



# ECHE Monitoring Guide for Erasmus+ National Agencies



## ERASMUS CHARTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION 2014-2020

The European Commission hereby awards this Charter to:

### HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

#### The Institution undertakes to respect the following principles:

- Respect in full the principles of non-discrimination set out in the Programme and ensure equal access and opportunities to mobile participants from all backgrounds.
- 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).
- Charge no fees, in the case of credit mobility, to incoming mobile students for tuition, registration, examinations or access to laboratory and library facilities.

The institution further undertakes to:

#### - When Participating in Mobility Activities - Before Mobility

- Publish and regularly update the course catalogue on the website of the institution well in advance of the mobility periods, so as to be transparent to all parties and allow mobile students to make well-informed choices about the courses they will follow.
- Carry out mobility only within the framework of prior agreements between institutions. These agreements establish the respective roles and responsibilities of the different parties, as well as their commitment to shared quality criteria in the selection, preparation, reception and integration of mobile participants.
- Ensure that outgoing mobile participants are well prepared for the mobility, including having attained the necessary level of linguistic proficiency.
- Ensure that student and staff mobility for education or training purposes is based on a learning agreement for students and a mobility agreement for staff validated in advance between the home and host institutions or enterprises and the mobile participants.
- Provide assistance related to obtaining visas, when required, for incoming and outgoing mobile participants.
- Provide assistance related to obtaining insurance, when required, for incoming and outgoing mobile participants.
- Provide guidance to incoming mobile participants in finding accommodation.

#### During Mobility

- Ensure equal academic treatment and services for home students and staff and incoming mobile participants.
- Integrate incoming mobile participants into the institution's everyday life.
- Have in place appropriate mentoring and support arrangements for mobile participants.
- Provide appropriate linguistic support to incoming mobile participants.

#### After Mobility

- Accept all activities indicated in the learning agreement as counting towards the degree, provided these have been satisfactorily completed by the mobile students.
- Provide incoming mobile participants and their home institutions with transcripts containing a full, accurate and timely record of their achievements at the end of their mobility period.
- Support the reintegration of mobile participants and give them the opportunity, upon return, to build on their experiences for the benefit of the institution and their peers.
- Ensure that staff are given recognition for their teaching and training activities undertaken during the mobility period, based on a mobility agreement.

#### - When Participating in European and International Cooperation Projects -

- Ensure that cooperation leads to sustainable and balanced outcomes for all partners.
- Provide relevant support to staff and students participating in these activities.
- Exploit the results of the projects in a way that will maximise their impact on individuals and participating institutions and encourage peer learning with the wider academic community.

#### - For the Purposes of Visibility -

- Display this Charter and the related Erasmus Policy Statement prominently on the institution's website.
- Promote consistently activities supported by the Programme, along with their results.

*On behalf of the institution, I recognise that implementation of the Charter will be monitored and that violation of any of the above principles and commitments may lead to its withdrawal by the European Commission.*

-signed-

Prof. xxx  
Legal representative  
Erasmus Code

The present ECHE Monitoring Guide has been prepared for the Erasmus+ National Agencies to support them in their ECHE monitoring responsibilities.

The ECHE Monitoring Guide is made public to ensure transparency and to provide information on the ECHE monitoring to higher education institutions, students, academic and non-academic staff and other stakeholders.

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**ECHE Monitoring Guide**  
*for Erasmus+ National Agencies*



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## Introduction

### The role of the ECHE

The **Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE)** provides the general quality framework for European and international cooperation activities a higher education institution may carry out within Erasmus+. The award of an ECHE is a pre-requisite for all higher education institutions located in a Programme country and willing to participate in learning mobility of individuals and/or cooperation for innovation and good practices under Erasmus+.

In addition, the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) is vital for encouraging excellence in European universities' internationalisation policies and the concrete execution of their mobility activities. As a tool, the ECHE has particular power, in that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in "Programme Countries" wishing to participate in Erasmus+ must first apply for it and then obtain it. In addition, HEIs in "Partner Countries" wishing to participate in Erasmus+ individual mobility must also guarantee that they will apply the principles it contains.

The principles underlying the ECHE are not new. They reiterate and build on the rules, the use of the tools and the institutional orientation elaborated over the last decades in order to ensure transparency, fairness, and effectiveness in the organisation of student mobility. The ECHE represents a development and further definition of the previous Erasmus University Charter, which also stated the basic rules that HEIs were held to apply in order to ensure quality mobility and recognition.

In addition to clarifying further the Erasmus principles, the ECHE also introduces a new dimension with respect to the previous EUC. The application and award process explicitly aims at greater involvement of each HEI and its staff in fostering an institutional culture of strategic thinking, transparency, fairness and effectiveness in internationalisation, rather than promoting simplistic adherence to formal rules. HEIs that apply successfully for the Charter not only promise to abide by those rules: they must also describe their own internationalisation strategy and formulate it convincingly as their "Erasmus Policy Statement" (EPS), publish it and stand by it. They must also specify how they comply with the ECHE principles.

