

Wageningen University

International credentials evaluation guideline

The following information is intended as a **guideline only** and is to be used as a reference for admission purposes only.

When referencing this guide please note the following:

- ◆ This guide has been compiled using a variety of sources[#] and is by no means complete.
- ◆ Additional grading systems may exist in any country.
- ◆ **Transcript legends should be used whenever possible.**
- ◆ Programme contents will be compared with and considered within the context of the level of study.
- ◆ For admission to a Master's programme, the qualifications listed are normally recognized as approximately equivalent to a Wageningen University 3-year Bachelor's degree.
- ◆ The minimum quality requirement for admission is calculated on the entire preparatory study programme (BSc or equivalent).
- ◆ Admission Boards may set higher requirements and/or may require additional documentation (e.g. portfolio, sample of written work, etc.).
- ◆ Normally, only students who are graduates of accredited or otherwise approved universities are eligible for admission to graduate studies. Students may be required to provide us with documentation to support the accreditation of the institution.
- ◆ Applications are evaluated on information provided with transcripts from previous institutions attended. Applicants are free to request a re-evaluation. The request must be made in writing to the Board of Appeals for Examinations. The letter should include the reasons for re-evaluation and appropriate documentation in support of the request.
- ◆ If you have a transcript from a country not listed below, please contact the Admission Officers for assistance.

An asterisk (*) indicates countries where a majority of institutions' first language may not be English.

Courses at Wageningen University often require group work, oral presentations and written exam papers. Students therefore must be proficient in the use of English, both written and oral, when they begin their studies at Wageningen University.

The university requires that certification of such proficiency be provided by applicants whose first language is not English.

For a number of countries, Nuffic has published a **country module** containing general information about the education system, the main qualifications issued, as well as the evaluation of these qualifications in the Netherlands. Refer to <http://www.nuffic.nl/diplomawaardering/landenmodules> (Dutch edition) or <http://www.nuffic.nl/en/diploma-recognition/country-modules> (English edition).

This guideline is based on the International credentials evaluation guideline compiled by Guelph University (2005). The main additional sources used - besides Nuffic's country modules and country monitor referred to above - are:

- Wisconsin Directory of International Institutions - <http://www.grad.wisc.edu/admin/gradcoordinators/iadmiss/index.html>

- UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) - <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-standard-classification-of-education.aspx> (refer to ISCED 1997 mappings)

- World Education Services, International Grade Conversion Guide for Higher Education - <http://www.wes.org/gradeconversionguide/>

- Foreign Credits, International Education Database - <http://www.foreigncredits.com/Education-Database>

Country of academic institution attended	Required level Minimum equivalent qualification for admission to a Master's programme	Required quality Grading scale and minimum academic standing required		Nuffic country module	Remarks
AFGHANISTAN *	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	10 point scale 8.0/10			
ALBANIA *	Diplomë me titull (4-6 years) is being replaced with Diplomë e Nivelit të Parë (Bachelor, 3 years) and Diplomë e Nivelit të Dytë (Master, 2 years)	10 point scale 8.0/10			
ALGERIA *	Licence, Ingénieur d'état, Diplôme d'enseignement supérieur (DES) (4 years),	20 point scale 13/20			
ANGOLA *	Diplôme de Licence, Technicien supérieur (5-6 years)	20 point scale 14/20			
ARGENTINA *	Licenciatura, professional title (4 years)	10 point scale 7.0/10			
AUSTRALIA	Bachelor's honours degree (4 years)	Class standing 2 nd class division A or overall grade of distinction		Available	
AUSTRIA *	Bakkalaureus (BA / BSc, 3 to 4 years) Diplom-Ingenieur, Magister	Reversed 5 point scale 2.5/5		Available	
AZERBAIJAN *	Bachelor's degree (Диплом о степени бакалавра), 4 years The Diploma of Specialist which used to	5 point or 100% scale 4.0/5 (yaxşı, good) or 75%			

