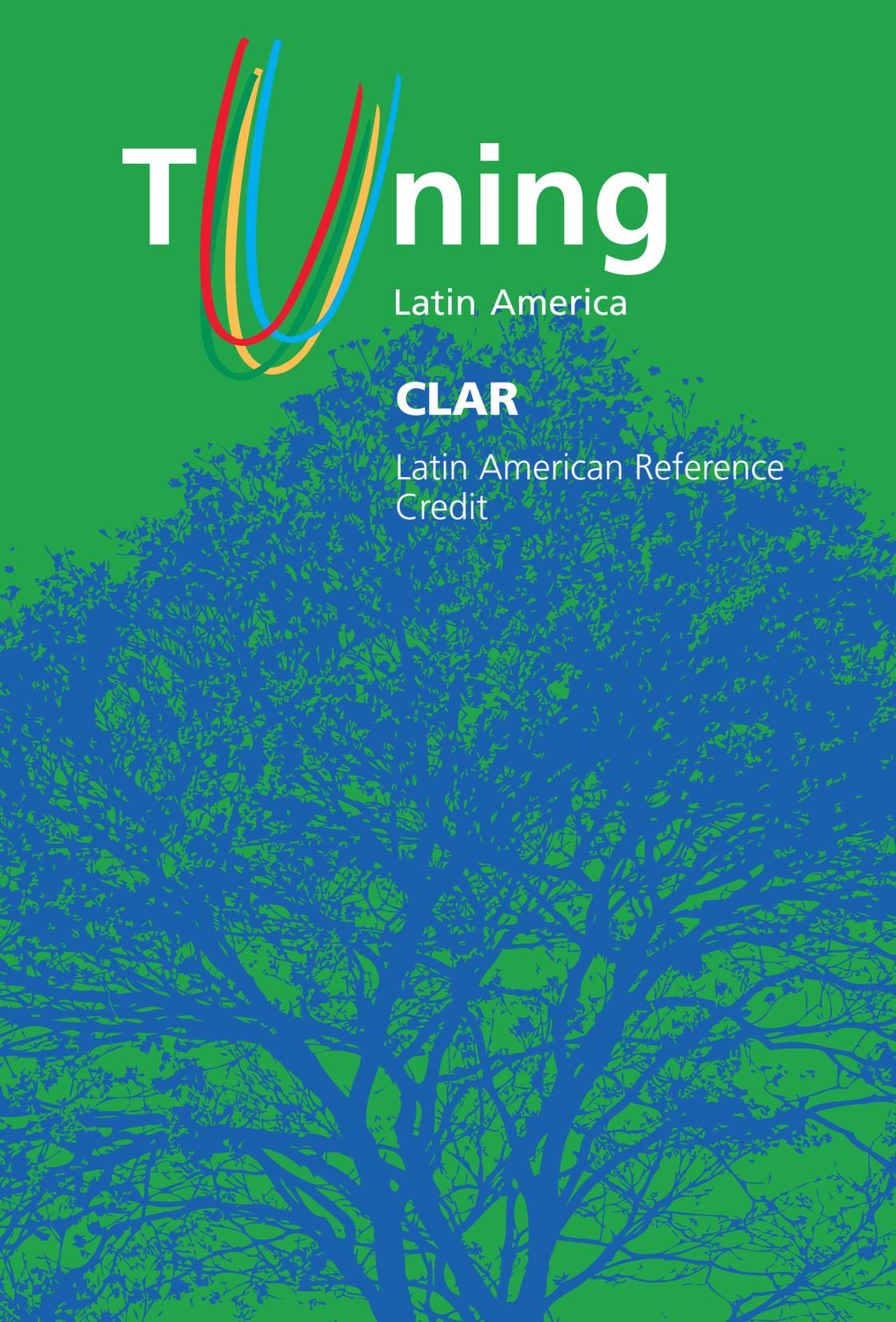


Tuning

Latin America

CLAR

Latin American Reference
Credit



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Tuning Latin America Project

CLAR

Latin American
Reference Credit

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Tuning Latin America Project

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Introduction

This document covers the basic principles and procedures leading to the establishment of a Latin American Reference Credit (CLAR) system, in accordance with objective No. 6 of the Tuning Latin America Project “Political-educational Guidelines for the Establishment of an Academic Credit System for Latin America,” The proposal complements the work carried out thus far by the project with regard to the following:

- a) The identification of generic and specific competences according to thematic areas, and the profiles and meta-profiles established for the 15 qualifications within which the project works.
- b) The relationship between a competence-based curricular design and the student’s real workload in order to obtain learning outcomes, and its connection with the time required.
- c) The transformation of teaching and assessment strategies that effectively lead to the training of competences.

These tasks are followed by a natural continuity process, the measurement of this time in terms of academic credits in ensuring their dual purpose of recognition of the student’s workload and the facilitating of mobility processes that combine to ensure quality training in a globalised world.

