Pitfalls

- There are several examples where the use of more than one credit system leads to confusion and lack of transparency. Where more than one credit system is used all should be shown in all documents.
- Some Institutions do not provide a single clear structure diagram for each study programme and it is only possible to review the whole structure by printing a separate document for each year of study. This does not aid transparency.
- *- For the student mobility it is requested to send examples. One would expect that the examples sent are perfect and ideal cases but not special cases. For example, even if a programme of study is designed at 60 ECTS per year it is possible sometimes for a student to take 54 or 66 ECTS in a year, either by choice or necessity. It is wise not to include such an example in your application for Label.*



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ECTS Pitfalls

- **Translation into English : as the ECTS user Guide suggests, the whole catalogue should be available in a widely spoken language and not just parts of it. Also, it is not wise to make a smaller/shorter version in English.**
- **There should be a better presentation on the way the ECTS credits are allocated to units. Learning outcomes are known to be the tool for this but most ECTS label applicants lack the presentation of Learning Outcomes in an analytical approach with student workload linked to them. It is therefore not clear whether or not the institutions have computed their ECTS allocation based on student workload.**
- **There should be a better evidence on recognition of credits taken at partner institutions.**



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ECTS Pitfalls

- **The web site of many universities do not provide easy access. The links provided in the application take you there immediately but if one begins from the generic front page of the web site of the university it takes quite an effort to find the information. Sometimes the information is given only in the national language, so if a foreign student who may not know the language well is trying to find such information it is impossible.**
- **Little attention paid to ECTS and its proper use like explaining the credit value, credit allocation, recognition procedures. This information is often superficial, quoting the ECTS Users Guide or it is presented as part of a longer document, such as Education and Examination regulations, and is difficult to trace.**
- **It will be helpful if there is a link in the front page of the website of the university indicating clearly a link with may be a title "ECTS-DS" or "ERASMUS" or "MOBILITY"**



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ECTS Pitfalls

- **The applicants did not show the recommended structure for the whole programme, year and semester. It was only the year (sometimes without specification) and the number of credits for the whole academic year was not 60 in most cases. Even the institution with an excellent and user-friendly information database and elaborate course structure diagrammes showed errors in calculations of the total number of credits.**
- **The sample Learning Agreements and Transcripts of Records and Proofs of Recognition were often not signed, dated long after the expected date, not issued by the proper institution and even missing.**
- **The form of Proof of Recognition was different in individual cases and failed to prove the recognition of the study period abroad. It was a separate, partly handwritten document, or in a form of Diploma Supplement or both, sometimes contradictory, with different number of credits recognized and a wrong order of dates. The recognition of the lower number of credits is not explained.**



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ECTS Pitfalls

In Student files:

- **requirement to certify all the copies is not respected;**
- **recognition decisions are not clear. Not clear what will be the final inscriptions in students' records;**
- **students are sent or received with less credits than required, Learning Agreement is signed after the mobility started.**

- **The Course Catalogue does not offer all required information, and the allocation of credits is not clear enough, neither as an overall university process nor at programme level. Clear diagrams showing 60/30/20 would be a major improvement.**

- **Certification of documentation is a requirement when applying for the label, so make the documents in truly certified copies. A photocopy or even a coloured photocopy of the original is not a certified copy.**

ECTS Catalog Requirements

Eligibility Criteria for [DS](#) Label

Eligibility Criteria for [ECTS](#) Label

Assessment Sheet for [DS](#) Label

Assessment Sheet for [ECTS](#) Label

<http://www.muni.cz/>

Two Good examples

MASARYK University, Czech Republic

visit

www.muni.cz

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University of Nicosia, Cyprus

visit

www.unic.ac.cy