	be awarded after 5 years is being phased out.				
BANGLADESH *	4 or 5 year technical degree, e.g. BEng, BSc (Eng), BTech, BArch. All others - Bachelor's and Master's required	Class standing First class/ first division 60% minimum			
BELGIUM *	Academisch gerichte Bachelor / Grade académique de Bachelier (3 years)	20 point scale 14/20 or Met onderscheiding/ Avec distinction		Available	
BOLIVIA *	Diploma de nivel terciario (5 years)	7 point scale or 100% scale 5.5/7 or 75% required			
BENIN *	Maîtrise, Ingénieur (4 years)	20 point scale 14/20			
BHUTAN *	4 or 5 year technical degree e.g. B.Eng, B.Sc(Eng), B.Tech, B.Arch, All others - Bachelor's and Master's required	Class standing 1 st class (60%)			
BRAZIL *	Bacharel (4 years), professional title e.g. Engenheiro	10 point scale or 5 point scale or 4 point scale 7.0/10 or 4.0/5 or 3.0/4		Available	
BULGARIA *	Diploma za vissho obrazovaniena obrazovatelno-kvalifikatsionna stepen "Bakalavar" (4 years)	6 point scale 4.5/6		Available	
CAMEROON *	Maîtrise (4 years, without thesis) or BSc (3 or 4 years)	20 point scale or 4 point scale or class standing 14/20 or 3.0/4 or 2 nd class upper division		Available	
CANADA *	Bachelor's honours degree (4 years)	4 point scale or 100% scale 3.0/4 or 70%		Available	
CHILE *	Licenciatura, professional title (4 years)	7 point scale 5.5/7			
CHINA, PRC *	Bachelor's degree (4 years preferably at project 211 institution)	4 point scale or 5 point scale or 100% scale 3.0/4, 4.0/5 or 75%		Available	

COLOMBIA *	Licenciado or professional title with 4 years of study	5 point scale 3.5/5			
CONGO *	Maîtrise	20 point scale 14/20			
COSTA RICA*	Bachiller Universitario, Licenciado (4 years)	Degree classification or 10 point scale or 100% scale Notable or 8/10 or 80%			
CROATIA *	Diplom (4 years) See Yugoslavia for older credentials	10 point scale or 5 point scale 7.0/10 or 3.5/5		Available	
CUBA *	Licenciatura, Ingeniero (5 years)	100% scale or 5 point scale 80% or 4.0/5			
CYPRUS *	Ptychio (4 years)	10 point scale 6.5/10			
CZECH REPUBLIC *	Bakalář (3 to 4 years) or professional title e.g. Inženýr (5 years)	Reversed 5 point scale Velmi dobře (2)		Available	
DENMARK *	Bachelorgraden (B.A. or B.Sc.) (3 years)	7 point scale 7.0/12 required		Available	
ECUADOR *	Licenciado, Ingeniero (4 years)	10 point scale or own scale 7.5/10 or upper range of “Bien”			Grading scales vary, sometimes even between faculties of the same university. Always refer to transcript.
EGYPT *	Bachelor’s degree, Licence (4 years) Diploma of Higher Studies (1 year after Bachelor’s)	100% or own scale or 4 point scale 75% or (Very Good) or 3.0/4		Available	
ESTONIA *	Bakalaureusekraad (3 years)	5 point scale 4.0/5 (Väga hea)		Available	
ETHIOPIA * and ERITHREA *	Bachelor’s degree in Arts, Science, Education, Medicine, Law (3-6 years) Preferably at least 4 years of higher	4 point scale 3.0/4		Available	

	education				
FINLAND *	Kandidaatti /Kandidat /Bachelor (3 years)	3 point scale 2/3 (Hyvät tiedot) Thesis Cum laude approbatur		Available	
FRANCE *	Licence (3 years) or 2 years at Grande École in addition to 2 years of preparatory studies	20 point scale 12.0/20 (Assez bien)		Available	
GERMANY *	Bachelor (wissenschaftliche Hochschule or Fachhochschule)	Reversed 5 point scale 2.5/5 (Gut)		Available	
GHANA	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	Class standing 2 nd Class upper		Available	
GREECE *	Ptychion (4 years)	10 point scale 6.5/10 Πολύ καλός (Very Good)		Available	
GUATEMALA *	Licenciatura (5 years)	100% scale 80% (Muy Bueno)			
HAITI *	Licence (4 years)	10 point scale or 100% 8.0/10 or 80%			
HONG KONG *	Bachelor's honours degree (4 years)	Class standing 2 nd class upper division			
HONDURAS*	Licenciatura, Bachillerato universitario (5 years)	100% scale 80% (Muy Bueno)			
HUNGARY *	Bachelor's degree (3 to 3.5 years), University diploma in ... (field of study) (4-5 years)	5 point scale 4.0/5		Available	
ICELAND *	Bachelor's degree (3 years) or Candidatus ... (name of field) (4 years)	10 point scale 7.0/10			
INDIA *	4 or 5 year technical degree e.g. B.Eng, B.Sc(Eng), B.Tech, B.Arch, All others - Bachelor's and Master's required	Class standing 1 st class (60%)		Available	
INDONESIA *	Sarjana (Strata 1), Diploma IV, Insinjur	4 point scale		Available	2.8/4 can be