1

Background

The credit system in the world's regions

1.1. European context

The ECTS system (*European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*) has now been formally established in most European Union countries which are signatories of the Bologna Declaration. Emerging from a pilot project overseen by the European Commission between 1988 and 1995, the ECTS was originally used to promote student mobility in Europe and facilitate the transfer of credits completed overseas. From that has evolved a credit accumulation system and the expansion of a European Higher Education Area created from the gradual convergence of educational structures and the exploration of common ground among academic degree programmes- in harmony with the main objectives set out by the 1999 Bologna Declaration.

The European model is based on some basic premises and consensus. ECTS credits are based on the amount of work students are expected to do in order to achieve the learning objectives associated with a specific course or programme, and are related both to learning results and hours of effective work. The model defines a conventional number of 60 credits as a total annual load for a full-time student, equivalent to academic work of between 1500 and 1800 hours per year. Each credit in turn associates a total of between 25 and 30 hours with student workload and includes both classroom hours and individual work hours.

The European ECTS system is used to accredit progress made by students throughout their training process. Thus, a full-time student who

obtains 60 credits will have completed their first year, and if they obtain 120, they will be halfway through their 4-year training cycle (e.g. a BA programme corresponding to 240 credits). Credits cannot be obtained in ECTS until the work required has been completed and the corresponding results of the learning attained been assessed.

Credits are assigned to all the educational components within a given degree programme (subjects, modules, courses, practical training and dissertations, etc.) and reflect the amount of work required by each of them in order to achieve their specific objectives, or learning outcomes, in relation to the overall amount of work needed to successfully complete a year of study.

The amount of work done by the student consists of the time that will be required to complete all the learning activities planned, such as attendance in class, seminars, workshops, independent and private study, practical training, preparation of projects, examinations, field work and excursions and professional internships, etc. (ECTS User Guide, 2009).

1.2. Asian context

The first approach to a regional transferrable credit system in Asia dates back to 1991. The University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) got underway with the invitation by Australia to higher education representatives from Japan, Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan to reflect and discuss educational cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. Following different meetings and agreement, participant countries agreed at a fourth meeting held in Auckland in 1996 to ask their governments to establish a central fund for grants in order to encourage student mobility processes — within the framework of broader alliances involving economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. The UMAP gained public support and its objective was clearly set out as follows: *“UMAP attempts to gain growing international understanding via an increase in the mobility of academic staff and students.”*

Among UMAP benefits are the increase in student mobility rates in the region, providing a framework for the transfer of credits and overcoming difficulties attached to recognition of studies. However, among its limitations is the fact that these credits have not managed to include the total student workload.

Another approach to credits in Asia is associated with the ACTS-*Asian Credit Transfer System*, the objectives of which are as follows:

- Facilitate and increase national and international mobility of graduates and students in higher education.
- Increase the recognition of qualifications among institutions.
- Adopt a common transferrable credit system.
- Ensure the competitiveness of higher education in Asia on a global scale and,
- Promote curricular improvement within member countries.

In the ACTS system, a credit is defined as the volume or amount of learning that there is expected to be after having taken and passed a course or subject. This volume or learning assigned to an ACTS credit is yet to be defined. The Qualifications Agency of Malaysia associates it with 40 hours of student learning (A Base Paper on Asian Credit Transfer Systems (ACTS), 2011).

1.3. Latin American context

In accordance with the results obtained from information gathered as requested by each of the National Tuning Centres¹ in the months preceding the second general meeting of the project held in Guatemala in November 2011, the following was taken into consideration:

- a) No generally and uniformly-applied academic credit system exists in most Latin American countries.

¹ The Tuning Latin America project has promoted the setting-up of National Tuning Centres in each of the 18 countries in the region in order to encourage participation to universities that are unable to be directly involved in the project. They comprise bodies responsible for higher education, quality assurance and accreditation agencies, rector conferences, professional student associations and universities, etc. The aim of these centres is to coordinate the project within the milieu and feed members with the answers from the system with regard to the debates that are taking place within the project.

- b) Where credits do exist, the criteria used to quantify them tend to be very diverse, with the most common form of measurement being that which establishes an equivalence of one hour per credit over 15 or 16 weeks per semester, and with each classroom hour being calculated as two hours of independent work.
- c) To the above is added a third consideration that refers to the very low or non-existent assessment of pre-professional practices and independent activities as generators of academic credits.