### Aims and limits of this manual

In harmony with the aim of the ECHE to involve various actors in each HEI in a proactive effort to enhance the quality of their internationalisation and modernisation strategies including mobility, the **ECHE: make it work for you!** tool is being developed in order to involve key figures (e.g. rectors, Erasmus+ coordinators, international office staff (IROs)) in active reflection on how to improve their international dimension by **self-evaluating** their current practices with respect to what they have promised in applying for the ECHE.

However, the task of monitoring and promoting the compliance with the ECHE of the HEIs that have already obtained it, is entrusted to the Erasmus+ National Agencies of the Programme Countries. The aim of the present manual is to provide a set of agreed guidelines and examples of good practice for the use of National Agencies.

This manual has been prepared by a working group formed of experts from HEIs and National Agencies, including Bologna experts and ECTS/DS counsellors. Our objective has been to provide guidelines which are **reasonable, clear, fair, practical and helpful** in promoting the excellence of Erasmus+ mobility.

We understand that this means ensuring that the HEIs that have received the Charter actually abide by what they have promised. Although in some countries the Erasmus+ National Agency may have a broader mandate for enhancing their HE systems in general, this is not universally the case, and this manual focusses on **specific ECHE-related checks and suggestions for enhancing compliance** in a positive direction.

The ECHE working group understands that monitoring and ensuring compliance will rarely be a case of black and white, “yes, you’re perfect/no, you’re out”. It is foreseen that the HEIs will be **progressively encouraged to improve where deficiencies are found**, and that only those who do not improve will eventually be excluded from the ECHE, and hence from Erasmus+.

Under these circumstances, the monitoring processes should be **limited** to issues directly connected to the application of ECHE principles and to HEIs and compliance with them; **objective**, based on clearly established parameters; and **gradual**: that is increasingly rigorous over the period of years for which the present Charter is valid (up to 2020).

## Applicability

These **ECHE Guidelines** are to be followed by all National Agencies in order to supplement the “technical instructions for primary checks” for Erasmus+ Checks for Grant Beneficiaries and the recommendations of the **ECTS Users’ Guide 2015**.

# Chapter 1 – The principles: priorities and timeline

## 1.a) The ECHE principles

The ECHE “principles” are listed under 6 headings. The first are the “Fundamental Principles” with which the institutions promise to:

*Respect in full the principle of non-discrimination set out in the Programme and ensure equal opportunities to mobile participants from all backgrounds.*

*Ensure full recognition for satisfactorily completed activity of study mobility and, where possible, traineeship in terms of credits awarded (ECTS or compatible system).*

*Ensure inclusion of satisfactorily completed study and/or traineeship mobility activities in the final record of student achievements (Diploma Supplement or equivalent)*

*Charge no fees, in the case of credit mobility, to incoming mobile students for tuition, registration, examinations or access to laboratory and library facilities.*



The next three groups (C3, C4, and C5 in the ECHE Application form; section "F. Quality Questions" in the Application form for mobility between Programme and Partner Countries) contain specific promises regarding mobility: Before mobility, during and after mobility:

### **Before mobility**

*Publish and regularly update the course catalogue on the website of the institution well in advance of the mobility periods, so as to be transparent to all parties and allow mobile students to make well-informed choices about the courses they will follow.*

*Carry out mobility only within the framework of prior agreements between institutions. These agreements establish the respective roles and responsibilities of the different parties, as well as their commitment to shared quality criteria in the selection, preparation, reception and integration of mobile participants.*

*Ensure that outgoing mobile participants are well prepared for the mobility, including having attained the necessary level of linguistic proficiency.*

*Ensure that student and staff mobility for education or training purposes is based on a learning agreement for students and a mobility agreement for staff validated in advance between the home and host institutions or enterprises and the mobile participants.*

*Provide assistance related to obtaining visas, when required, for incoming and outgoing mobile participants,*

*Provide guidance to incoming mobile participants in finding accommodation.*

### **During mobility:**

*Ensure equal academic treatment and services for home students and staff and incoming mobile participants.*

*Integrate incoming mobile participants in the institution's everyday life.*

*Have in place appropriate mentoring and support arrangements for mobile participants.*

*Provide appropriate linguistic support to incoming mobile participants.*

### **After mobility:**

*Accept all activities indicated in the learning agreement as counting towards the degree provided these have been satisfactorily completed by the mobile students.*

*Provide incoming mobile participants and their home institutions with transcripts*

*containing a full, accurate and timely record of their achievements at the end of their mobility period.*

*Support the reintegration of mobile participants and give them the opportunity, upon return, to build on their experiences for the benefit of the institution and their peers.*

*Ensure that staff is given recognition for their teaching and training activities undertaken during the mobility period, based on a mobility agreement.*

*Two final categories are those regarding cooperation projects and visibility:*

*When participating in European and international cooperation projects:*

*Ensure that cooperation leads to sustainable and balanced outcomes for all partners.*