	≥ 144 credits (Sarjana Mudi not acceptable)	3.0/4			accepted from the best Javanese universities
IRAN *	Bachelor/ Kârshenâsî/ Lisâns (4 years)	20 point scale or 4 point scale 14/20 or 3.0/4		Available	
IRAQ *	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	100% scale 70%		Available	
IRELAND	Bachelor's honours degree	Class standing 2 nd class upper		Available	
ISRAEL *	Bachelor's honours degree	100% scale 75% (Good)			
ITALY *	Laurea (3 years)	30 point scale 25/30		Available	
JAPAN *	Bachelor's degree (Gakushi Shogo) (4 years, 124 credits)	4 point scale or 3 point scale 3.2/4 or 2.2/3		Available	
JORDAN *	Bachelor's degree	100% scale or 4 point scale 80% or 3.0/4 (Very Good)			
KAZAKHSTAN *	Bakalavr, diplom spetsialista (4 years)	5 point scale 4.0/5 (Жақсы, good)			
KENYA	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	100% scale or class standing 60% or 2 nd class upper			
KUWAIT *	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	4 point scale or 9 point scale or 100% scale 3.0/4 or 7.0/9 or 80%			
LATVIA *	Akadēmiskā izglītība (3 years)	10 point scale 7.0/10		Available	
LEBANON *	Bachelor's degree, Licence (3 years)	100% scale or 20 point scale 80% or 12/20			
LIBYA *	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	100% scale or own scale 75% or (Very Good)			
LITHUANIA *	Bakalauro Diplomas (4 years)	10 point scale 7.0/10		Available	
MALAYSIA *	Bachelor's degree	4 point scale or 100% scale or class		Available	

	(3 to 4 years)	standing 3.0/4, 60% or 2 nd class upper			
MEXICO *	Licenciado (4.5 to 5 years), professional title (Ingeniero, Arquitecto)	10 point scale 8.0/10 (Bien)		Available	
MONGOLIA *	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	4 point scale 3.0/4			
MOROCCO *	Master, Ingénieur d'Etat	20 point scale 13/20		Available	
MOZAMBIQUE *	Bacharelato, Licenciatura (4 years)	20 point scale 14/20			
NAMIBIA	Bachelor's honours degree (4 years)	Class standing 2 nd class upper			
NEPAL *	Bachelor's honours degree (4 years) or Bachelor's degree (3 years) and Master's degree	Class standing First class or first division 60% = 1 st class			
NEW ZEALAND	Bachelor's honours degree (4 years)	Class standing or 4 point scale 2 nd class upper or 3.0/4		Available	
NICARAGUA *	Licencia/ Licenciatura or professional title	100% scale 80%			
NIGERIA	Bachelor's honours degree (4 years)	Class standing 2 nd class upper		Available	
NORWAY *	Bachelor's degree (3 to 4 years)	6 point scale (ECTS grading scale), before 2005 reversed 6 point scale C, before 2005 2.5/6 (Laudabilis)		Available	
PAKISTAN *	4 or 5 year technical degree, e.g. BEng, BSc(Eng), BTech, BArch. All others - Bachelor's and Master's required	Class standing First class or first division 60%= 1 st class		Available	
PANAMA *	Licenciado or professional title (4 years)	100% scale 80%			
PERU *	Bachiller/ Licenciado or professional title (4 to 5 years)	20 point scale or 100% scale 12/20 or 80%			Rank in class, when available, is a better indicator.
PHILIPPINES *	Bachelor's degree	Reversed 5 point scale or 4 point			

	(4 years)	scale 2.0/5 or 3.0/4			
POLAND *	Dyplom Licencjat/ Inzynier (3 to 3.5 years)	5 point scale 4.0/5 (Dobry)		Available	
PORTUGAL *	Licenciado (4 to 5 years)	20 point scale 14/20 (Bom)		Available	
ROMANIA *	Invatamant superior - Universitati Diploma de Master, Diploma de Licenta (4 to 5 years), Diploma de Inginer, Diploma de Arcitect	10 point scale 7.5/10		Available	
RUSSIAN FEDERATION *	Диплом бакалавра (Bachelor's degree), 4 years; Диплом специалиста (Diploma of Specialist), 5 years	5 point scale 4.0/5 (Хорошо, Good)		Available	
RWANDA *	Licence (Bachelor's degree), Maîtrise (4 years)	Class standing or 100% scale 2 nd class upper or 75%			
SAUDI ARABIA *	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	4 point scale or 5 point scale or 100% scale or own scale 3.0/4 or 4.0/5 or 80% or (Very Good)			
SENEGAL *	Licence, Diplôme d'ingénieur, Diplôme d'ingénieur de technologie	20 point scale 13/20			
SIERRA LEONE *	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	Class standing 2 nd class upper			
SINGAPORE *	Bachelor's honours degree, Master's degree (4 years)	Class standing 2 nd class upper or 2 nd class, division 1			
SLOVAKIA *	Bakalár (3 to 4 years)	Reversed 5 point scale Vel'mi dobrý (2)		Available	
SLOVENIA *	1.stopnja- visokošolski univerzitetni programi (Bachelor's degree with academic orientation) (3 to 4 years)	10 point scale 7.5/10			
SOUTH AFRICA	Bachelor's honours degree (4 years)	Class standing or 100% scale 2 nd class, division 1 or 65%		Available	

