Common framework for the recognition and transfer of ECTS credits obtained by Erasmus+ mobility students for online courses offered on central platform of the ErasmusX Project

FINAL REPORT

Intellectual Output no 5 „Recognition of ECTS credits for online courses"

2021

Content

1 Introduction

This report presents the results of the Intellectual Output no 5 „Recognition of ECTS credits for online courses" of the Project "ErasmusX - Online Courses for Mobile Students" [Erasmus+ Strategic partnership, no. 2018-1-ES01-KA203-050886], initiated and realised by the consortium of the following institutions: University of Alcalá in Spain (coordinator), European University Foundation in Luxembourg, University of Napoli Federico II in Italy, University of Latvia and Lodz University of Technology in Poland. The IO5 was elaborated and delivered by all partners of the consortium with a leading role of the Lodz University of Technology.

The overall aim of the Project was to encourage students to take part in international exchange by offering them a wide variety of e-learning courses and completion of one (or more) of them as part of their learning mobility for studies and/or traineeship, independently of mobility destination or courses location. The Project has developed the central platform (IO1, IO2) with the catalogue of e-learning courses prepared and offered by participating Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), i.e. partner universities (IO3) for Erasmus+ mobility students. The e-learning courses concern study fields initially agreed by the consortium: Engineering, Computing, Economics, Business, Education. They are elaborated according to the commonly agreed high quality standards of teaching methodology (IO4). The central platform will be open for other universities to join the initiative.

The main assumptions and desired outcomes of the Project were planned as follows:

- e-learning courses offered by the central platform are selected by students of participating HEIs as part of their mobility programme for studies or traineeship,
- a mobility student is free to choose any course from the catalogue relevant to his or her study programme regardless of the place/destination of the mobility (except of the courses offered by his or her home university, as they cannot be considered as part of international mobility).

In order to achieve the Project's aims it was crucial to ensure that the online courses offered in the central platform are fully recognised and included in the final record of student's achievements. Thus, it was necessary for participating universities to elaborate and introduce the common approach and framework for the ECTS recognition and transfer (IO5) for those courses.

2 Background and methodology

2.1 Main aims of the Project in regard to the common framework for recognition and transfer of credits

Recognition of credits is a process through which an institution certifies that learning outcomes achieved by a student and assessed in another institution satisfy the requirements of one of the programmes which the first institution offers. In the context of the learning mobility, students should be assured that credits obtained in host university are transferred and recognised in their home university for the purpose of obtaining a degree. To facilitate learning mobility between HEIs the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is used in countries of the EHEA. It provides a framework of common approach, rules and documentation of credits transfer and recognition, required especially under the Erasmus+ mobility scheme. All key documents and recommendations regulating the implementation of Erasmus+ mobility schemes underline the importance of full recognition for satisfactory completed activities of mobility in terms of credits awarded and inclusion them in the final record of student's achievements [Erasmus Charter for Higher Education, The European Quality Charter for Mobility, The Erasmus Student Charter etc].

For the effective implementation of the Project's results it was necessary to:

- analyse in details the potential barriers (legal, institutional, procedural, technical etc.) which might hinder the recognition of the ECTS credits of e-learning courses offered in the ErasmusX central platform,

- identify those elements of the process and organisation of learning mobility of students which should be adjusted to the needs of implementation of the e-learning courses offered in the central platform,
- elaborate and implement the common solutions for certification and recognition of the ECTS credits for e-learning courses offered in the central platform.

The proposed common system of the ECTS credits recognition for online ErasmusX courses should take into account:

- individual national/local regulations and requirements existing in participating HEIs,
- solutions which will encourage students to use the offer of online courses through the platform (with minimum of additional requirements and paper work on the part of students),
- solutions which will allow and encourage other universities to join the common platform,
- challenges arising from the new Erasmus programme for 2021-2027 regulations and guidelines, including new forms of mobility (blended mobility) and digitalisation of procedures and documentation,
- conditions related to the existing COVID-19 pandemic which currently influenced international mobility of students by limiting its traditional form and scale, moving learning process to online form, however, requiring synchronous modes of distance learning in many universities.

2.2 ErasmusX e-learning courses as part of the learning mobility – the scope of analysis and of common framework

The Project concerns the development of e-learning courses which are offered to Erasmus+ students of Project's participating universities as elements of their learning mobility programme for studies and/or during the traineeship mobility. Learning mobility is traditionally understood as involving physical mobility in which a student moves to another country for a part of a programme of study (usually one or two

semesters) or traineeship. In case of mobility for studies, it is usually realised in the framework of organised programmes subject to agreement between sending (home) and receiving (host) university and a student (Learning Agreement for Studies - LAS). Moreover, the mobility of students (and staff) is subject to institutional agreements between HEIs. With the new generation of Erasmus programme 2021-2027 there is also possibility for students to participate in blended mobility, a combination of both, traditional and virtual forms.