*Provide relevant support to staff and students participating in these activities.*

*Exploit the results of the projects in a way that will maximize their impact on individuals and participating institutions and encourage peer learning with the wider academic community.*

#### **For the purposes of visibility:**

*Display the Charter and the related Erasmus Policy Statement prominently on the Institution's website.*

*Promote consistently activities supported by the Programme, along with their results.*

*Furthermore each HEI has had to formulate their "Erasmus policy statement" which (as mentioned in the first visibility principle) states their individual overall orientation and aims.*

#### **1.b) The priorities: the "Pressure Points"**

In theory, each Charter holding institution is obliged to comply with **all** the principles. In fact, in order to obtain the Charter each HEI had to explain how it applies each principle.

However, in order to organise a meaningful monitoring process which will become progressively more stringent in the future, the most urgent priorities must be identified, whereas further aspects will be emphasized in the coming years. The current manual therefore addresses the grant agreements of the first Erasmus+ calls being currently implemented. Further editions will be released at a later stage.

As can be seen from the above, many – not all – of the principles regard mobility. Although the ECHE includes other important aspects as well, we consider that **the central objective of the ECHE and all related tools is to guarantee, improve and enhance the quality of individual mobility**. Therefore, our most urgent efforts

should be dedicated to monitoring and improving compliance in key areas which affect the functioning of Erasmus+ mobility.

In order to do this, we have identified a certain number of "Pressure Points", compliance with which is necessary in order to make individual mobility work. In the interests of the students, we identify the following as the most urgent priorities:

- Course Catalogues
- Recognition
- Information on grading systems and grade transfer (including grade distribution tables)

The three priorities are closely related, in fact connected to one another. Smooth recognition depends on the existence of course catalogues so that the learning agreement tables A and B can be filled out properly before mobility takes place; transcripts of records must be issued promptly and correctly, and must include proper information on credits and grades so that recognition can take place. The ultimate aim is to make mobility smooth and enhance its relevance for the learner.

These priorities are referred to in several of the Principles:

#### **Course catalogue:**

*"Publish and regularly update the course catalogue on the website of the institution well in advance of the mobility periods, so as to be transparent to all parties and allow mobile students to make well-informed choices about the courses they will follow."*

This principle objective is to ensure transparency with regard to the offer of learning/teaching opportunities for mobile students. This means ensuring that the HEIs' offer is presented in a timely manner and includes all the necessary information; in other words that course catalogues should be made and made available according to ECTS rules, as contained in the ECTS Users' Guide 2015.

#### **Recognition:**

*"Ensure full recognition for satisfactorily completed activity of study mobility and, where possible, traineeship in terms of credits awarded (ECTS or compatible system)."*

*"Ensure that student ... mobility for education or training purposes is based on a learning agreement for students ... validated in advance between the home and host institutions or enterprises and the mobile participants."*

*"Accept all activities indicated in the learning agreement as counting towards the degree provided these have been satisfactorily completed by the mobile students."*

*"Provide incoming mobile participants and their home institutions with transcripts containing a full, accurate and timely record of their achievements at the end of their mobility period."*

Recognition is a complex process, which can only take place correctly when a number of pre-conditions have been fulfilled. Recognition depends on ensuring that the new learning agreements are being used correctly, starting with the careful elaboration and

signing by the three parties of tables A and B, prior to mobility; that transcripts of records including appropriate information on learning outcomes, volume of workload (credits), grades and the information necessary to interpret them are furnished quickly by the host institution, so that recognition can take place, and proof of recognition by the home institution of credits and grades (where appropriate) can be given; there should also be a clear and easy path for students to have recourse in case there are difficulties in recognition.

### **Information on grade systems and grade transfer (including grade distribution tables):**

The use of ECTS grade distribution tables is not foreseen specifically in the Charter principles. However the current 'State-of-the-art' in recognition (new ECTS Users Guide 2015 as well as 2009 edition) foresees such tables, or at the very least, full and accurate information on the grading system and grade transfer used, so as to facilitate home institutions in recognising (and registering) the work done abroad in an appropriate way.

This means that this priority is a consequence of the principle already mentioned above:

*"Provide incoming mobile participants and their home institutions with transcripts containing a full, accurate and timely record of their achievements at the end of their mobility period."*

The Inter-institutional Agreement recommends that full information on the grading system and grade transfer is included. Grade distribution tables should be provided with the transcript of records (table C of the learning agreement). Some countries consider their grading system or culture unsuited to the present ECTS grade distribution table system. Nonetheless, we consider this a priority because many HEIs that do use numerical grading systems, and could furnish the tables, do not do so, making it very difficult for their mobility partners to make use of their own grade distribution tables. In other words, this is a real bottle-neck for recognition and needs to be addressed. HEIs, which do not provide grade distribution tables with the transcript of records, should foresee it in the inter-institutional agreements or inform the partner HEI, where information for the grade conversion / transfer can be found on their website / course catalogue. Countries that do not use numerical grades obviously will not provide tables, but they should provide full information about their system so that their partners can go forward.

