

● Implementation of the ECTS system in Polish Technical Universities on the Example of the Technical University of Czêstochowa

Maria NOWICKA-SKOWRON. Janusz SZOPA

Department of Management, Technical University of Czêstochowa

Al. Armii Krajowej 19 b, 42-200 Czêstochowa, Poland

Fax +48-34-3613876,, Tel +48-34-3250395, e-mail grabara@kki.net.pl

Abstract: The Erasmus Program has proved that studies carried out abroad are the best way for becoming acquainted with other countries, languages, cultures and views, but they also have increasingly important influence on the progress of scientific and professional career.

The acknowledgement of the period of studies done abroad and diplomas obtained from foreign colleges and universities remains still a problem on the way to create "Europe without borders" in the sphere of education and training, in which teachers and students could move without obstacles. To this end, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) project has been developed aiming at improving the procedure of acknowledging studies done abroad. The European Commission included the ECTS into the Socrates scheme dealing with higher education.

The ECTS enables the principles of doing and completing studies to be stated in a clear manner, thus facilitating the broadening of the educational offer for students.

As for a technical university, such as the Technical University of Czêstochowa, the implementation of the ECTS is quite complex. At the initial stage of implementation works, a range of problems was found to occur. The primary problem was to assign separate system of credits for engineering and economics branches. The second difficulty, which is much more serious because of being inherent in the attitude of lecturers, is the traditional system of credits that has been built for decades.

That is why the Technical University of Czêstochowa has chosen a project of gradual approaching the ECTS in the already existing branches. On the other hand, branches that have been established since the year 2000, such as computer science and econometry, have programs fully complying with the ECTS requirements in their foundations.

The current paper presents the principles and mode of preparing and implementing the ECTS in a technical university.

Keywords: ECTS, Technical University of Czestochowa

1. Introduction

● The European Community propagates inter-university cooperation as an activity in students and university interest to expect improvement of education quality. The organisation also promotes students' exchanges, which is regarded as a basic element in the cooperation between universities. Erasmus Programme shows that foreign studies are especially valuable: it's not only the best way to get to know others countries, outlooks, languages and cultures, but also an essential element in building scientific and professional career.

Academic recognition by partner universities is a preliminary condition to create open, European educational and training sphere, in which students and teachers may move without any restrictions. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was created in order to implement the above-mentioned idea. ECTS is a pilot undertaking formed within the frameworks of Erasmus Programme in order to promote inter-university academic recognition of foreign study. Outdoor ECTS's assessments showed significant potential of this system. The European Commissions decided to include ECTS to Socrates Programme, in Section I dealing with higher education. Elements of ECTS were created, completely tested and worked out within the confines of the pilot undertaking conducted by 145 European universities from all member countries and EFTA countries.

From the 1998/99 academic year Poland was included to SOCRATES – ERASMUS Programme. In practice it means that a Polish student after succeeded first year of study can continue studying at the same faculty at whichever university of each EU country on the same rights as students from the Union. At the same time students

from the European Union would study on the same rights at Polish universities. Aforementioned programme makes possible academic teachers exchanges and one or two – term students outgo to co-operating foreign universities in order to do there a part of study. ECTS – worked out within the confines of Erasmus Programme - has served to this purpose. It's a system, which helps engaged educational institutions in students' exchange to organise and particularly to fit programme of study of outgoing student and to complete at home university the part of study done abroad. The crucial condition for full development of this form of education is complete academic recognition of study period done abroad and gained diplomas. The worked out project is also to help Polish students studying at the same faculty in Polish universities which are introducing ECTS system. Complete academic recognition means that the study period done abroad or at other Polish universities substitutes for comparable study period done at home university regardless of differences in contents' programmes. ECTS is based on mutual trust between co-operating universities and each university (each department, institute) chooses partner for such co-operation.

Introduction of Credit Transfer System is a basic condition for applying for accreditation by the departments and institutes. On behalf of every university, this includes Technical University of Czêstochowa, institutional co-ordinator responsible for introducing ECTS applies to the European Commission for granting the measures to put this system into practice. The European Commission grants measures for university to implement the system in a certain academic year. It involves necessity to take up works at all faculties. Granted measures permit to train people who introduce this system and execute it every day. From these measures ECTS information packages at the reformed department might be financed. Such as essential are meetings of a leading group, so during the process of introducing the system at university level an important element will be meetings all qualified ECTS co-ordinators with all who are responsible for educational system. Students representation should also be included in works on the new system– because these new rules and new possibility concern students. Lack of introduction of the ECTS system would make difficult or even prevent willing students to undertake studies abroad, to have them recognised and gained scores. This system, beside above-mentioned advantages, gives students possibility of seeing others European countries, getting to know their cultures and customs and also improving the knowledge of foreign languages. It often happens that studies abroad give possibility of better views concerning contacts and further professional work.

In our opinion ECTS implemented in the right way makes possible widely comprehended development and far going abilities for students.

2. Implementation of resolutions considering introducing ECTS at Technical University of Czêstochowa.

Currently at our university ECTS was introduced at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and the Faculty of Environmental Protection and Engineering. At the beginning of 90-s initiatives concerned restructuring of the higher educational system in the East and Central Europe were supported by the activities of European Union within the confines of Tempus Programme. Aforementioned support assumes grants, that means financial measures allocated for the implementation of specific tasks connected with widely comprehended reform of higher education system.

