

Guidelines for allocating European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Introduced in 1989, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a tool of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for to bring transparency, competitiveness and mobility to higher education across Europe. ECTS is adopted as the national credit system in most countries of the EHEA.
- 1.2. ECTS is based on the principle that 60 ECTS credits are equivalent to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a typical full-time academic year of formal learning (i.e. 1 ECTS = 25 to 30 notional hours of student workload). For the award of ECTS credits, the learning outcomes of a qualification must be consistent with the relevant outcomes set out in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). The FQ-EHEA contains a set of overarching descriptors of the generic outcomes of qualifications that signify completion of each of the three main cycles of the framework. These descriptors are commonly known as the “Dublin Descriptors”. Within the FQ-EHEA the term “cycle” is used to describe the three main sequential levels: first cycle (Bachelor’s), second cycle (Master’s) and third cycle (Doctoral) qualifications.

2. The use of ECTS credits at Imperial

- 2.1. Imperial qualifications are linked the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ). The FHEQ describes qualifications in terms of levels, (e.g. Level 6 is a Bachelor’s level qualification). As **Imperial awards ECTS credits**, we also link our qualifications to the FQ-EHEA. The FQ-EHEA aligns with the FHEQ and typically, first cycle equates to the UK’s Bachelor’s FHEQ level 6 qualifications and these can range from 180-240 ECTS credits. Second cycle equates to the UK’s Master’s FHEQ level 7 qualifications and these range from 60-120 ECTS, although a range of between 90 and 120 is more typical of many awards. Third cycle equates to UK doctoral FHEQ 8 level qualifications and does not necessarily have ECTS credits associated with it.
- 2.2. At Imperial, the standard structure of our full-time programmes of study is as follows (part-time programmes are pro-rata):

Bachelor’s (a minimum of 45 ECTS must be at QF-EHEA first cycle/FHEQ Level 6):

- a) 3-academic year Bachelor’s, 180 ECTS
- b) 4-academic year Bachelor’s with year abroad or year in industry, 240 ECTS

NB. Credit is not awarded for clinical programmes (e.g. MBBS) however, programme and module learning outcomes must be set at the appropriate level.

Integrated Master's (a minimum of 60 ECTS must be at QF-EHEA second cycle/FHEQ Level 7):

- c) 4-year (academic year plus additional assessed work outside the academic terms), 270 ECTS. This is the standard for all MEng and is available/optional for MSci.
- d) 4-year (academic year), 240 ECTS. MSci/MEng students who wish to gain 270 ECTS will need to do additional work outside the terms in order to gain the extra 30 ECTS.

Postgraduate Certificate:

- e) 3 months, 30 ECTS (a minimum of 20 ECTS at QF-EHEA second cycle/FHEQ Level 7)

Postgraduate Diploma:

- f) 6 months, 60 ECTS (a minimum of 45 ECTS at QF-EHEA second cycle/FHEQ Level 7)

Free-standing Master's (a minimum of 75 ECTS must be at QF-EHEA second cycle/FHEQ Level 7):

- g) 1-calendar year Master's, 90 ECTS. This is the standard format for all freestanding Imperial Master's programmes
- h) 2-academic year Master's, 120 ECTS,

Doctoral Level (QF-EHEA third cycle/FHEQ Level 8):

Imperial does not allocate credit to doctoral level awards, however, programme learning outcomes must be set at the appropriate level.

2.3. **Note:**

For the purpose of this document:

An academic year is 3 terms; 32 weeks and a calendar year is 12 months; 48 weeks

A module is defined as '*a self-contained, formally structured unit of study, with a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria*'. Under this definition a research project is considered a module.

3. Guidelines for allocating ECTS credits

- ECTS should be allocated to educational units of study which have defined learning outcomes and assessment methods, e.g. modules (and research projects).
- It is recommended that 1 ECTS credit should reflect 25 hours of work undertaken towards achieving a learning outcome.
- It is recommended that the minimum number of ECTS credits which can be allocated to module is 5 ECTS.
- Half credits may be used but other decimals should be avoided.
- ECTS are only awarded where the specified learning outcome(s) have been achieved at the relevant level as evidenced by appropriate assessment. In order to be credit-bearing modules must be assessed by at least one assessment method.
- Each module should have a description which, as a minimum, should include details of the learning outcomes, assessment methods, delivery methods (i.e. learning and teaching and independent study hours), level and number of ECTS credits. Descriptions should be available to current and prospective students.
- ECTS credits are not awarded to clinical programmes.
- Visiting exchange students are expected to take a full workload and assessment and therefore ECTS should be allocated accordingly.
- Imperial students on Year in Industry degree programmes should be allocated 60 ECTS for the year, providing they are on a supervised work placement that is also assessed.
- Imperial students studying abroad will receive the number of ECTS allocated by the university they have chosen to study in. As students are studying in a different language, completing the full programme is far harder than if they were doing the programme in their native tongue. In cases where the student does not accrue the required 60 ECTS from their Year Abroad, ECTS credits can be accumulated by the student completing a report on their Year Abroad when they return. For institutions where ECTS is not used, the local credit should be translated into an Imperial allocated ECTS value based on published study hours at the partner institution, with or without an additional report as appropriate.

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