The original concept of the Project assumed "traditional" form of learning mobility, when a student is moving to host university in another country for studies and/or traineeship, during which he or she enrols to one of the courses offered on central platform. However, the solutions elaborated in this Project are also valid in other forms of mobility, i.e. blended one.
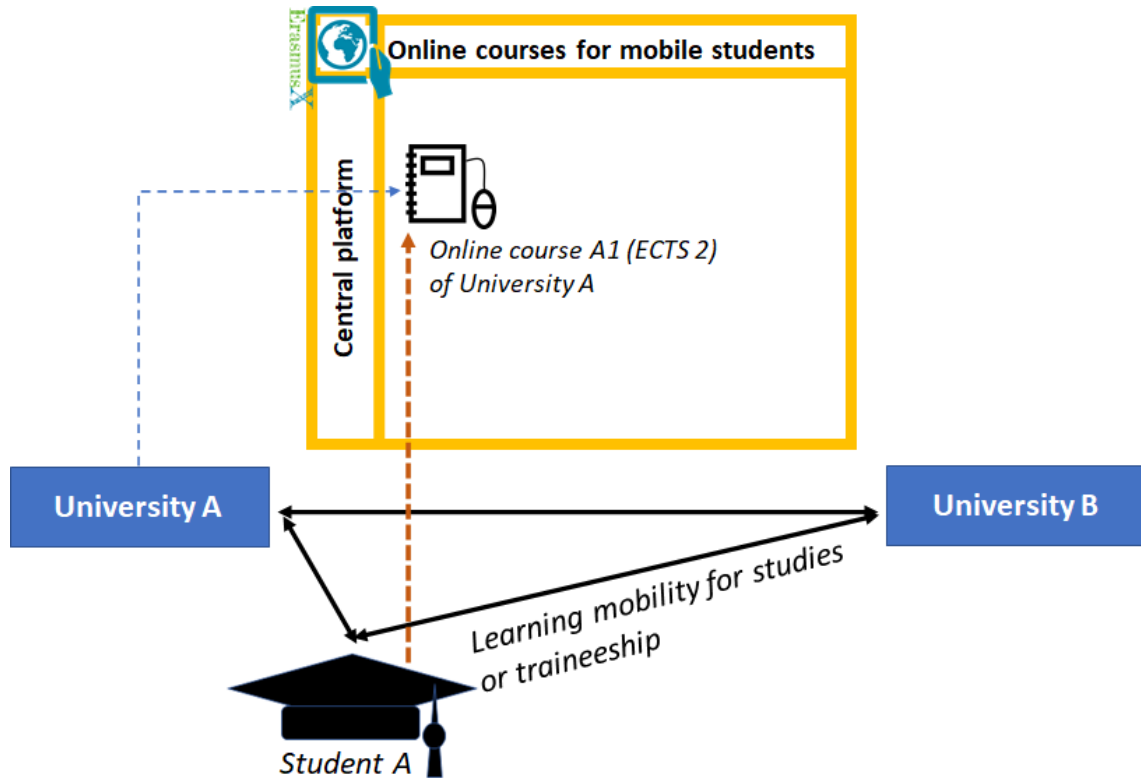
Students of the HEIs participating in the Project will be able to choose any course from the central catalogue relevant to his or her study programme (the syllabuses of online courses should be available at the central platform). In the Project the following options of choosing the ErasmusX online courses in the learning mobility of students could be envisaged:

- e-learning course offered on the central platform of the Project ErasmusX chosen by a mobility student is provided by his/her home university,
- e-learning course offered on the central platform of the Project ErasmusX chosen by a mobility student is provided by his/her host university,
- e-learning course offered on the central platform of the project ErasmusX chosen by a mobility student is provided by third university (neither host nor home university of a student).

The first option occurs when a student A from University A is going to University B for mobility for studies (or traineeship) and he or she has chosen an e-learning course offered by home University A in the central platform (figure 1). As the completion of such a course offered by the home university cannot be considered as part of mobility and included in the learning agreement, this option was excluded from the common