### **1.c) The timeline for the future**

The above three "pressure" or "priority points" constitute the first matters to be addressed in **ECHE compliance monitoring and enhancement**.

The other principles are often easier to address, and do not constitute particular problems for the National Agencies. Some are quite simple, such as the principles of visibility. These have already been checked by most National Agencies, and can easily be checked by everyone. Other principles, although as complex and important as the "pressure points", will be prioritised in the coming years as follows:

### 2<sup>nd</sup> edition:

- Support to students including logistics, linguistic support and counselling as well as correct grant payment procedures
- Traineeship mobility
- Inclusion and equal opportunities in access to mobility

### 3<sup>rd</sup> edition:

- Recognition of staff mobility as well as valorisation of staff and students' experience after mobility
- Participation in cooperation programmes
- Inter-institutional agreements and their management

Many of these priorities are also suitable for objective checks, and the checks can be targeted using such collateral tools as the mobility reports, to which the NAs will have access.

## **Chapter 2 – Tools and Guidelines**

### **Tools and guidelines available during the project life-cycle of KA 1 Mobility with both Programme and Partner countries (KA103 and KA107)**

The NAs have numerous opportunities to measure or to influence compliance with the ECHE in a positive direction. Below we indicate many of these opportunities.

#### **1. Application for ECHE including the Erasmus Policy Statement**

The Erasmus Policy Statement (EPS) is the most specific and 'personalised' statement of what the HEI promises to do, and what its internationalisation policy within Europe and beyond is. If the organisation has updated the EPS during the Erasmus+ Programme lifecycle, it should have placed the new EPS on its website and should have informed its national agency.

In addition, in the other parts of the application, which are available to the NAs in CircABC<sup>1</sup>, HEIs have had to make explicit how they address compliance with the ECHE principles. HEIs should thereby have taken the annotated ECHE guidelines into consideration.

#### **2. Comments from the evaluators on the ECHE applications**

When each application was evaluated, the experts made decisions on whether to award the Charter *conditionally* or with the promise and expectation that any small defects will be remedied.

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<sup>1</sup> [EUROPA > European Commission > CIRCABC > Education and Culture > E+, LLP, YiA National Agencies > Library > Erasmus+ > Contractual and financial management > Erasmus Charter for Higher Education Monitoring](#)

In all cases, the experts' comments and advice can be a starting point for examining compliance. Each NA can find the comments of the experts for their respective HEIs (if applicable) in CircABC in the same folder as the application forms.

### 3. All applications for funding under Erasmus+ and inter-institutional agreements for mobility between Programme and Partner Countries

To apply for Erasmus+ actions HEIs must have been awarded the ECHE. The applications may yield indications about how the principles are being applied. In particular, in the case of KA107 mobility, HEIs must answer questions which are relevant to the ECHE implementation and funds are allocated based on that qualitative assessment.

HEIs established in a Partner Country are not eligible to receive an ECHE, but they commit themselves to respecting the same principles and quality requirements when they sign inter-institutional agreements with their peers in Programme Countries. Before the mobility activity can take place, HEIs must sign these inter-institutional agreements.

### 4. Grant agreements under Erasmus+

When the HEI signs any grant agreement under Erasmus+, it must once again explicitly declare that it will respect the ECHE principles (article I.1.3). Still, it may be that HEIs sign the grant agreement without being fully aware of the significance of the signature. **We recommend that the NAs include in the notification letter that signing the Grant Agreement obliges the HEI to follow the ECHE principles.**

Proposed text to be added to the notification letter when sending the grant agreement

May we remind you that when applying for the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education and after having been awarded with your Charter in XXX, you have committed your higher education institution to comply with the principles of the Charter.

### 5. Interim reports

Since the interim reports on KA103 and KA107 contracts include only quantitative (statistical and financial) data, they may not yield indications about ECHE compliance, although in some cases difficulties may be identified.

### 6. Monitoring visits

There are several situations in which the National Agency might decide that a monitoring visit is called for or opportune. For example:

- If the HEI requests it
- For newcomers in the actions
- In parallel with system checks

- For HEIs that didn't participate in the coordinators' meeting or other events

When serious concerns have been expressed by Erasmus+ mobility participants

In each of these cases, the visit might also make it possible to see whether the course catalogues are in place, whether the learning agreement is being used properly, and whether the information provided on the local grading system includes grade distribution tables, and in general is sufficient, accurate and in line with the ECTS Users' Guide 2015. It can also be an occasion for discussing and clarifying what ECHE compliance implies.

For a further discussion of monitoring visits, please see below, Chapter 3, "Suggestions for monitoring visits".