There is no academic credit system shared by the Latin American countries. What exists are diverse experiences with differing levels of depth and scope. Among these are the following:

- In **Uruguay**, the features common to concentration of enrolment in higher education at the University of the Republic (UDELAR) have favoured the practically widespread existence of a credit system approved by the Central Directive Council of the University of the Republic in 2005 for degree and post-graduate courses. In the Uruguayan proposal, a credit is equivalent to 15 hours of student workload (including classroom hours, assisted work and independent study), and a normalizer of 80 or 90 annual credits is used. Over the last five years, the UDELAR has made progress in terms of reaching agreements over policies involving curricular expansion, diversification, articulation and relaxation, which is now embodied in the Decree governing Degree-level Studies and other Tertiary Education Syllabuses, approved in 2011 by the Central Directive Council.
- A series of initiatives in **Chile** —supported by the MECESUP Programme and the Council of Rectors (CRUCH)— has encouraged universities to adopt the STC credit system as part of the curricular reform processes: students' total workload, which takes into account the time set aside for all curricular activities —both face-to-face and otherwise— that they need to complete in order to achieve the learning objectives attached to each subject; the time that the student sets aside for their degree course — that a year of full-time study means between 1440 and 1900 hours of academic work; and then there is the normalizer, which enables a number of credits to be assigned to each of the different curricular activities. It has been

agreed that 60 SCT credits is to be associated with the total annual workload of between 1440 and 1900 hours.

- In the **Mexican case** and as a result of the magnitude and heterogeneous nature of higher educational establishments, four ways of naming and measuring credits have been established: a) Credits that fall under the Tepic agreement, which establishes that the value in terms of credits on a degree course is a minimum three hundred and a maximum four hundred and fifty, with six-month courses in which 15 theoretical hours of teaching is equivalent to 2 credits and 15 hours of practical activities is equivalent to 1 credit; b) credits that fall under Agreement 279 of the SEP. This agreement states that for the qualification of associate professional or university senior technician, degree programmes must include a minimum 180 credits and 300 credits in the case of the BA degree qualification. c) Agreement 286: establishes in section 64 of the General Education Act that the competences acquired via different channels, among them the self-taught method, may be publicly recognised by the relevant educational authority; d) SATCA credits: a proposal put forward by ANUIES in which one credit is equal to 16 hours. This measurement assigns a numerical value to all student learning activities contemplated in a given degree programme, with the aim of accumulating and transferring academic credits.
- Credits are well-known in **Colombia** and widely accepted. Over the last five years, a fruitful debate has evolved about competences, flexibility and recognition of studies, among others. In that country and in accordance with Decree 1295 from 2010, an academic credit is equivalent to forty-eight (48) hours of academic work by the student, which includes hours accompanied by direct teaching and independent hours of work that the student needs to set aside in order to carry out the study activities and practical training, etc., deemed necessary to achieve learning goals. 1 hour with teaching means 2 hours of independent work. Generally speaking, each educational establishment in Colombia assumes the credit and works with it on an individual basis. Groups of universities that have agreements governing student mobility, such as the *Sígueme* Programme, try to bring their systems in line with a view to facilitating student transfer processes.
- In **Venezuela**, the National Curriculum Commission, in its approach to the curricular reforms established, defines academic credit as the

average time set aside by the student for the construction of learning by taking into account face-to-face activities and independent work. Generally speaking, it is recommended that two hours of independent work by the student be established in this proposal for each hour accompanied by teaching.

- In **Ecuador**, the Regulations governing the Academic System of the National Higher Education System issued by the ex-CONESUP are being applied which, in accordance with section 123 of the current Organic Law governing Higher Education (LOES), must be approved by the Higher Education Council. One credit in face-to-face teaching is equivalent to 16 chronological hours of independent student work, 8 effective chronological hours in semi-face-to-face teaching and, in the case of distance learning courses, at least 3 of the 16 hours must be face-to-face.
- In **Brazil**, institutions that work with academic credit use the following equivalences: one credit corresponds to: between 15 and 20 hours of theory, 30 to 40 hours of practice with guidance, and 60 to 80 hours of activities carried out independently with teaching supervision. Some private universities are starting to apply credits and assess professional internships and independent activity carried out by the student.
- In **Paraguay**, The Credit System is used by higher educational establishments on a degree and post-graduate level. Although it has still not been established as a credit system on a national level, both public and private universities use it, and its application varies from one establishment to another.
- In **Central America**, via the Central American University Council (represented by **Costa Rica, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Honduras and Nicaragua**), universities have compiled and analysed the definitions of academic credit used in these countries. A common definition has been agreed known as the Central American academic credit, which is defined as: "the unit used to measure the intensity of student work (academic load) which is equal to 45 hours per academic (teaching) period, applied to an activity that has been facilitated, supervised and assessed by teaching staff and may include face-to-face hours of teaching (such as theory, practice, laboratory work, field work and interactivity). Semi-face-to-face hours (bimodal work), and independent and

research work carried out by the student.” In Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras, credit is currently an evaluative unit that is equivalent to 3 hours per week of student work over 15 weeks, applied to an activity that is supervised, assessed and approved by the teacher.