SOUTH KOREA *	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	Variations on 4 point scale 3.0/4		Available	
SPAIN *	Licenciado/ Licentiatuura or professional title (Ingeniero, Arquitecto) Will be replaced with Titulo de graduado	10 point scale 7.0/10 (Notable)		Available	
SRI LANKA *	Special Bachelor's degree (4 years) General Bachelor's degree only (2 years) is not acceptable	Class standing 1 st class or 2 nd class upper (1 st class with 'A' grades in ½ of papers or 2 nd class upper with 'A' or 'B' grades in ½ of papers.)			
SUDAN *	Bachelor's honours degree (5 years)	Own scale or class standing (Very Good) or 2 nd class upper			
SURINAM *	Bachelor of Science (3 years)	10 point scale 7.0/10		Available	
SWEDEN *	Kandidatexamen (3 years)	Väl godkänd		Available	
SWITZERLAND *	Bachelor's degree (3 years), Lizentiat (4 years)	6 point scale or 10 point scale or reversed 5 point scale 5.0/6 or 7.5/10 or 2.5/5		Available	
SYRIA *	Bachelor's degree or Licence (4 years)	100% scale 70%			
TAJIKISTAN *	Bakalavr (4 years), Diplom spetsialista (5 years)	5 point scale 4.0/5			
TAIWAN *	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	4 point scale or 100% scale 3.2/4 or 75%		Available	
TANZANIA	Bachelor's degree (3 years)	5 point scale or class standing 3.5/5 or 2 nd class upper			
THAILAND *	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	4 point scale or class standing 3.0/4 or 2 nd class upper		Available	
TRINIDAD and TOBAGO (WEST INDIES)	Bachelor's honours degree	Class standing 2 nd class upper			
TUNISIA *	Licence, Diplôme d'Ingénieur	20 point scale			

	(3 years)	13/20			
TURKEY *	Lisans Diploması (4 years)	4 point scale or 10 point scale or 100% scale 3.0/4 or 7.0/10 or 70%		Available	
UGANDA	Bachelor's degree (3 years)	Class standing or 5 point scale or 100% scale 2 nd class upper or 3.6/5 or 70%			
UKRAINE *	Диплом бакалавра (Bachelor's degree, 4 years), Диплом спеціаліста (Diploma of specialist, 5 years)	5 point scale 4.0/5			
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	100% scale 80%			
UNITED KINGDOM	Bachelor's degree (3 to 4 years) (Scotland may have 1 st degree Masters)	Class standing or 100% scale 2 nd class upper or 60%		Available	
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	Bachelor's degree (4 years ,≥ 126 hours)	4 point scale 3.0/4		Available	
URUGUAY *	Licenciado or professional title (4 years)	6 point scale or 12 point scale 4.0/6 or 7.0/12			
UZBEKISTAN *	Bakalavr Diplomi (4 years)	5 point scale 4.0/5			
VENEZUALA *	Licenciatura or professional title (Agrónomo, Arquitecto, Ingeniero, etc.) (5 years)	20 point scale or 9 point scale 14/20 or 7.0/9			
VIETNAM *	Bang Tot Nghiep Dai Hoc (Bachelor's degree, 4 years) National universities: Bang Cu Nhan (BSc) and Bang Ky Su (BEng)	10 point scale 7.0/10		Available	
YEMEN *	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	100% scale 80%			
YUGOSLAVIA * (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia)	Diploma Visokog Obrazovanja (4 years)	10 point scale or 5 point scale 7.5/10 or 4.0/5			

ZAMBIA	Bachelor's degree (4 years)	Degree classification Merit			
ZIMBABWE	Bachelor's degree (3 years)	Class standing 2 nd class upper			

Capturing the Message Conveyed by Grades

Interpreting Foreign Grades

by Guy Haug

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Gradings systems differ widely in philosophy and practice from one country to another, and the fair interpretation of foreign grades into national ones is a major issue, both for students returning after a study period abroad and for university staff required to assess the credentials of foreign applicants.