framework and not discussed further. The central platform should exclude the availability of courses of student's home University.
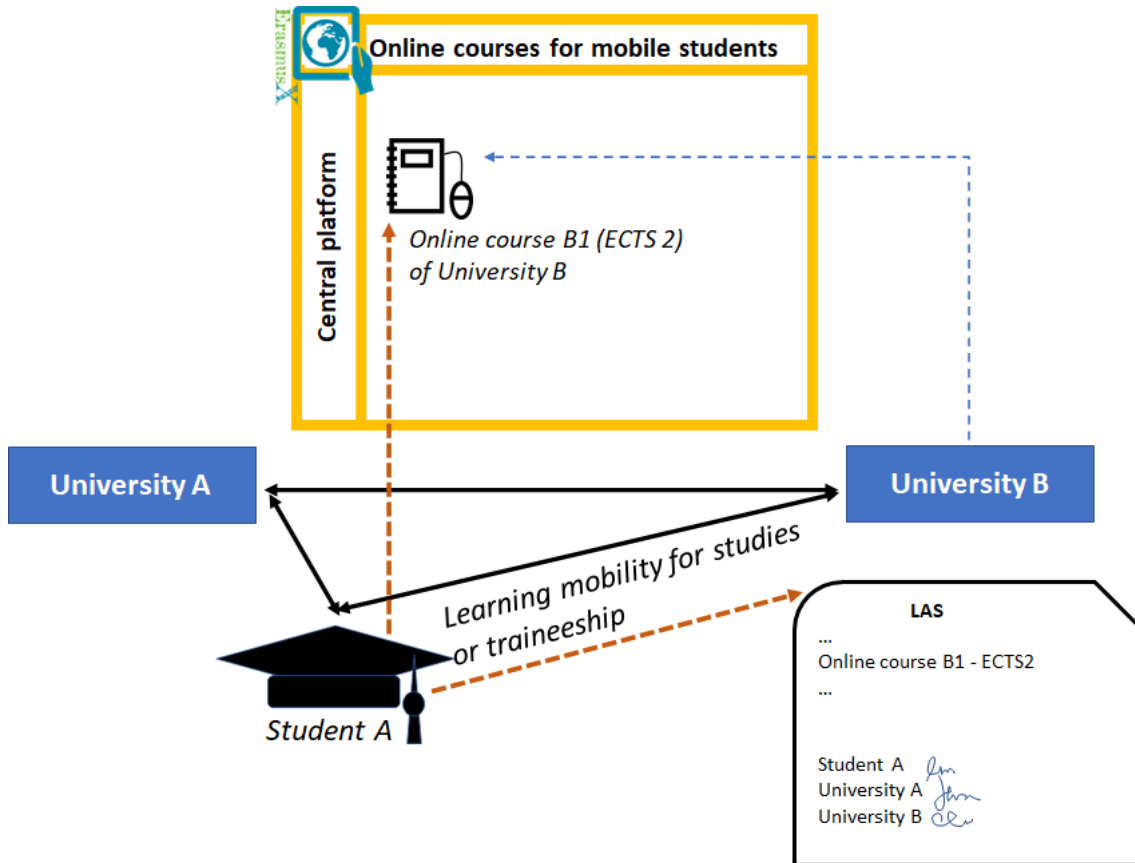
Figure 1

The second option is when a student A from University A is going to University B for mobility for studies (or traineeship) and would like to choose courses in traditional class-room form and additionally e-learning course(s) offered by the University B in the ErasmusX central platform (figure 2). As this e-learning course is offered by the University B in the central platform, but also in the university local catalogue, it may be included in the Learning Agreement and confirmed in the Transcript of Records with no problem. No further changes to the process and documentation of mobility are necessary. In that case student should go through the "normal" process of application for mobility in University B, without the intermediary of the central platform. Although the central platform may play important role in promotion of e-learning courses of host
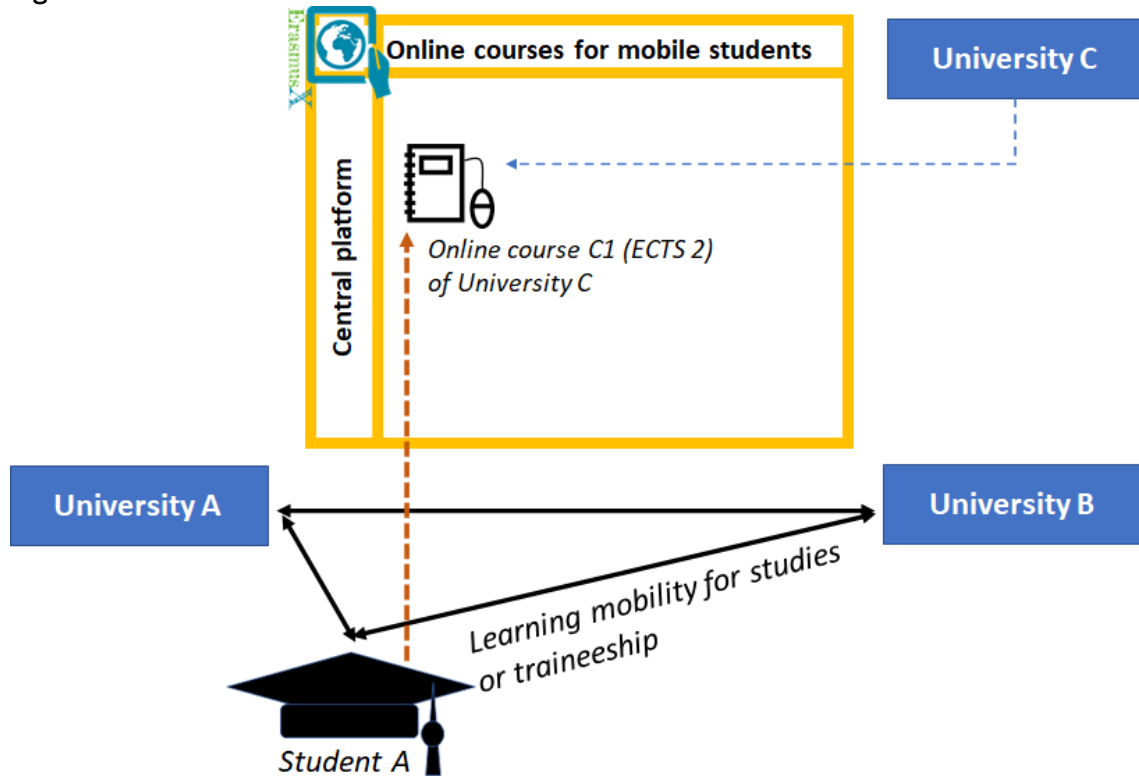
HEIs. In this case special arrangements for common framework of ECTS transfer and recognition are not needed.