## **7. Participants' report (EU survey)**

In the 'EU survey', the NAs will find out whether the mobile students have indicated that they have received academic recognition and whether the information before mobility was appropriate (i.e. an updated course catalogue in an accessible language was available) both at the sending and the receiving institution. In case problems are identified the NA can contact the HEI and ask for explanation. It is important to bear in mind, that when the student writes the initial participant report (EU survey), there may not have been sufficient time for recognition procedures by the home HEI to be finalised. In these cases, students will have the possibility to fill in an additional survey on recognition at a later stage.

## **8. Final beneficiaries' reports on KA1 actions**

When the aggregate data of the EU survey becomes available in the final beneficiary's report, it will be evident whether there is significant non-compliance. When the NAs assess the reports they will naturally evaluate compliance with the ECHE priorities. For example in section 5 (implementation of the project) and Section 9 (compliance with the ECHE), special attention should be given to the three ECHE compliance pressure points / priorities discussed in these Guidelines. When there is clear divergence between the answers in the final report on the one hand, and, on the other, the results of the participant reports and the HEI cannot explain the difference in a satisfactory way, the procedure outlined in Chapter 4 should be followed.

## **9. Desk / financial checks (after the action)**

For detailed information on how to select the HEIs to be checked, please consult the NA guide, technical instructions. During desk checks, elements of ECHE compliance should be considered as well. The HEI will by definition have agreed to comply with all of the ECHE principles. In the current phase, emphasis should be on the three priorities indicated in this manual while discrepancies in the other principles can be spotted as well.

## **10. On-the-spot checks (during / after)**

On-the spots are not mandatory, but may be decided during (in the case of KA107) or after both mobility actions. On the spot checks during the implementation of KA107 projects are specially recommended if concerns are raised or if there has been an



exchange of information on risk and problem cases between NAs, EACEA, DG EAC and EU Delegations. In that case the checks can be used to verify ECHE compliance.

### **11. Systems' checks**

Please refer to the NA Guide for the obligations NAs have towards systems' checks.

To check ECHE compliance, special attention should be given to the ECHE monitoring priorities: recognition, course catalogue, grade distribution table.

### **12. Individual complaints and desk monitoring**

The regular contact between NAs and HEIs is called desk monitoring and includes responding to queries by email and phone. In addition, NAs are often reference points for individual complaints, many of which may alert them to problems in ECHE compliance. For example, these might be complaints about misleading or inadequate information in the course catalogue, complaints about recognition including grades. In such cases the NA will follow up the complaint, asking for the viewpoint of the sending and receiving institutions, to verify whether the complaint is justified and give appropriate follow-up. It is recommended to establish a registry of complaints, where NAs can provide the information about the complaint, all the details and actions taken and record the follow-up.

### **13. Coordinators' meetings**

Some NAs engage in thematic monitoring, and organise meetings with Erasmus+ Coordinators on specific themes. Such meetings provide a good platform for sharing good practices on the chosen ECHE priorities (Transparency (course catalogue), recognition, grade distribution tables). Coordinators who are unaware of what they have promised or uncertain about how to implement the principles can be informed about the use of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) transparency tools (ECTS Users' Guide, learning agreements, diploma supplement, grade distribution tables, course catalogue) and understand how their proper use will allow them to comply with the ECHE priorities.

It is good practice where possible to involve experts in HE modernisation ('Bologna' experts if available and HEREs in relevant Partner Countries<sup>2</sup>) in such meetings. (see an example of a presentation in the reference section).

For a road map for dealing with problem cases, see below, Chapter 4.

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<sup>2</sup> HEREs exist in Western Balkans, Neighbouring Countries, Russia and Central Asia (Regions 1,2,3,4 and 7 of the Erasmus+ Programme Guide).



## Chapter 3 – Best Practice for site visits

### Suggestions for monitoring visits

#### Introduction and objective of the visits

The Agreement between the NA and the European Commission obliges the National Agency to monitor the implementation of the Erasmus+ projects as well as carry out checks (guide for NAs guidelines III.10 – check of grant beneficiaries: technical instructions for NAs).

The purpose of the checks is to ensure that the HEI to be visited, meets the criteria for the Erasmus+ Programme. This includes the compliance with the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE); and in the case of mobility between Programme and Partner Countries that the ECHE principles included in the inter-institutional agreements are respected. In addition, NAs monitor that the programme resources are used accordingly.

In the case of a monitoring visit, the practicalities of implementation of Erasmus+ mobility and the quality of the programme will be discussed as well as the results and impact. The visit also aims to support HEIs in the management of the Erasmus+ Programme by identifying and disseminating good practices and by identifying and resolving potential challenges.

For the HEIs the visit offers the opportunity to provide feedback to the NA on their services and programme management. During the visit, there will be an opportunity to assess jointly the international activities of the institution and to discuss possible development needs. If successful, the visit can be of mutual benefit and visits can help to improve cooperation between the NA and HEIs as well as the administration of the Erasmus+ Programme in general.

#### General

The NA will naturally require information on the HEI's international activities within Europe and beyond.