Generally speaking, in those Latin American countries that have a credit system in place, there are diverse criteria used to quantify the unit, which makes it difficult to homogenize the experiences. The most common measurement is for one credit to equal 1 hour of class per 15 or 16 weeks of each semester, and for two hours of independent work to be calculated for each hour of contact teaching (between 45 and 48 hours per credit). The proposal put forward by SCT-Chile, which has already been referred to, is a unique one insofar as it is based on the total annual volume of work carried out by the student and uses a normalizer —60 annual credits— that are re-distributed across the programme.

One of the most significant aspects of what has taken place in the different countries is the very low or zero regard given to independent or non-face-to-face activities as generators of academic credits — among others, professional/job internships, research activities, practical work and assistantships. It is important to stress that the time set aside and activities carried out by students in order to attain the learning results required (hours set aside for practical work or independent/individual work) are as important for generating credit as classroom activities, or those under direct supervision of the teacher.

Despite the above, as far as the diverse conceptualization and implementation of credits in Latin America and the major heterogeneous nature in which they measure and are measured is concerned, the concept of and need for their use are not far from the discourse being pursued about change in higher educational establishments. This has been giving rise to some interesting reflections as to their possible adoption. Thus, for instance, in Bolivia credit has been discussed at several national academic meetings and in other similar sectors. Among the main observations made is that the conversion of academic hours into credits not only represents the conversion of a number of hours to a credit. This equivalence associates other criteria of a qualitative nature with the importance of each subject for a specific professional profile, i.e. that the same subject should have different credits on two different degree courses. It is also possible for two subjects on the same course

to have two different credits owing to their relative importance in the graduation profile.

As far as student mobility in Latin America is concerned, there has been relative growth over the last ten years. In the case of the MERCOSUR countries, the experiences gained from the *Escala Estudiantil* Programme and MARCA as a reference for degree student mobility have had a significant impact. In 2011, the MERCOSUR Mobility Programme (PMM) was launched as an initiative that includes students on non-accredited degree courses at public and private universities. On a level of the Central American region and Mexico, the CSUCA-ANUIES Programme has already enabled there to be student mobility among the 7 countries (Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama).

Irrespective of the above, mobility has tended to be mainly associated with sending Latin American students to other countries in Europe, North America and Africa, and also the hosting of students from these and other regions in the world in Latin American classrooms. In all these cases, universities generally continue to use traditional ways of recognising exchange studies (subject per subject, semester per semester) without having a mechanism at their disposal that could facilitate recognition of the studies completed.

Globalisation and the demands for economic and social innovation, which are all too evident in the world today, make it necessary to reflect on the strategic need for and advantages of a common Latin American higher education area. With their diversity, the Latin American countries face considerable challenges in attempting to project a type of student mobility that is able to transcend national, cultural and social borders. Greater obstacles are being faced when reflecting on a common Latin American higher education area that should take into consideration both improvement and/or renewal of training programmes and their reconciliation on a national and regional level. Defining a Latin American qualifications system would constitute an even greater challenge in this area.

2

Student-focused profile

Consensus has been reached in Latin America with regard to the advantages of including a definition of graduation processes based on competences and student-focused curricula — identifying the effective learning outcomes with which the student must be familiar throughout their training process.

Understanding the education process from the student standpoint, changes the approach traditionally taken. Via a traditional approach, which can be understood as involving the transfer and acquisition of content that focuses on teaching, a process has been highlighted that focuses on the student, on their learning and on their capacity to learn.

This shift involves changes in:

- The role played by the student, who needs to demonstrate a command of the competences proposed in the profile following a reflective and understanding learning process.
- The role played by the teacher, who needs to focus on how to structure the learning situation according to how the capacities of their students develop.
- The way in which educational activities and the organisation given to knowledge are conceived — those that need to be taken into consideration according to the goals set by the student.
- The way of assessing learning, which should not just take the results obtained into consideration, but also the process that has been followed and the contexts in which it is learnt.

As a result of a process viewed in this way, the student needs to learn how to learn. Learning does not take place from the outside looking inwards, but is constructed internally and via interaction with others by means of a construction process that enhances the student themselves. Therefore, it proves necessary to create spaces in time when designing the curriculum in order to search, reflect, internalize and consolidate knowledge which, by being integrated, mobilized and applied, will develop the competences demanded within the comprehensive training of the future professional.

The assumptions that underlie new curricular consensus point today to the importance not only of learning or the acquisition of certain knowledge, abilities, skills and values considered basic or essential in a specific profession or area of knowledge, but also the conditions and stimuli required to ensure that the student is able to develop a significant and enhancing level of learning throughout a comprehensive training process. Only this will enable the future graduate to develop the capacity to constantly keep their knowledge up-to-date (lifelong learning).