Figure 2

Online courses for mobile students

Central platform

Online course B1 (ECTS 2)
of University B

University A

University B

Learning mobility for studies or traineeship

Student A

LAS
...
Online course B1 - ECTS2
...

Student A
University A
University B

The last option concerns the situation in which a student A from University A is going to University B for mobility for studies or traineeship and he or she has chosen through the central platform e-learning course(s) available in the third university, neither host nor home university of a student, University C (figure 3).

Figure 3

This option is the biggest challenge in terms of required adjustments of procedures, documents etc. for successful recognition and transfer of credits of online courses available at the central platform. It was therefore analysed in details and was the main subject of the elaborated common framework. The following main issues were considered by the consortium:

- the possibility of formal inclusion of the ErasmusX courses in the mobility programme of a student (LAS),

   Could online course of University C be a subject of learning agreement between a student (of University A), University A and University B?

- arrangements in case of realization of an online course in University C during the traineeship in University B,

- the identity of a student of University A in University C

   Can student be regarded as mobility student at University C completing only one (or few) selected courses without learning agreement?

Can he/she be registered in University C as a (mobility) student?

How can he/she be enrolled to a course offered by University C?

- method of confirmation of ECTS credits obtained by a student for completion of the ErasmusX course in the third University C,

Which University should issue the Transcript of Records for an online course?

- necessity of signing of agreement between universities offering courses on the central platform.

2.3   The work plan and methodology

The Intellectual Output no 5 was realised by the IO5 Working Group consisting of representatives of the Project partners, who were experts in such areas as learning mobility of students in HEIs, Erasmus+ programme, recognition and transfer of ECTS credits. The IO5 Working Group was responsible for elaboration of ideas, consultation and approval of final results. The realization of the IO5 activities was coordinated by Lodz University of Technology.

The following task were realised:

1) The IO5 Working Group discussed the aims and scope of analysis on the bases of a document prepared by the Lodz University of Technology – "Recognition and transfer of ECTS credits obtained by Erasmus+ mobility students for e-learning courses offered on central platform of the ErasmusX Project – elaboration of common rules (discussion paper); the result of this phase was the document "Initial ideas and solutions for recognition and transfer of ECTS credits for e-learning offered in central platform of the EramsusX project – working document"

2) Lodz University of Technology elaborated the detailed description of the proposed solutions in the document "Recognition and transfer of ECTS credits obtained by Erasmus+ mobility students for e-learning courses offered on central platform of the ErasmusX Project – common framework proposal" in order to be in-depth analysed at partner institutions

3) In-dept analysis at partner institutions (universities) concerned:

    a. the analysis of legal and organisational requirements, procedures and practices existing at universities concerning the recognition of ECTS credits for online courses realised by students abroad

    b. the assessment of proposed solutions in the context of national/local conditions

The analysis was based on the uniform list of questions. The individual reports prepared by the Project partners were then summarized by the Lodz University of Technology in the Partial Report.

4) The analysis of existing practices of recognition of online courses in the EU and outside was made on the bases of desk research and survey among universities outside of the Project

5) The final common framework of recognition and transfer of credits for online courses of the ErasmusX project was elaborated.

6) The outline of the common framework was presented during the final conference OT4ME! - First Conference on Online Teaching for Mobile Education, 22-25 November, 2021 (virtual).

3 The common framework for recognition and transfer of ECTS of the online courses offered in the central platform of the ErasmusX

The common framework will be used in the situation in which a student A from University A is going to University B for mobility for studies and he or she has chosen through the central platform e-learning course available in the third university (neither host nor home university of a student), University C (see figure 3).

The main elements of the common framework concern:

- the inclusion of ErasmusX e-learning course of the University C in the Learning Agreement of the student A,

- method of confirmation of obtained ECTS credits for ErasmusX e-learning course C1 by the student A,
- the status of the student A in University C,
- formal arrangements in regards of signing of the agreement by universities offering courses on the central platform.