These grants were allocated after competition results, i.e. acceptance of submitted application forms (proposals) where positive notes from the European Commission experts were required [1]. In 1997, as a result of common initiation, Thermal Mechanics Institute and Department of Heating, Ventilation and Atmosphere Protection prepared project: "Foundation and development of a new programme of education in the field of power engineering" and successfully applied for the grant. Above-mentioned project implies an initiative of a new speciality mutual for both departments and it permits for using their common scientific and teaching potential. The education on this speciality will be done in the form of so- called Y system, that means after the 5th term students can choose one of the two forms of study continuation, namely 3,5 – 4 years engineering studies or 5 years master studies. Significant element of this project, proclaiming one of the requirements of financing it, is participation of partners from European Union Member States. Earlier international contacts of aforementioned institutes allowed including to the project such institutions as The Saloniki University from Greece and University College Cork from Ireland. Those universities adopted the role of partner institutions offering help in implementation of the project. The European Union accepted project of creating a new speciality (ENERGY ENGINEERING) and admitted finance for its implementation till the end of 2000 year.

Students of a new-found speciality are educated in the field connected with such subjects which integrate traditional power engineering within environment protection issues. These studies have interdisciplinary character, because they are conducted by two different faculties of our university. Fundamental purpose of the project is an initiation a pilot form of education consistent with EU standards and one of the most crucial activity form is students exchange between Technical University of Czêstochowa and partner universities in Greece and Ireland. An experimental 20-

person group made up from students from the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and the Faculty of Environmental Protection and Engineering was set up in the first year of the project's realisation. In the following years the number of students participating in this project will be increasing. During the third year of study the students take part in an intensive English course financed by the European Union measures and also participate in lectures leading in English by technical university teachers. ECTS will be used at the Technical University of Czestochowa for academic recognition of study periods spent at partner institutions abroad.

Introduction of the aforementioned system at Technical University of Czestochowa within the confines of Energy Engineering speciality is one of the aim of the Tempus project, because it permits in practice to organise free transfer of students to all universities in Europe. Students exchange has bilateral character; students will have a chance to gain education on the comparable level with the European universities. All costs of intensive language courses (12 hours per week), travel, students and teachers' stays abroad are covered by the European Union from PHARE – TEMPUS fund.

3. General information about the European Credit Transfer System

ECTS was elaborate under the auspices of European Commission in order to initiate common procedures that aim to academic recognition at home institution (sending institution) study period done abroad at host institution (receiving institution) [2]. The European Credit Transfer System proclaims system, which helps measure and compare the students' achievements in the science and afterwards transforms for the standards are in force in particular coordinating universities. This system can be used in the field of one university, between universities within one country or coordinating universities from different countries. ECTS system is based on three main elements:

- namely information (of curriculum and of the student's learning performance),
- agreement on the curriculum (between the cooperating university and the students),
- using ECTS scores (determining the "amount" of student's workload in order to obtain a credit).

Those three basic elements come into force through three crucial documents:

- information package,
- learning agreements,
- transcript of records.

First of all the European Credit Transfer System is bringing into effect through students, lecturers and institutions that expect the foreign studies will be an integral part of education. ECTS does not in itself regulate in any way contents, structure or equivalence of study programme. All these issues relate to quality and have to be decided internally by the universities themselves when establishing a satisfactory basis for bilaterally or network coordination agreements [3].

Code of appropriate proceeding as ECTS is, equips the sides of agreements with tools, which make possible to obtain the clarity and give the basis to mutual credits recognition. Full credits recognition is *conditio sine qua non* for students' exchange within the confines of Socrates and Erasmus Programmes. Full credits recognition means that the study period spent at foreign studies (including exams and others form of grades) regards as an equivalent of comparable study period at home university (including exams and others form of grades), besides that contents of learning curriculum including in agreement can differ from each other.

The using of ECTS system is freely and it actives on mutual trust rules to academic standards of partner universities. Each institution itself chooses partners. The European Credit Transfer System makes possible to obtain the clarity of system through using:

- ECTS credits – which are number values grades attribute to individual courses to show a student's workload to success those courses,
- information package including written information for students and university's workers about university, departments, institutes, organisation and structure of studies,
- transcripts of records – which show progress in science done by students in entirely and universally way and also possible to transfer from one university to the other,
- learning agreements – are subjected by study programmes and ECTS credits.

To transfer the information and flexibility are indispensable for recognising the achievement in graduated or leaded foreign studies. ECTS' coordinators have to fulfil the crucial issues, because administrative and academic sides of ECTS belong to their duties.

However, changing university student should have an access to every kind of courses, including doctoral seminars offered at the department. Above-mentioned student should have possibility to participate in general offered courses, not only courses special made for incoming students.

The European Credit Transfer System enables to extend the foreign study period. According to ECTS student wouldn't have to come back to home university after finishing fixed visit period; he/ she may stay at host institution in order to achieve the scientific degree or even change for the other university. It's in university hands gives assent for staying here longer or disagree for it, and also determining the conditions which student have to fulfil to change the university or to get its diploma.

ECTS system will help the students of the Technical University of Czêstochowa to have their achievements in learning acknowledged, by transforming them into understandable to all "measures" – with scores and grades – and will also facilitate "translation", i.e. the appropriate interpretation of rules applicable in the higher education system of other countries.

4. References

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