The NA should inquire as to whether the ECHE self-evaluation (ECHE: make it work for you!) has been carried out and whether the institution wants to share the results. It will also establish the context, through the following:

- Strategy for internationalisation: objectives, priorities, organisation, different forms of international activities
- How this relates to and is specified in the current Erasmus Policy Statement (EPS)
- Share of the Erasmus+ Programme activities with respect to the all international activities of the HEI
- Other Erasmus+ projects (centralised and decentralised projects)

In line with the focus of this manual, here we concentrate on how such a visit can be useful for monitoring and enhancing ECHE compliance with special reference to the 'pressure points'

## 1. Transparency: the course catalogue<sup>3</sup>

Before the visit, the NA should check whether:

- The current edition of the course catalogue is easily available on the HEI's website.
- Previous editions are also available (if possible)
- The contents are compatible with those listed in the 2015 ECTS Users' Guide (see recommended elements on page 55)
- The catalogue is available in the local and a widely spoken language as set out in the 2015 ECTS Users' Guide
- The explanations provided by the HEI in the Erasmus+ beneficiary report under point 2 is satisfactory
- Complaints have been made about the course catalogue contents and / or availability (e.g. in EU-Survey participants reports)
- If weaknesses or possible areas for improvement are identified they should be addressed during the visit.

### Whom to contact:

The Erasmus+ coordinator or the Erasmus+ office, who will be able to indicate other appropriate people, including those in charge of internationalisation and study programmes.

Incoming students (ask how they have been selected and meet with them without HEI staff present)

Essential references: ECTS Users Guide 2015; ECTS Label holders<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Recognition of study mobility

Before the visit the NA should check:

- How the HEI has explained its recognition procedures in its ECHE application and (if it is a beneficiary of mobility projects between Programme and Partner Countries) how in the application form and / or inter-institutional agreements

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<sup>3</sup> For HEIs that due to their particular profile do not take part in incoming student mobility for studies but mainly send their students on traineeships, compiling a course catalogue would not be considered a priority nor is subject for monitoring on this pressure point. Nonetheless, it would be advisable to have such a document in order to give information to any possible interested international partner.

<sup>4</sup> <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/celebrating-ects-and-diploma-supplement-label-holders-2009-2013-pbNC0514040/>

- What the indicators in point 1 of the HEI's beneficiary report are and how they have been explained or justified
- During the visit, evidence in the form of complete learning agreements and certification from the HEI's academic records, and diploma supplements should be available.

#### Whom to contact:

According to the HEI's organisation, the academic and / or administrative staff responsible for recognition at central and / or departmental level Returned Erasmus+ mobility students (Programme and when possible Partner Countries).

#### Questions for the staff:

- What are the procedures for preparing, modifying, approving and completing the learning agreement?
- Are the procedures the same for all departments?
- How are mobility HEI partners chosen?
- Are inter-institutional agreements made taking into consideration the compatibility between the study programmes on offer by the HEIs?
- How are the results registered in the academic records system?
- Who is responsible?
- How does the mobility period appear in the diploma supplement?
- Are there any other aspects which you would like to discuss?
- Do you have good practices you would like to share?

#### Questions for the students:

- (SMS: studies abroad, planning and recognition): Who is responsible for the preparation and approval of the learning agreement? What about possible changes during the exchange? Did you carry out all the activities listed in table A of the learning agreement? Did you have to use tables A2 and B2 for modification?
- Who is responsible for recognition of studies after the exchange? Was the recognition process smooth? Were all the activities listed in table A recognised as appears in table B?
- Did all the activities carried out count towards your degree? Are they registered in your certificate of studies / diploma supplement?
- Were there difficulties in recognition? Why?
- Did you understand the rules concerning conversion of your grades?

- Did you know how and where to lodge a complaint if you thought you had not been treated fairly?

### **3. Information on grading systems and grade transfer (including grade distribution tables)**

Before the visit the NA should check

- what information is given on the grading system in the course catalogue
- whether there have been complaints regarding the HEI with respect to grade conversion

#### During the visit:

- Evidence should be presented on how the HEI describes its grading system to its partners. This might be:
  - on the website
  - in the inter-institutional agreement
  - in the information provided with the transcript of records.

The NA should verify whether grade distribution tables are provided, or, as appropriate according to national and / or local context, whether the information provided is clear, and as adequate as possible.

#### Whom to contact:

- According the HEI's organisation, the academic and / or administrative staff responsible for grade conversion at central and / or departmental level
- Incoming mobility student to verify the clarity of the information provided
- Returned Erasmus+ mobility students (Programme and when possible Partner countries) to verify how grade conversion was carried out

#### Essential references:

ECTS Users' Guide (2015 and 2009 editions – see annexes)

ECTS video on "ECTS grade distribution tables":  
<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I101940&sitelang=en&videolang=EN/EN>

## Chapter 4 – Procedures in case of non-compliance

### Procedures in case of non-compliance

It is to be expected, and indeed may prove so, that most applications to obtain the ECHE are in part *'aspirational'*: that is, HEIs have promised that they will do things which however sincerely they may hope to do in the future. This is part of the ECHE award mechanism: HEIs should feel the responsibility of what they have declared and promised, and make the changes that are necessary so that they are compliant, whether or not they already were when they applied for the ECHE.