3.1   Recognition of the ErasmusX online course during mobility for studies

The main idea behind the adopted solution is based on the assumption that the online course of University C offered in the central platform is included in the Learning Agreement of a student signed by the home (A) and host (B) universities. It also meets the condition that the solutions should not impose additional administrative burden to students. This additional work will be executed mostly by the administration of the universities. The only additional process which student will undergo is application for an online course offered in the central platform.
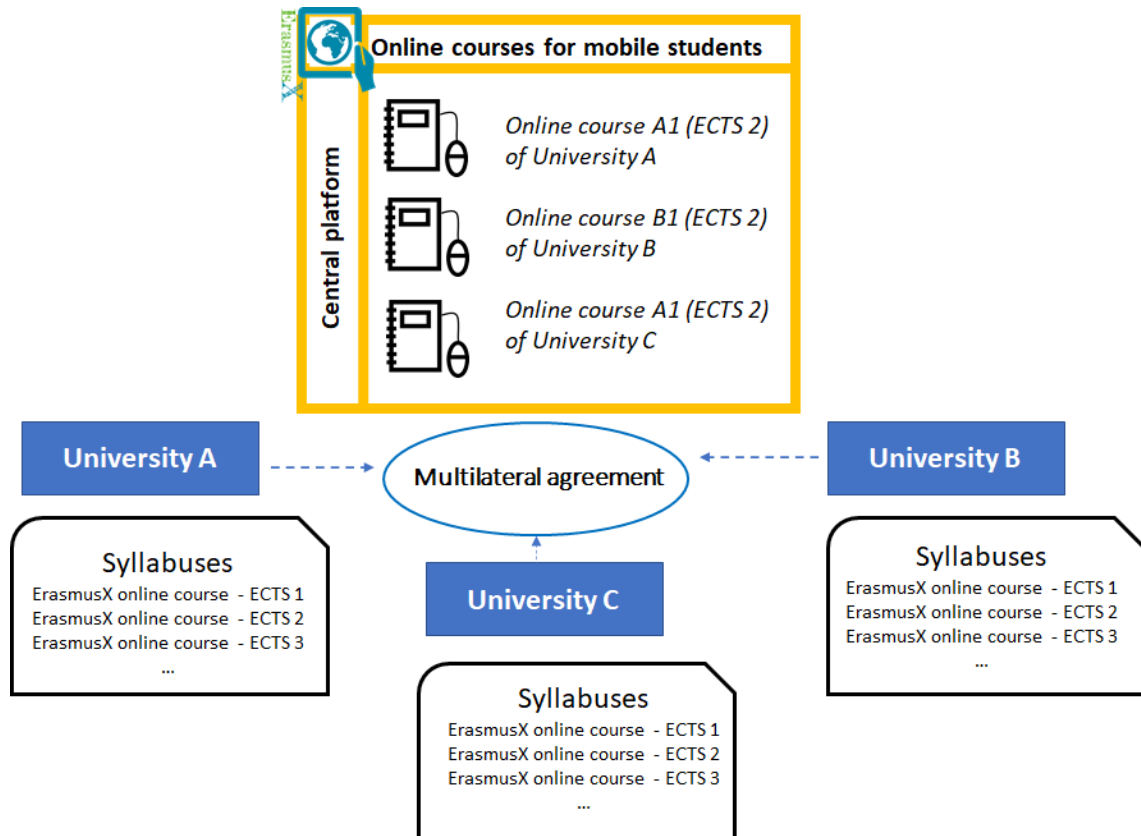
In the adopted framework recognition of the ErasmusX online course is done between home University A and host University B, based on the confirmation of learning outcomes achieved by the student A, issued by the University C providing on-line course.