Credential evaluation, credit transfer and grade translation are among the most widely debated and highly sensitive issues in international education, and numerous approaches, solutions, models and formulas have been proposed over the years both in the United States and in Europe.

This article does not intend to propose any particular technique to resolve the issue. It pays more attention to the fundamental needs of interested stakeholders than to the technical tools currently available from professional credit evaluators. Its sole ambition is to recall a few basic rules and principles that tend to be forgotten as the job of translating foreign grades turns into an exercise in accounting or mathematics. The underlying idea in this article is that the first function of grades is to convey a message, and the real challenge in interpreting foreign grades is to render that same message in a different language.

My exposure to the issue of understanding/using foreign grades has been widespread and diversified, but mostly limited to Western Europe and North American systems. In this context, I would distinguish between three main approaches, each guided by a different underlying philosophy.

- **The Inter-university Cooperation Programs (ICPs) developed in the European Union under the ERASMUS program**

Under these exchange schemes set up freely between individual university departments, students spend a study period at a host university abroad and their academic performance there would be fully recognized as part of the degree prepared at the home institution, even though courses abroad may differ substantially from those in the home curriculum.

The basic principle is that "mutual trust and confidence"; grades obtained abroad would be shown on the transcript of the home university. ICPs exchanging large numbers of students among partner universities in several EU countries have gone through an extensive learning process and developed empirical "grading scales" in the forms of charts of the "equivalent" grades at their partner universities. Their specific value is that they are often tailor-made and compare many (if not all) grading systems in use in the EU. Their main limitations are that they are applicable only to short periods of study abroad rather than to entire curricula and that they are negotiated between partner institutions (which entails that they differ substantially from each other: a German 2.3 or an Italian 27 are allocated widely differing foreign equivalents in, for example, the Spanish system, depending on the discipline, institution, and person in charge).

• **The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)**

ECTS was developed as a pilot scheme under the first phase of the ERASMUS program of the EU and will now be gradually generalized under the new SOCRATES scheme. ECTS has paid considerable attention to the issue of grading, and has introduced a very elaborate "ECTS Grading System" required for use by participating institutions in their ECTS student exchanges.

ECTS goes beyond ICPs, in that it is a whole organized system within which consistency has been sought. The underlying philosophy is that of the equivalence of end products: while the curricula in history, physics, business or engineering may differ in every respect among national systems, the graduates (the "end product") produced by these systems are not all that different. In order to facilitate the transfer of grades between institutions, "ECTS grades" were introduced with five levels of pass and two levels of fails. They serve as a buffer (or common currency) between different national grades: the host university provides its own national grade and shows the ECTS grade next to the local grade on the student's transcript; the home university in turn uses the ECTS grade and translates it into its national grade, which is used on the student's final transcript.

ECTS offers two distinct advantages: the system is open and can be adapted to all possible national systems (e.g., bridges with Central/Eastern European systems or U.S. grades can be added relatively easily) and it is an interpretative scale rather than a mathematical formula.

• **The U.S. Credit Transfer System for Study Abroad**

While credit transfer is widespread in the United States, it differs from its younger European counterparts in several important ways: traditional Junior Year Abroad programs are under the direct responsibility of the sending university, and grades are in the U.S. system in order to facilitate the transfer of credits. There are, of course, divergences from this model, especially in cases where students take regular courses taught by the host university and a wide variety of *ad hoc* conversion scales between national and U.S. grades are applied. In many cases, the difficulty of dealing with foreign grades is circumvented as credits are simply given on a pass/fail basis although this penalizes students in good standing by not showing their true achievement. On the other hand, this model has the virtue of a certain type of universality (it is independent of the educational environment in the host country) and the United States has developed considerable professional expertise in assessing credentials and translating grades from all over the world.

Mathematical Formulas Fail to Capture the Message

Both in Europe and in the United States, there have been numerous recent attempts to put together automatic, mathematical formulas that "calculate" foreign grades in the national grading system of the user. In my opinion, these formulas do not produce figures that are a reliable and fair reflection of the message conveyed by the original grade. Their main shortfall is that they cannot adequately deal with certain key characteristics of grading systems:

- Grading systems are not linear and are often characterized by a strongly skewed distribution of grades actually given to students. While American or Italian teachers would use the upper part of their grading scales (albeit in different ways), others (e.g., French and British) in practice hardly ever use the top 20% of their scale. For this reason, proposals based on linear formulas can produce devastating results: I recently saw the case of a German student in France who achieved a 15 (quite a good grade) which was converted into a German 2.5 (a rather mediocre one); on the contrary, a British student who gets a 27/30 in Italy would have every reason to be pleased if that grade were linearly calculated to correspond to a British 90/100!
- Many grading systems are **not continuous**, but divided into several "classes" or "categories" which correspond to broad levels of performance. This means that a small difference in numbers may conceal a substantial difference in meaning when a "class" limit is crossed: in the United Kingdom, a grade of 70 classified as "First Class" is very different from a 69 ("Second Class"), while the same small difference of 1 point is irrelevant between the grades of 54 and 55 (both "Lower Second Class").
- Grading differs **not only between countries**, but there are, as well, marked differences in grading traditions and policies depending on the type and level of the grading institution, the field of study, or even the type of grade (final examination, mid-term, paper, or average computed from various grade items).