In this context, there are some objective and simple checks which NAs can carry out (i.e. is the ECHE and the Erasmus Policy Statement (EPS) prominently displayed on the HE website?); in other cases it may be more complicated to establish whether or not the HE is compliant.

### Steps to be taken when non-compliance is identified

Whether for simple matters or for more complex monitoring, the first step will be for the NA to advise the HEI, unofficially, that it has identified a problem, asking the HEI to present its point of view. Ideally, the HEI should either give convincing explanations, or correct the defect identified, and the NA can take note.

Otherwise, the NA should advise the HEI **officially** that there appears to be a lack of compliance, and invite the HEI formally to present its point of view.

In subsequent correspondence or contacts a plan for complying should be agreed upon, which lays out deadlines and steps to be taken. NAs should ask the HEI to produce a remedial action plan which should comprise at least

- concrete measures
- person responsible
- time frame (deadlines)

If the deadlines are not met, the HEI must be warned again. If there is insufficient evidence of ability or desire to comply, the matter must be referred to the European Commission.

The European Commission will investigate the degree of non-compliance and will invite the institution to create a valid action plan for remedying the situation. If this is not implemented, the Charter may be withdrawn.

The HEI may also be penalised for non-compliance, by reducing the organisational support (OS) if the final report is judged overall unsatisfactory.

With respect to the specific purposes of this Manual, we recommend giving particular weight to the ECHE *'pressure points'*, that is the priorities identified as essential for ensuring the smooth functioning of mobility (course catalogues, recognition and grade distribution tables).

It is obvious that all parties will prefer not to reach the point of withdrawing the Charter. Nonetheless, for the credibility of the ECHE, it will be necessary to do so wherever severe defects are identified and are not remedied.

## How to identify cases of non-compliance and what to do next?

### 1. Course catalogue:

Institutions applying for the ECHE make a clear and simple promise with regard to the course catalogue. They guarantee that they will:

*"Publish and regularly update the course catalogue on the website of the institution well in advance of the mobility periods, so as to be transparent to all parties and allow mobile students to make well-informed choices about the courses they will follow."*

The NA can easily check whether the course catalogue is on the HEI's website, and whether it is readily available. They can also easily ascertain whether the catalogue contains the elements required by the ECTS Users' Guide 2015.

The problematic aspects, for the Institutions themselves, and thus for the NAs, will be whether the catalogue can be considered **up-to-date** and published '**well in advance**' of the mobility period. In some systems where little change in the learning / teaching offer takes place from one year to the next, compliance will be easier than in others, where all or many programmes change each year. The NA will have to consider the national context, but also stimulate HEIs to update the catalogues each year as soon as possible and to give clear information to potential students about whether the version on-line can be considered definitive or not (or to what extent).

### 2. Recognition

HEIs applying for the ECHE make important promises with regard to recognition. They guarantee that they will:

*"Ensure full recognition for satisfactorily completed activity of study mobility and, where possible, traineeship in terms of credits awarded (ECTS or compatible system)."*

*"Ensure inclusion of satisfactorily completed study and/or traineeship mobility activities in the final record of student achievements (Diploma Supplement or equivalent)"*

*"Accept all activities indicated in the learning agreement as counting towards the degree provided these have been satisfactorily completed by the mobile students."*

*"Provide incoming mobile participants and their home institutions with transcripts containing a full, accurate and timely record of their achievements at the end of their mobility period."*

*"Ensure that staff is given recognition for their teaching and training activities undertaken during the mobility period, based on a mobility agreement"*

This seems clear and uncontroversial. Nonetheless, NAs will be faced with a variety of situations which may go from excellent (entirely satisfactory) to very poor. They need an indication of what can be considered acceptable, and what not. The overall intent of monitoring is to improve the practices of recognition in every situation. However if

complete and fair recognition is not taking place, students are not being treated fairly and action must be taken.

### Goals for recognition

Goals for recognition are different for every country; national context should be taken into account. The goals (percentage) for recognition are available in the NA Work Programme.

In the Final Report assessment, special attention should be paid to the criteria of "recognition of learning outcomes".

If the results of the EU survey (participant reports) reveal that recognition has been realised only partially or not at all, closer observation is needed. Closer observation will mean inspecting complete learning agreements (including all tables from A to D) and the corresponding student records, to be sure that recognition has actually taken place at the levels and in the ways specified in the ECHE and the ECTS Users' Guide.

### 3. Information on grading systems and grade transfer (including grade distribution tables)

As pointed out in chapter 1, point 1.b, "the use of ECTS grade distribution tables is not foreseen specifically in the Charter principles. However the current 'State-of-the-art' in recognition (new ECTS Users Guide) foresees such tables, or at the very least, full and accurate information on the grading system used, so as to facilitate home institutions in recognising (and registering) the work done abroad in an appropriate way."