3.1.1   Inclusion of the ErasmusX e-learning course in the Learning Agreement of the student

In order to include the ErasmusX online course C1 in the LAS of a student it is necessary to introduce "universal courses" called for example "ErasmusX online course, ECTS 1 [2,3…]", in the local programmes catalogues of all universities participating in the central platform. Those courses should be included in the universities' offers for incoming students in all universities participating in the ErasmusX central platform (but available only for students of the consortium).
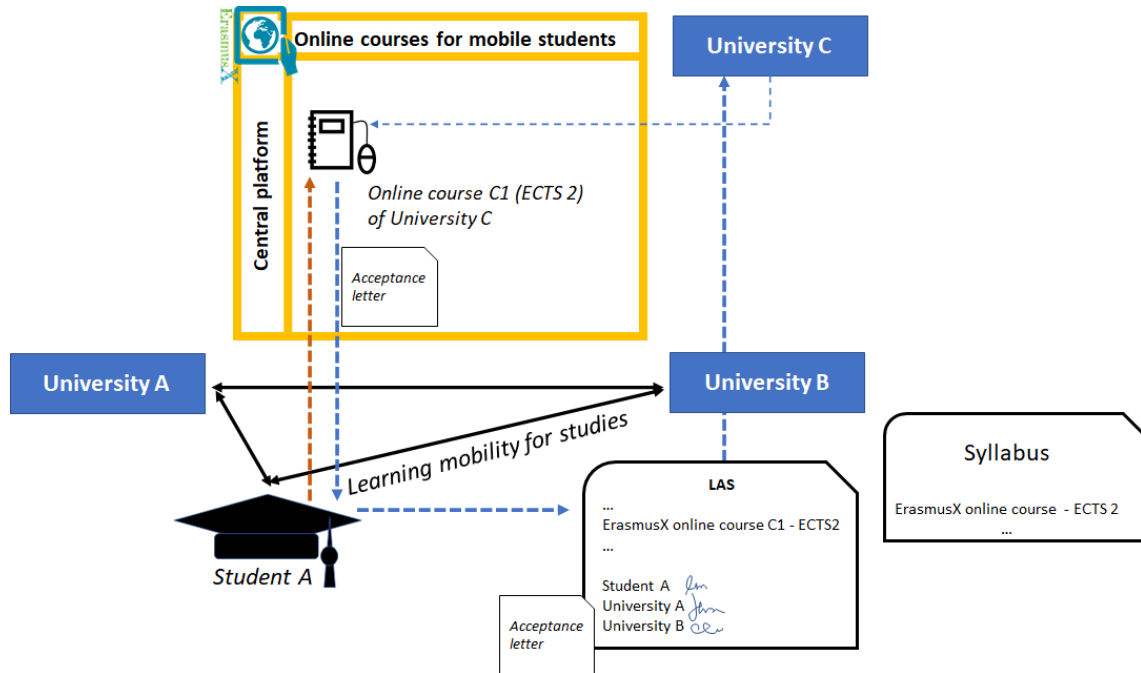
The "**ErasmusX Project ECTS 1[2,3]**" **course syllabuses** will be developed in a uniform/agreed way for all participating universities. All universities wishing to join the central platform will need to include "ErasmusX online ECTS 1 [2,3…]" courses in their local catalogues (figure 4).

Figure 4

The student A applies to be enrolled to the e-learning course C1 to the University C through the central platform. If the student is accepted, the University C issues/send acceptance letter to the student (this can be realised in usual form used by the university). On this bases student may include course C1 as an "ErasmusX online course C1 ECTS 1 [2,3…]" in the LAS signed by his home University A (subject to agreement of home university). LAS together with acceptance letter form University C should be sent to University B. LAS signed by University B is then send to University A. Additionally, the copy of the LAS should be send to University C by administration of the University B.
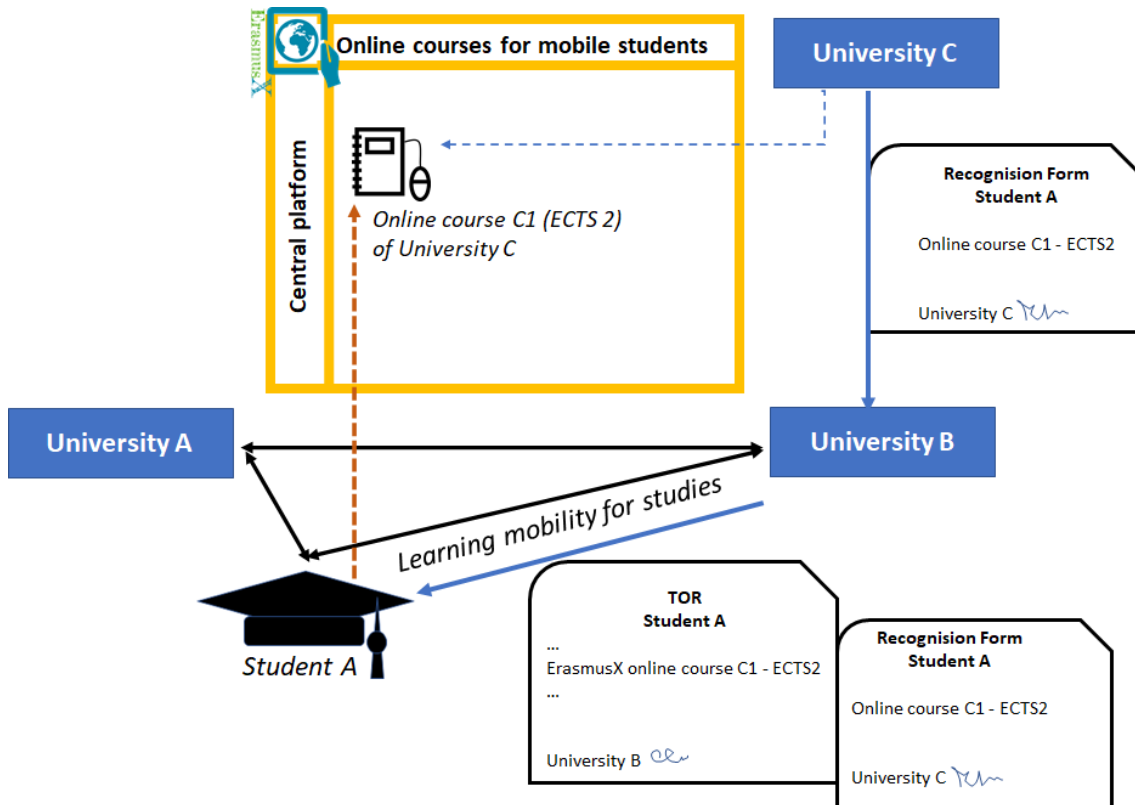
Figure 5