Taking France as an example, it is well known that grades at "*classes préparatoires*," which recruit among the best students on their way to "*Grandes Ecoles*," tend to be particularly low, with, for example, 11/20 seen as quite a strong grade, while the pass mark in France is usually an average of 10/20 calculated on all subjects. There may also be minimum pass grades per subject set at a lower level, for example, 8/20.

The distribution of grades tends to be different between certain quantitative fields (with grades distributed over the whole range) and the non-quantitative fields (where grades are more concentrated in the middle, and the upper part of the scale is seldom used). Thus, even within a given country, a grade may have a "normal," intuitive, abstract meaning which needs to be adjusted (up or downwards) depending on a whole series of factors relating both to who gave it and who interprets it.

From the above observations, my main conclusion is that foreign grades are not just **numbers** that can be calculated by applying a mathematical formula, but a **message** that needs first to be **understood** in the original system and in a second stage **interpreted** by users in their own system.

Simple mathematical formulas with their claim to universality are nothing but a fallacious over-simplification of a reality they fail to capture.

This, however, does not mean that the process of foreign grade interpretation cannot be organized in an efficient, expedient way based on a thorough effort to understand the message that [foreign grades] carry. It is possible to draw up tables ("grade equivalence chart," "grade concordance scale") that render a grade's "normal" or "average" meaning in another grading system, first on a bilateral basis and then in a more multi-lateral context. But this exercise has more to do with the complexity of human language than with mathematics. It takes more listening, modesty and flexibility rather than a doctrinal attitude and a creed in universal formulas/answers. More specifically, the drawing up of tables that can genuinely serve as a basis for interpreting foreign grades is only possible if a certain number of key considerations are observed. The remainder of the article presents six principles that could guide future developments in the area of foreign grade handling.

1. Grade interpretation is no more objective than grading

This is a key consideration: it is a fact of academic life that grades vary, often quite significantly, between institutions, subject areas, and even individual examiners in a given department at a given university. Expectations vary from course to course and from teacher to teacher ... and even over time with the same teacher! Hence, grade conversion scales should not be expected to be more objective than the original grading, and international educators should not be overly sensitive about less-than-perfect conversion scales. Nor should we be overly disturbed that the diverging equivalence tables exist in various contexts of international mobility.

Grade interpretation is no more an exact, objective, universal science than grading itself.

2. Fairness is more important than accuracy

The general attitude towards grade interpretation should be guided by the desire to be fair to students rather than by a vain search for accuracy. In an area marked by subjectivity and diversity, the choice is usually between approximately right and accurately wrong.

But how can fairness be measured and indeed achieved? It seems to me that the only indicator is that the conversion table must provide grades that are in line with the home grades. My experience is that discussions about grade equivalencies are often complicated by emotional reactions where each side insists upon the highest possible foreign grades corresponding to their own grades. This attitude appears to be related to a somewhat defensive, misguided conception of academic pride and leads to a devaluation of foreign grades. Where a dominant partner in an exchange network is able to impose a biased equivalence scheme upon partner institutions, the result is that students from the dominant partner studying elsewhere see their academic performance undervalued when they return home. This can be detected when the performance of students returning from abroad appears to be out of line with either their own previous grades or with those of their classmates who stayed at home.

Structural misinterpretation of foreign grades is unlikely to be detected or corrected easily in the case of one-way mobility. In the case of reciprocal flows, the inevitable effect of a biased conversion scale is that it provides a structural bonus for students moving in one direction while it

disadvantages those moving in the opposite direction. These signals are more easily detected in reciprocal exchanges, especially if they involve high levels of student traffic.

3. Grade categories/classes convey core information

In many systems, the full scale of grades is divided not only between pass and fail, but into various "classes" or "categories" corresponding to broad "quality labels" assigned to a certain bracket of numerical grades. Thus, in the United Kingdom, there are "First Class," "Second Class" (divided between upper and lower sub-classes) and "Third Class" performers, while French, German or Spanish students may be labelled in a similar way as, for example, *Passable* (Average), *Gut* (Good) or *Sobresaliente* (Outstanding).