The indication of grade distribution tables as a priority is considered a consequence of the principle:

*"Provide incoming mobile participants and their home institutions with transcripts containing a full, accurate and timely record of their achievements at the end of their mobility period."*

As mentioned there, some countries consider their grading system or culture unsuited to the present ECTS grade distribution table system. This creates difficulties for their partner countries.

The NAs in each country must consider the current situation. If numerical grades are given, HEIs in the country must provide the necessary statistical information about grades, according to the ECTS rules and format in order to provide their partners with the specific relevant information needed in order to convert grades and ensure fair recognition. See also **egracons** for reference (<http://egracons.eu/>).

Countries that do not use numerical grades will not provide tables, but they must provide full information about their system so that their partners recognise credits with attached grade fairly.

Proper use of grade distribution tables (or equivalent information in those countries where only pass / fail or qualitative grades are given) should be a priority theme for coordinators' meetings, to clarify in each country what is expected. After which, NAs should expect full compliance, and flag those situations where either their own HEIs or their HEIs' partners are not compliant.

## Chapter 5 – Monitoring ECHE principles in mobility between Programme and Partner Countries

In KA107 mobility, the beneficiary (which is always the Programme Country HEI) is responsible for reporting on the mobility and recognition. The National Agencies will monitor how KA107 mobility is managed, and whether Programme Country HEIs are able to ensure that ECHE principles are observed, and how. NAs can organise exchanges of good practice on this topic at their coordinators' meetings.

HEIs located in Partner Countries are not eligible to receive an ECHE. However, in order to take part in Erasmus+ mobility between Programme and Partner Countries, they must sign an Inter-Institutional Agreement with their European partner which integrates ECHE principles. In addition, when applying to take part in Erasmus+, the European applicant also explains how its partners will comply with the ECHE principles. Although monitoring will differ in certain aspects, this Manual can also be used to provide guidance for National Erasmus+ Offices and EU Delegations located in Partner

In addition to the three "pressure points" identified in previous sections, in KA107 mobility emphasis should be given also for the first ECHE principle:

"Respect in full the principle of non-discrimination set out in the Programme and ensure equal access and opportunities to mobile participants from all backgrounds."

The "pressure points" in mobility between Programme and Partner Countries are as relevant as in monitoring compliance within Programme Countries. This is because setting up smooth transparent mobility, which benefits students (as well as staff), fully requires even greater attention to ensure transparency, fairness and recognition.

Here, too, **course catalogues** (or in any case extensive and clear information on HEIs' offer), **recognition** (implying the use of the complete learning agreement, including the tables A to D and final proof of inclusion of the mobility in the student's record), and **grade distribution tables** or at least clear information about the country's and the institution's grading practices, are necessary. Information on specific countries can equally be obtained from the National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs), HEREs (when relevant<sup>5</sup>) and EU Delegations.

In some cases (mobility with Partner Countries belonging to the European Higher Education Area - EHEA) it is possible to use ECTS and ECTS credits. In other cases this tool may not be available. It may be necessary to use the recently created **Credit Reference Systems** to quantify students' workload; in other countries new rule-of-thumb measurements must be developed.

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<sup>5</sup> NEOs and HEREs exist in Western Balkans, Neighbouring Countries, Russia and Central Asia (Regions 1,2,3,4 and 7 of the Erasmus+ Programme Guide).



## Links, references / annexes

### Annotated ECHE guidelines

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/opportunities/higher-education/doc/charter-annotated-guidelines\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/opportunities/higher-education/doc/charter-annotated-guidelines_en.pdf)

### Inter-institutional agreements:

[http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents-for-applicants/inter-institutional-agreement\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents-for-applicants/inter-institutional-agreement_en)

### Learning agreements:

[http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents-for-applicants/learning-agreement\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents-for-applicants/learning-agreement_en)

### Mobility agreement:

[http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents-for-applicants/mobility-agreement\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents-for-applicants/mobility-agreement_en)

### Erasmus+ student charter:

### National Erasmus+ Offices:

[https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/contacts/national-erasmus-plus-offices\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/contacts/national-erasmus-plus-offices_en)

### Tempus Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs):

[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/programme/heres\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/programme/heres_en.php)

EU Delegations: [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/index_en.htm)

### ECTS Users' Guide 2015

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/index_en.htm)

### ECTS Users' Guide 2009

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/ects-guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/ects-guide_en.pdf)

### ECTS video on "ECTS grade distribution tables":

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I101940&sitelang=en&videolang=EN/EN>

Online Learning Agreement: [www.learning-agreement.eu](http://www.learning-agreement.eu)

Erasmus Without Papers: [www.erasmuswithoutpaper.eu](http://www.erasmuswithoutpaper.eu)

European Grade Conversion System: [www.egracons.eu](http://www.egracons.eu)

## Contact

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