Generally speaking, the change in paradigm points to a strengthening of capacities and interests of the individual/student, who needs to consolidate a type of training that enables them to face an uncertain and unpredictable future regarding employment in which the capacity for learning and continuous reassessment will come to be considered more significant than the accumulation of information and specialist knowledge — much of which very quickly becomes obsolete and is of limited importance.

Nowadays, the cognitive, affective and attitude-related potential of the individual needs to be developed rather than being forced to adhere to rigid and homogenous curricular structures. Within this framework are promoted different types of learning such as tutoring, independent study, outings, trips and conceptualized work experience and research projects, etc. The creative use of new information and communication technologies is also thus stimulated (TIC) (Gómez, V.M. and Celis, J.G., 2005).

A curricular design whose profile reflects the general and specific competences for graduation in a specific qualification will require a calculation of the total work time that the student needs to set aside in order to achieve the learning outcomes on each course/subject/module/period. It is therefore important to establish a credit reference system that will enable this time and its recognition to be measured.

3

Proposal put forward by the Latin American Reference Credit (CLAR)

3.1. Importance of the credit system at TUNING

The proposal for an academic credit system is one of the fundamental aspects of the approach taken by the Tuning Latin America Project, and there are many sides to this debate. It highlights the importance of taking into account the following: student time, the volume of work required to gain certain competences, and the weighted and realistic distribution of the learning activities included in the curriculum so as to avoid unnecessary prolongation of qualifications or repetition of courses.

A system of this type is based on the correlation of a number of elements:

- The profile of the qualification, indicating the competences that need to be developed.
- The learning results specified for each subject/module/period/course.
- The educational activities that best ensure that learning results will be attained.
- The time (measured in hours), based on the work carried out by the student who, as a general rule, will be required to carry out the educational activities deemed necessary to attain the results obtained from learning.

The Tuning Project, which focuses on general and specific competence in each area and results obtained from learning, has shown that learning, teaching and assessment-based approaches have a bearing on the work demanded of students in order to attain the learning results required and, therefore, on how this is measured. Student workload, teaching methods and competences and learning outcomes are clearly related to each other. Nonetheless, other factors also have an influence such as the diversity of traditions, curricular design and the context, consistency of programmes, organisation of teaching and the capacity and attitude of the student - in other words, the time required by students to achieve such competences and results (Beneitone *et al.*, 2007).

3.2. Origins of the CLAR: precedents

- a) In the second stage of the Tuning LA Project (2011-2013) and after seven years gaining momentum, representatives from participant Latin American countries gave an appraisal about the state of the matter in question in each of the countries at the first general meeting held in Colombia (May 2011). They come to the conclusion, among others, *that it was necessary to persevere in the construction of a Latin American credit by initially defining a reference credit.*
- b) At the second general meeting, which took place in November 2011 in Guatemala, participant countries agreed as to the need to design a credit reference system for universities from the region (CLAR) and the need to set out the real curricular requirements demanded of students in accordance with the effective availability of time at their disposal.

3.3. Objectives set out by the Latin American Reference Credit (CLAR)

Unlike other proposals, the Latin American Reference Credit was a response to the importance of disseminating and promoting a change in the curricular paradigm and the development of quality programmes that would favour student mobility among the countries of the region. Within this context, the main objectives of the system are as follows:

- *To favour the development of curricular reform that considers the credit system to be an aspect involving improvement of a student-*

focused curriculum as a centre of learning, and as a factor involving recognition of the accumulation of academic work.

- *To estimate credit as a factor involving the promotion of quality* in training processes. Although the CLAR is not responsible for quality, a well-established and well-balanced credit system which, together with competences, provides additional information to the graduation profile, contributes towards quality.
- *To promote student mobility* among Latin American universities via a shared system involving recognition of the student's academic work.

As a system involving the recognition and development of quality in terms of academic work, the CLAR seeks to:

- Encourage curricular innovation and continuous improvement in the quality of degree programmes in national systems;
- Promote reflection about the time and type of learning activities required of a student in order to attain learning results and the development of their competences in a specific curricular activity;
- Facilitate greater academic cooperation among higher educational establishments in Latin America;
- Facilitate student transfer within Latin American national higher education systems.

As a transferrable credit system, the CLAR seeks to:

- Facilitate student and academic transfer and mobility among Latin American higher educational establishments using a common conversion outline, and
- Facilitate the mutual recognition of courses and academic activities carried out by mobilized students.

3.4. Latin American Reference Credit (CLAR)

The Latin American Reference Credit (CLAR) has been devised as a unit of value for calculating the workload, measured in hours, required of a student in order to attain learning results and pass a subject or teaching period.

From a complementary standpoint, the CLAR represents a system that displays the relative complexity of the different curricular components and facilitates the assessment and comparison of learning results within different contexts of qualifications, degree programmes and learning environments. It provides a shared method for the purpose of comparing learning between the different degree programmes, sectors, regions and countries.