The meaning of these labels in their own context is tainted by culture and tradition. Thus, a British "Third Class" (a pass mark, but usually given only to a relatively small number of very borderline students) is very different from a French *Passable* (a widely-used label that normally applies to the vast majority of pass grades). However tempting it may be, equating *passable* with "Third Class" because they both correspond to the lowest label of "pass grades" would fail to take into account their real meaning.

As a consequence, conversion scales should pay considerable attention to categories/classes of grades. A first priority should be to make certain that this core piece of information is correctly rendered when converting foreign grades; fine-tuning within each particular class/category is only a subordinate exercise: what matters in Britain is whether the grade is a "First" or not, not whether it is a 71 or a 72. This observation is particularly relevant when converting grades from systems using a broad numerical scale into, for example, the U.S. system which usually has only three pass grades (or categories) corresponding to the letters A, B, and C. In the United States, a "D" may also be considered a passing grade, but not for transfer purposes.

The need to pay attention to grade classes reinforces the conclusion that linear methods, which ignore class boundaries, are nothing but fallacious and dangerous over-simplifications. They distort the original message in the same way as a word-for-word check in a bilingual dictionary: for each word there is a corresponding word in the other language, but the sequence of words thus obtained almost certainly means something different (or nothing at all) in the target language.

4. Average grades mean more than individual grades

This is very much related to the previous point: more comprehensive indicators of academic performance abroad convey a more valid message than each of their constituent grades, and should hence receive more attention in the process of interpreting foreign transcripts.

The problem is that in non-linear systems (i.e., in nearly all cases) the mechanical translation of an average grade (using an empirical equivalence chart) will not correspond to the average of the mechanically-translated individual grades from which the average grade was calculated. As a consequence, average grades should be computed in the original system before they are converted into another system. This simple

mathematical reality seems confusing to many professionals in international circles. Every now and again, the vain search for a model without this bewildering characteristic brings about deceiving but reassuring proposals based on the simple but wrong assumption of linearity.

5. Reliable conversion scales are transitive

In most cases, institutions need only bilateral conversion scales for incoming/ outgoing students between their own country and one or several foreign countries (e.g., a scale giving U.S. equivalencies for grades from France, Spain, Brazil, etc.). These institutions do not need to convert grades between third countries (e.g., a U.S. university does usually not need to convert Spanish into French grades). Thus, there is no incentive for them to check whether their various bilateral conversion scales are compatible and likely incompatibilities can go unnoticed for a long time.

Yet, there are a few laboratories where grade equivalence needs to be ensured in a multilateral setting and equivalence charts must work simultaneously between all pairs of countries involved. This is the case for a handful of fully integrated, multinational double degree curricula developed under ERASMUS in the European Union, where students go in all directions (e.g. between four partner universities), and their grades must be converted in a compatible way among all systems involved. The same applies in the case of ECTS, although the situation is slightly different because the common use of "ECTS grades" means in effect that all countries apply only bilateral conversion grades between their own and ECTS grades; yet, a great deal of compatibility between these bilateral scales must exist in order to allow the system to function properly.

The ultimate test of the reliability of equivalence charts is when they are transitive. Transitivity means that the following two exercises produce the same converted grade: (1) a grade from country A is converted into a grade for country B and the grade obtained for country B is converted into a grade for country C; and (2) the same grade from country A is converted directly into a grade for country C.

If, after repeating the exercise various times and in various directions, grades obtained through both calculations are identical or nearly so, then the equivalence charts used for the exercise are unlikely to contain any major structural biases. Developers of all types of grade conversion proposals (be they equivalence tables or mathematical formulas) are invited to submit their proposals to the transitivity test. Usually the results of the test are an invitation to modesty, and sometimes a clear message that the proposed chart needs to be completely reconsidered. Transitivity is of course, all the more difficult to achieve as the number of countries involved grows.

6. Grade interpretation should be done by users

The final interpretation of grades from abroad should be left to the institution that uses them as input for decision making (e.g., to award credits or accept a foreign applicant). In the absence of a universal model for grade interpretation -- even for grades from a particular foreign country -- this is the only way in which the autonomy of each institution can be guaranteed.

What this means in practical terms is that each institution should award grades in its own system and leave the interpretation of those grades in another system to the receiving foreign institution. This basic dual principle is not respected when the grading institution awards grades directly in the system of the using institution (not uncommon in transcripts issued outside of the United States for U.S.-bound exchange students), which in effect imposes pre-translated grades on the using institution, or when the using institution finds its hands bound by an automatic, mechanical conversion model that fails to leave room for interpretation. While conversion should preferably be based on stable tables of equivalencies, these tables only reflect the "normal" or "average" meaning of foreign grades. When there is non-numerical information available (e.g. about "grade inflation" at a given institution), the using institution should have the possibility of adjusting (but not distorting) converted grades to ensure fairness to the student. This may, of course, be misused and open the door to "impressionistic" conversions, but it fundamentally distinguishes grade interpretation from simplistic grade calculation.

