

UNIVERSITY GUIDELINES FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PERIODS OF STUDY AND WORK PLACEMENTS ABROAD IN THE FRAMEWORK OF INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

Introduction

This document is based upon, and is an extension of the *University's Academic Regulations (Art. 22)*. The Guidelines draw on the principles formalised by the Ministers of Higher Education as part of the Bologna Process (1999), as later reinforced by the *Budapest-Vienna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area* (March 2010) and developed in the ECTS Users' Guide (2015)¹.

With a view to improving the experience of UNIMI students abroad and to increasing the transparency and uniformity of the University's procedures, this text updates the guidelines adopted by the Academic Senate in 2010 by making provision for the recognition of periods of study and other learning activities undertaken by UNIMI students (enrolled on 1st-level, 2nd-level and single-cycle degree programmes) at foreign universities with which the University of Milan has official cooperation and exchange conventions in place. These conventions are based on the ECTS credit system, which makes it easier to recognise periods of study abroad.

For the purposes of these Guidelines, one ECTS credit is equivalent to one Italian CFU (academic credit)

"Full academic recognition" is one of the conditions stipulated in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education – which the Rector, as legal representative of the University, has signed with the European Commission – and it lies at the base of all Erasmus+ student mobility activities.

By committing to this principle, the sending university undertakes to recognise the academic credits obtained by students at other eligible universities in accordance with the terms and conditions of the learning agreement.

I - Basic obligations of the parties involved in student mobility

- Each **student** undertakes to follow and complete the study plan included in the learning agreement.
- The **receiving institution** undertakes to provide the agreed teaching and academic support to students.
- The **sending institution** undertakes to recognise the achievements of each mobile student in accordance with the study plan included in the learning agreement.

II - Essential documents for academic recognition of course units during the mobility period

1. Learning Agreement

¹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1>

- The learning agreement is the central tool in the recognition process with respect to the learning activities undertaken during any mobility period. It stipulates the learning activities to be followed and their corresponding number of credits, once these have been agreed between the *student*, the *receiving institution* and the *sending institution*.
- Each learning agreement must be made in writing (see chapter III, A.1 below) and signed (also in digital form) by all three parties involved, before the student leaves for the mobility period.

Learning agreements can be amended at a later date (see chapter III, A.3).

- The learning activities carried out by each student abroad will only be recognised if they are included in the learning agreement, which must have been approved before the student leaves for the mobility period and, if appropriate, amended during the period of study abroad in line with established procedures (see chapter III).

2. Transcript of Records (or certificate of sitting exams/learning activities)

- At the end of the period of study abroad, the receiving institution will provide each student with a signed Transcript of Records listing the outcomes achieved by the student in each of his/her learning activities (henceforth named Transcript of Records).
- The sending institution guarantees that all studies undertaken at the receiving institution will be academically recognised as an integral part of each student's degree programme.

III - Procedure for recognising periods of study abroad

A. Outgoing students

1. Designing the learning agreement

Before departing, all students who are admitted to spend a period of study abroad must consult the course catalogue of the receiving institution and, using the form provided by the University, must design a personal study plan in consultation with the Exchange Tutor of their study area (or a designated person). Each learning agreement must indicate the learning activities that the student intends to carry out abroad and the learning activities within his/her degree programme at the sending institution which these will replace. As a general rule, the credits should be equal in number to those that the student would obtain by spending an equivalent period at the sending university. Specifically:

- students who will spend a period equivalent to one academic year abroad should elect learning activities worth 60 credits in their learning agreement;
- students who will spend a period equivalent to one academic semester abroad should elect learning activities worth 30 credits in their learning agreement;
- students who will spend a period equivalent to one academic trimester abroad should elect learning activities worth 20 credits in their learning agreement.

Except where a degree programme specifically provides otherwise, the choice of learning activities to be carried out at the receiving institution should be made in the spirit of the *Budapest-Vienna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area* (March 2010) and the *ECTS Users' Guide* (2015). In particular, the study plan should ensure:

- high quality and professionalism in the activities chosen, which should not meticulously replicate the courses offered at the sending institution;
- full concordance with the learning outcomes of the degree programme at the sending institution;
- the opportunity to follow a sustainable and flexible learning path;
- full, fair and easy recognition of the credits achieved by the student, by adopting an “*open and flexible approach [...] based on compatibility of learning outcomes rather than equivalence of course contents*”², including in the form of virtual learning if so agreed in advance.