The CLAR considers an annual full-time student workload to be equivalent to 60 credits¹. Use of this normalizer was approved at the second general meeting of the Tuning Latin America Project (November 2011), taking into account:

- a) Its divisibility, which enables it to be easily adapted to diverse ways of structuring the academic year (six, four and three-month period and modules, etc.).
- b) The fact that it is being widely used in other parts of the world, which would facilitate its understanding and compatibility.

If as a general rule one (academic) year of full-time study is equivalent to 60 credits, then one semester will be equivalent to 30 credits. Thus, a 4 year programme would correspond to 240 credits, one of 5 years would be 300 and one of 7 years would be 420 credits, in accordance with the real situation regarding degree courses and programmes in different countries.

The workload assigned to a CLAR credit is defined by a record of the total time a student sets aside on an annual basis to learning. For in-

¹ Agreements reached at the second general meeting of Tuning Latin America, November 2011.

stance, if one academic year is of 36 weeks' duration, with 45 chronological hours of weekly work (which includes contact teaching and independent work), the total number of hours of work will be equal to 1,620 hours a year which, if divided by the 60 annual credits agreed, will amount to a credit value equal to 27 chronological hours. This may vary, depending on the number of weeks considered to make up one year, the weekly number of hours of work and the features of the different degree programmes and countries.

4

Features of CLAR credits

Among the features proposed for the Latin American Reference Credit are the following:

- Credits are awarded after successfully completing a learning period (which includes the time set aside for the assessments that verify this).
- They represent a way of recognising the learning outcomes attained (reference value).
- They favour student transfer among different degree programmes and/or educational establishments, both within and beyond national contexts.
- They provide the job market with recognition of the level of training attained by the candidate (they lend recognition to their qualifications or skills).
- They favour lifelong learning and, generally speaking, give greater flexibility to the higher education system.
- They are not invasive. They recognise the diversity and singularity of systems, ways of administering them and the extent of education programmes in each country.
- The CLAR system and credits are and will be respectful towards local, regional, national and institutional autonomy.

5

Benefits expected of the CLAR

From the point of view of innovation and improvement, it is hoped that the CLAR will encourage and favour curricular improvement in national systems, and also reconcile them, thus enabling there to be a move towards student-focused curricula that are also geared towards quality in terms of training processes.

How does the CLAR contribute towards quality as it is understood in these terms?

Although a credit system in itself does not guarantee access to quality, a Latin American credit may help to:

- Focus attention on the student by encouraging them to take responsibility for their learning achievement acquisition process and training in competences.
- Make the curriculum more flexible and thus holistically favour its integration.
- Efficiently plan and organise the curriculum.
- Lend relative weight to curricular activities in accordance with their complexity.
- Serve as a reference for comparing degree programmes (comparability and legibility).

- Reflect on teaching methodologies and forms of assessment being used in order to optimize the time the student sets aside for their learning.
- Distribute work to be carried out by teachers and students in a balanced way (curricular management).

In short, a Latin American Reference Credit system will help to focus attention on student intervention and on the quality and relevance of the competences that they need to develop in order to be fully integrated in society. It will also facilitate the calculation of the number of real hours used by the student to perform their tasks and develop the competences set out in the degree profile. In this respect, the design and application of a credit system will encourage educational establishments to reflect on their curricula, on the workload assigned to the student, and on learning results.

The definition and adoption of the Latin American Reference Credit (CLAR) will help to build a common area for higher education in the region. An area thus defined will help to provide Latin American higher education systems with greater flexibility, mobility, collaboration, transparency, recognition and integration.

The CLAR will, in the terms already stated, in turn allow greater articulation between the regional area of Latin American higher education and other areas, thus favouring access on the part of students to a globally integrated form of higher education. It will also promote greater efficiency in terms of the academic recognition process involving the subjects being studied during mobility stages.

The CLAR system will possibly enable students, employers and society in general to understand and accept existing qualification systems on a national level so that this may help to define a system of a regional nature.

6

Procedures for calculating the Latin American Reference (CLAR)

6.1. Duration of the academic year

The duration of the academic year is one of the factors used to calculate the number of hours worked by the student and to define the value of a credit. In Latin America, the duration of an academic year may vary from one country to another, and even between the same country between one educational establishment and another.

At the Fourth General Meeting of the Tuning-Latin America Project (Brussels, 2006) and based on data provided by the National Tuning Centres in the different countries participating in the project, the conclusion was drawn that nearly all higher educational establishments in Latin America plan between 32 and 40 weeks of academic work per year. This datum was corroborated in the study titled "Estimation of student work volume in Latin America¹", carried out between November 2011 and March 2012. The 10,086 questionnaires answered by teachers and students from 189 academic units from institutions participating in the project corroborated the range referred to above.