In order to safeguard the principle that grades should be interpreted by users and at the same time enhance chances for the correct interpretation of grades, the sending institution should provide information about itself and its grading system. Useful information includes not only maximum and minimum grades, but also grade distribution and class boundaries.

The ECTS grading system is based on a shared code ("ECTS grades") where the encoding is the responsibility of the grading institution and the decoding is left to the using institution. Thus, even in a system based on "mutual trust and confidence" like ECTS, there is some room for interpretation rather than just an automated, numerical exercise. It is also interesting that the network of national academic recognition centers in Europe (known as NARICS and ENICs) is developing a "diploma supplement" appended to transcripts in order to facilitate the interpretation of grades by foreign users. This welcome initiative is jointly supported by the European Union, the Council of Europe and CEPES/UNESCO and should contribute to the education of both graders and grade users and thus reduce the chances that simplistic formulas are used except as a last recourse when nothing else is available.

ECTS Grade	Percentage of successful students normally achieving the grade	Definition
A	10%	EXCELLENT - outstanding performance with only minor errors
B	25%	VERY GOOD - above the average standard but with some errors
C	30%	GOOD - generally sound work with a number of notable errors
D	25%	SATISFACTORY - fair but with significant shortcomings
E	10%	SUFFICIENT - performance meets the minimum criteria
FX	-	FAIL - some more work required before the credit can be awarded
F	-	FAIL - considerable work is required

THE CHART BELOW was proposed for a particular consortium of institutions where common examination papers are double marked by home and host campus and hundreds of students are exchanged in all directions annually. It is NOT claimed that this system would be suited for grade conversion outside of this consortium. It neutralizes the British "Third Class" as it was set equal to minimum pass grade in other systems that do not have an equivalent notion as a British "Third."

EXAMPLE OF GRADES/CLASS EQUIVALENCES AMONG ONE CONSORTIUM

GREAT BRITAIN	FRANCE	GERMANY	SPAIN	UNITED STATES
100-90	20.0-18.0	1.0	10.0	
89	17.8	1.0	9.9	
88	TRES 17.6	1.1	9.9	
87	BIEN 17.4	1.1	9.9	
86	17.2	1.2	9.8	A+
85	17.0	1.2	9.8	
84	16.8	1.3	9.7	
83	16.6	1.3	9.7	
82	16.4	1.3	9.6	
81	16.2	1.4	9.6	
FIRST CLASS	16.0	SEHR 1.4	SOBRE- 9.5	
79	15.8	GUT 1.5	SALIENTE 9.4	
78	15.6	1.5	9.4	
77	15.4	1.5	9.4	A
76	15.2	1.5	9.3	
75	15.0	1.6	9.3	
74	BIEN 14.8	1.6	9.2	
73	14.6	1.7	9.2	
72	14.4	1.7	9.1	
71	14.2	1.8	9.1	A-
70	14.0	1.9	9.0	
69	13.8	2.0	8.8	
68	13.6	2.1	8.6	
67	13.4	2.2	8.4	B+
UPPER	ASSEZ BIEN 13.2	2.3	NOTABLE 8.2	
65	13.0	2.4	8.0	
64	12.8	2.5	7.8	
63	12.6	2.6	7.6	
62	12.4	2.7	7.4	B
CLASS	12.2	2.8	7.2	
60	12.0	2.9	7.0	
59	11.8	3.0	6.8	
58	11.6	3.1	6.6	
LOWER	11.4	BEFRIEDIGEND 3.2	BUENO 6.4	B-
56	11.2	3.3	6.2	
SECOND	PASSABLE 11.0	3.5	6.0	
55				
CLASS	10.8	(AUSREICHEND) 3.6	APROBADO 5.8	
53	10.6	3.7	5.6	
52	10.4	3.8	5.4	
51	10.2	3.9	5.2	C
THIRD CLASS	10.0	4.0	5.0	
40-50				
39	9.9	4.1	4.9	
FAIL	ECHEC 9.0	NICHT AUSREICHEND 4.3	SUSPENSO 4.7	F
38	8.0	4.5	4.5	
37	7.0	4.9	4.0	
35	6.0	5.0	3.5	
30	5.0	5.1	3.0	
25	4.0	5.3	2.5	
20	3.0	5.5	2.0	
15	2.0	5.7	1.5	
10	1.0	5.9	1.0	
5	0.0	6.0	0.0	
0				