2. Approving the learning agreement before departure

The learning agreement is submitted electronically by each student and forwarded to the Exchange Tutor of their study area (or a designated person), who can either accept the plan as submitted or request changes before its approval. The student then sends the learning agreement to the receiving institution, which will either approve the plan as final or request changes before its approval. Finally, the student sends the learning agreement, after having been approved and bearing all signatures, to the International Mobility and Promotion Office to confirm acceptance of the proposed study plan.

3. Amending the learning agreement

Learning agreements are subject to change, provided that each change is formally accepted and signed by all three interested parties. All changes should generally be made before the start of learning activities and no later than the end of the period of study. Changes to the learning agreement must be made as follows:

- The student amends the learning agreement by electronic means, only after having agreed upon the changes with the tutor.
- Changes are ratified following the same process established for the approval of the original learning agreement – ratification is carried out by electronic means.
- Once approved, the student sends the amended learning agreement to the International Mobility and Promotion Office.

4. Procedures upon completion of period of study abroad

Returning students

- Returning students must send the Certificate of Stay issued by the receiving institution to the International Mobility and Promotion Office – following the procedure provided – within 10 days of their return. The Certificate of Stay must indicate the actual duration of the student’s stay abroad and the duration of their physical and/or virtual stay in case of blended study.
- Returning students must submit a recognition application, a certificate of their learning activities (transcript of records), the final approved version of their learning agreement and their personal study plan no later than two months after their return, following the procedure established in their degree’s Programme Description.

Departmental Exchange Tutor

²ECTS Users’ Guide (2015), p. 30

- The Exchange Tutor of the relevant study area will receive the documentation submitted by the student according to the procedure established.
- No later than one month after receiving the documents, the Exchange Tutor will recommend for the Academic Board or its appointed Committee to recognise the credits or will directly validate the credits if so empowered by the Academic Board. The validation certificate must specify the learning activities carried out (with their original titles), the number of credits, the grade out of 30 and the activities which they replace.

Grades will be converted by comparing the grade distribution table from the student's reference group with the one developed by the other institution for the parallel reference group³. Where no such table is available, the Exchange Tutor may refer to an ECTS conversion table. Where ranges overlap, the University should decide in advance whether it will recognise the minimum, average or maximum comparable grade.

To complete the **recognition procedure**, the relevant offices of the Student Registrar Division must include the validated learning activities in the student's career within one month of receiving the validation decision.

5. Evaluating periods of study abroad: incentives and penalties

Students will be considered to have **fulfilled** the learning agreement they signed with the University before their departure if they successfully perform the activities of the study plan and obtain at least 70% of the Italian credits (CFUs) required therein (42 for an academic year, 21 for a semester or 14 for a trimester). Credits may also be granted for dissertation research or placement/internship activities.

5.1 Incentives As an incentive, students who successfully perform the activities of the study plan set out in their learning agreement (see above) may be eligible for additional points for the final exam, granted by the Academic Board. Upon the proposal of the Exchange Tutor, the Degree Committee may award a minimum bonus of 1 point and a maximum bonus of 3 points (depending on the duration of study, the number of CFUs obtained and the total outcome achieved).

5.2 Penalties Students who do not meet the condition mentioned above must give due explanation to their contact tutor to evaluate the appropriate actions. These may include having to return all or part of the scholarship obtained.

Reasons of force majeure (e.g. illness) may be treated as justification for failing to meet the objectives set.

B. Incoming students

1. Before arrival at the University of Milan

³ ECTS Users' Guide (2015), p. 41

The International Mobility and Promotion Office will submit the following documentation from foreign students for the approval of the Exchange Tutor:

- application form, learning agreement and transcript of records (from sending institution).

If approved (and signed), the Exchange Tutor will forward the learning agreement to the International Mobility and Promotion Office and to the student.

2. After the period of study at the University of Milan

- The student will be issued a *transcript of records* no later than one month after the end of the mobility period. This will also be sent to the sending institution.