3.1.2 The method of confirmation of obtained ECTS credits for ErasmusX e-learning course

After successful completion of the on-line course C1 by the student A, University C issues a document confirming the ECTS credits obtained, in a document called **Recognition Form**, and send it to University B. On the bases of information included in the Recognition Form, University B confirms ECTS acquired by a students for "ErasmusX online course ECTS 1 [2,3…]" in the student's Transcript of Records. Recognition Form will be sent to University A together with ToR. The model of the Recognition Form is presented in the annex.

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Figure 6

Online courses for mobile students

Central platform

Online course C1 (ECTS 2)
of University C

University C

University A

University B

Recognision Form
Student A

Online course C1 - ECTS2

University C

Learning mobility for studies

Student A

TOR
Student A
...
ErasmusX online course C1 - ECTS2
...

University B

Recognision Form
Student A

Online course C1 - ECTS2

University C

3.1.3   The status of the student A in University C

The student A should be enrolled to the ErasmusX e-learning course in the University C as mobility students in accordance to internal regulations on the bases of multilateral agreement of the consortium (see below). Students will be identified on the basis of student identity card.

The universities participating in the central platform will be able to set admission limits for such students for all ErasmusX e-learning courses offered in the central platform to avoid excessive course occupancy.

3.1.4 Multilateral agreement

The universities participating in the central platform will need to have multilateral agreement (for example in the form of intra-European mobility agreement, Consortium Agreement) concerning the conditions of enrolment to online courses offered in the central platform as part of the mobility of students.