The average of the interval detected between 32 and 40 weeks, corresponding to 36 weeks, will be taken as a reference for the purpose of calculating the Latin American CLAR credit.

¹ All information regarding the statistical survey can be found on the website of the Tuning Latin America project: <http://www.tuningal.org/>

6.2. Annual number of hours worked by the student

The workload that needs to be demanded of the student in order for them to attain the learning outcomes expected and to develop the competences stipulated in the degree profile would also appear to be highly dispersed and varied both among countries and within them. On the other hand, the amount of hours required of students in order to attain learning outcomes and meet verification demands with regard to the development of competences is also variable, and depends on individual capacities, teachers' experience and training, the teaching and learning methods used, assessment, the nature and consistency of the programme, the quality of the organisation, the availability of learning resources and institutional traditions, on both a national and regional level, etc.

Students' time is a core element in defining CLAR credits. Students' time is considered to be associated with an interval of between 40 and 55 hours, according to that set out in the "Estimation of student work volume." Setting aside more time is not only unrealistic, but also fails to take into account the leisure and rest hours needed and the number of hours set aside for other areas and social interaction pursued by the student.

Based on 36 hours of academic work a year (analysed in section 6.1) and the range of hours of weekly work (40-55 hours), the annual range of students' work hours would be between 1,440 and 1,980 hours.

Weeks per year	Hours of weekly work	Hours of work a year
36 weeks	40 hours	1,440 hours
36 weeks	55 hours	1,980 hours

Hour/credit ratio:

(1,440 hours/year): (60 credits/year) = 24 hours/credit

(1,980 hours/year): (60 credits/year) = 33 hours/credit

*Therefore, a **CLAR credit** has no single value. It fluctuates between **24 and 33 chronological hours of work carried out by the student.***

In cases where the teaching year is other than 36 weeks, the number of hours of weekly work carried out by the student may vary, provided

the range of annual work established in the previous table is not altered (1,440-1,980). Any variation in the number of weeks and the number of hours of work per week will need to ensure that the range established be respected, so as to avoid excessive variability in terms of the CLAR.

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Appendix

I. Glossary for the Latin American Reference Credit (CLAR)

CLAR represents student-centred systems whereby credits are granted according to the work they carry out in order to attain the learning results on a course, cycle or period. Key CLAR concepts include: student academic workload, credit system, curricular component, learning results.

Student Academic Workload

This refers to the estimated time (expressed in hours) required by students to attain learning outcomes which are defined from a curricular standpoint. It is measured using the academic workload assigned to the student and includes guided learning and independent study as elements leading to passing a course or subject.

The following needs to be taken into account when calculating student academic workload:

- Forms of teaching and types of activity: classes, seminars, practical and/or laboratory work, tutorial work, vocational training/internships, field work, project, research, etc.
- Learning activities: carrying out specific activities, practising technical skills, writing essays, articles and monographs, reading books and articles, giving oral presentations, etc.
- Assessment: written examination, oral examination, tests, portfolio assessment, collaboration, thesis, vocational training/internship report, research report, field work report, etc.

- Guided learning: learning via formal contacts such as classes, tutorials or personal work using self-guided materials in the case of open or distance learning.
- Independent learning: learning that students develop on their own, including individual or group deliberation, gathering of information (online or with bibliography, etc.), comparing and analysing information, and performing tasks (writing essays, preparing presentations with slides, gathering material, etc.).

Credit system

Broadly speaking, this is a systematic way of quantifying a training programme by assigning credits to its components.

Curricular component

A curricular component is a learning unit which is included in the degree programme. This combines knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that help to complete the elements that make up the degree profile and, as such, credits are assigned to them. Traditional curricular components are: courses, seminars, vocational training/internships and theses, among others.

Learning outcomes

The definition of learning outcomes according to the Tuning Project is as follows: "Formulations with which the student needs to be familiar, understand or be able to demonstrate once the learning process has terminated. Learning outcomes must be accompanied by suitable assessment criteria that may be used to ascertain whether the results expected have been achieved."

In other words, a learning outcomes may be defined as knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that a student will have developed after completing a course, subject or curricular activity. Learning outcomes will need to be accompanied by assessment criteria that verify as to what extent such knowledge, skills, competences and values have been gained by the student.

II. FAQs

What are CLAR credits?

This refers to the workload demanded of the student in order to attain the learning results proposed in an activity or during a curricular period. From the quantitative point of view, one CLAR credit is equivalent to one part of the total workload required to complete one year of full-time studies. It has no single value, but fluctuates between 24 and 33 chronological hours of student workload.

As a general rule, one (academic) year of full-time study is equivalent to 60 credits, one semester to 30 credits and one quarter (three-month period) to 20 credits. Thus, a 4-year programme will correspond to 240 credits, one of 5 years to 300 credits and one of 7 years to 420 credits.