3.2 Recognition of the ErasmusX online course during mobility for traineeship

In case of the mobility for traineeship the proposed model adopts the same rules. Recognition of the ErasmusX online course is done between home University A and host University B, based on the confirmation of learning outcomes achieved by the student A issued by the University C providing on-line course. The only difference is that instead of including the ErasmusX online course C1 in LAS, it is added to Learning Agreement Student Mobility for Traineeships as "additional achievements" (figure 7 and 8).
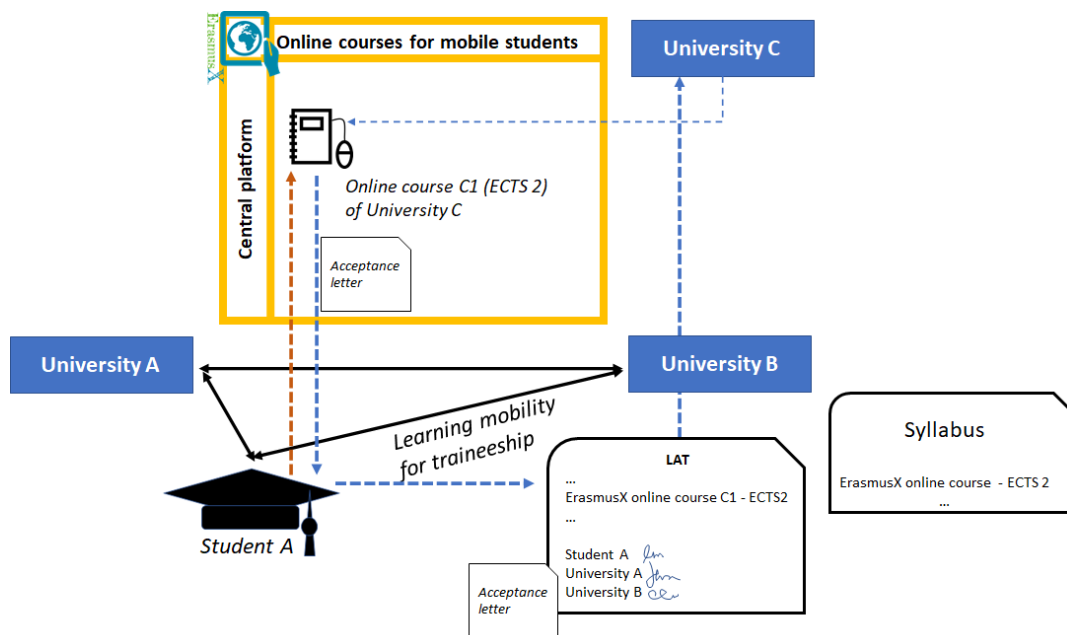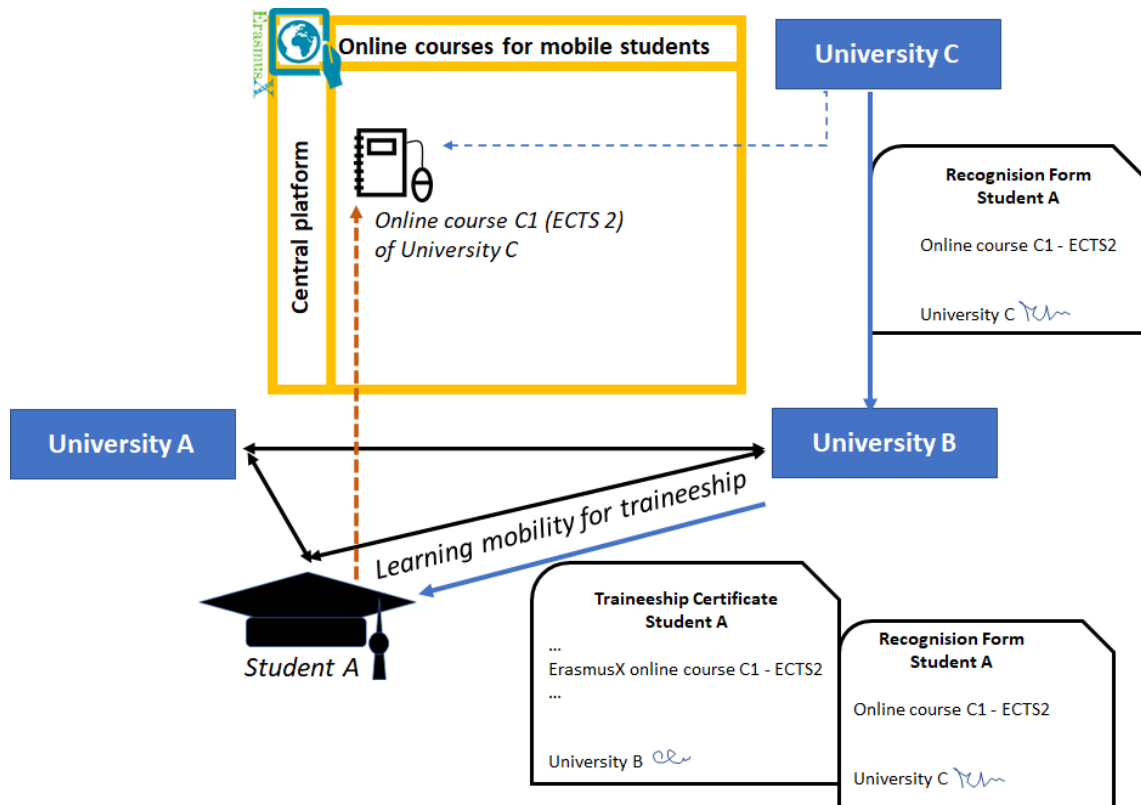
Figure 7

Figure 8

4 Beyond the common framework

The consortium was considering the alternative solution of the model in which the recognition of the online course offered in the central platform was done between home University A and the third University C providing the course, without participation of the host University in the process. This alternative approach is more in line with recognition of credentials in open education. Such solution does not in full respond to the idea of the Project and to the approach taken by the consortium that online courses offered by the central platform should be included in the mobility programme of the student.

It should be stressed that the best solution to increase the variety of e-learning courses for Erasmus+ students would be the possibility of recognition of ECTS obtained in more than one university in the framework of one individual mobility study programme. It assumes that one LAS can be signed by a student with more than 2 universities and a student can choose e-learning courses form different universities. It requires LAS signed and ToR issued by all universities involved. This solution is not feasible at the moment, however it is worth suggesting as a proposal for future development of the Erasmus+ mobility, especially for the consortium of closely cooperating EHEIs (i.e. European Universities).

Annex. Proposed model of Recognition Form

RECOGNITION FORM for ErasmusX course

NAME OF STUDENT:	FIRST NAME:

NAME OF RECEIVING INSTITUTION:

FACULTY OF:

TEL.:   FAX: EMAIL:

NAME OF HOST INSTITUTION:

FACULTY/DEPARTMENT OF:

Course Unit code	Title of the course unit	Local grade (1)	ECTS grade (2)	ECTS credits
		TOTAL ECTS AWARDED:		

(1) (2) – see explanation on annex page

Date   **Signature of registrar/Dean**   **Stamp of institution**

NB : This document is not valid without the signature of the registrar/dean/administration officer and the official stamp of the institution.

Annex to Recognition Form

<u>*EXPLANATORY NOTES*</u>

(1) (2) Description of the institutional grading system:

LOCAL SCALE (example based on Polish grading system)		ECTS GRADES	
5.0	five	A	(excellent)
4.5	four and a half	B	(very good)
4.0	four	C	(good)
3.5	three and a half	D	(satisfactory)
3	three	E	(sufficient)
2	two	FX/F	(fail)