What does the CLAR credit represent?

This represents the number of hours, *measured in student workload*, assigned to a curricular activity, period or cycle within a degree programme. It takes into account all the activities that the student carries out in order to attain learning outcomes in those activities covered by their programme — among others, attendance in class, seminars, practical work and work carried out under direct tuition by the teacher, independent study in libraries and development of specific tasks in laboratories. This list may not be exhaustive, and the activities carried out by a student are heterogeneous and of varying complexity. ALL of them are represented equally in the CLAR credit (not just those that acknowledge direct teacher/student interaction).

Do face-to-face activities have a different hour value than the non-face-to-face activities carried out by the student?

No. The CLAR credit measures the total amount of work carried out by the student, including both face-to-face and non-face-to-face activities. All the hours set aside for face-to-face and non-face-to-face activities as a whole make it possible to attain learning outcomes.

Are there any differences in hour value between a master class and that of other face-to-face activities?

No. All activities, irrespective of what they involve, are equally important for the student's learning process. What is interesting to ascertain is the time taken to carry out the set of activities that make it possible to attain learning results.

How are credits assigned?

Credits are assigned by taking into consideration the number of weeks a year set aside by educational establishments for academic work - i.e. 36 weeks a year, the number of hours set aside weekly by a student for study, which ranges from 40 to 55 hours; and the total number of credits in one school year for a programme leading to a degree or professional qualification, which is 60. This number of credits must be distributed among all the curricular components included in the degree programme corresponding to each academic year, depending on the global demand for student work and taking into account the following: the estimated number of hours required to achieve the learning objectives set out for a particular activity, the need for distribution pertaining to credits among all curricular activities or periods, and the relative importance and complexity of these activities within the overall structure of the degree course.

Who assigns credits?

Credits are assigned by each higher education establishment in each country within the framework of current syllabuses and study programmes, and in accordance with national and institutional regulations and conditions.

To what type of curricular component are credits assigned?

Credits are assigned to all the curricular components that are recognised individually in the degree programme, irrespective of whether these are compulsory or optional. They include modules, subjects, courses, seminars and practical training, among others — on condition of being subject to assessment.

To what are credits are not assigned?

To extra-curricular activities that are not contemplated in the degree programme or those determined by the educational establishment in question, in accordance with its education policies.

Is there a connection between the number of credits assigned to a curricular component and its level or degree of importance?

No. All curricular components within a degree programme play their role in the training process, and for this reason they are considered equally important. This does not mean that they have the same number of credits within the programme.

Is there a connection between the number of credits assigned to a curricular component and its level or degree of difficulty?

Yes, albeit indirectly, because it is not the degree of difficulty that exclusively determines the number of credits assigned to a curricular component. There are other variables. Generally speaking, however, it can be said that the greater the complexity of a component, the greater the need to set aside time for face-to-face and non-face-to-face activities, activities with direct guidance provided by the teacher and independent work carried out by the student, in order to attain learning results.

Can the same module or subject have a different number of credits in different programmes?

Yes. Each programme in principle sets out the relative weight of the curricular components to which credits are assigned. Attributing credits will depend on curricular design following the degree programme, articulation between curricular components, and the relative weight of that component in the programme, in addition to the emphasis placed on it within the degree course, among other aspects. All this may entail a different student workload and therefore a different assignation of credits for the same subject within two different degree programme. Nonetheless, the greatest possible consistency in assigning the number of credits to subjects shared by more than one degree programme must be assured in order to lend consistency to the credit.

Is there any connection between contact hours with the teacher and assigned credits?

There is no direct connection between contact hours with the teacher and the credit assigned to the curricular component. There is great heterogeneity regarding relations between classroom hours and the volume of work that these face-to-face hours demand of a student. Therefore, assigned credits will depend on the total time set aside for attaining the learning outcomes required.

How is the teacher's role affected by the CLAR?

The teacher is a key informant when assigning credits and plays an essential role in their effective application. In principle, they must be aware of the role played by the curricular component for which they are responsible within the degree programme. They must also plan learning tasks to ensure that these fit in with the total number of hours/credit that have been assigned to them. In other words, if the activity has 3 credits and the value of the credit is 25 hours, the student will have 75 hours available to pursue the learning activities planned by the teacher (both face-to-face and non-face-to-face), and to attain the learning results required. An awareness of the time limitations imposed on the curricular components to be developed is the greatest impact that credits have on the teacher's duties.

Can a student obtain credits in a greater number than that established annually (60)?

Yes, they can, although this is not advisable so as not to exceed a reasonable limit of the volume of studies that a full-time student needs to set aside. In exceptional cases and where an educational establishment's internal regulations allow this, deviations from the normalizer may be taken into consideration.

