



University of  
St Andrews

## Credits and grade conversions for study abroad

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# UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

## POLICY ON CREDITS AND GRADE CONVERSIONS FOR STUDY ABROAD

### 1. Introduction

This Policy sets out procedures relating to the acquisition and conversion of credits and grades at institutions other than St Andrews, in the course of a St Andrews Degree programme. It does not take account of Degree programmes 'With Integrated Year Abroad' (WIYA), for which students complete assessments for St Andrews credits, graded by staff in St Andrews.

The Policy sets out a common basis for those parts of the Grade Conversion process that can be standardised, in the interests of clarity, high standards and equal treatment of all students undertaking Study Abroad.

It is expected that individual Schools will give further detailed advice to their own students, and that particular study abroad arrangements may have specific additional requirements and deadlines. All staff and students involved in Study Abroad should be aware of this Policy.

It is recognised that the conversion of grades and credits from one reporting scale to another requires a clear understanding of the scales and their relationships as well as regard for academic standards and respect for the principles of partnership. Conversions should be objective, transparent, valid and reliable. The Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) has an active role in overseeing the conversion of Study Abroad grades, and can be consulted at any time about difficult cases.

Schools should use the Policy and its regular application as a benchmark for the continual academic evaluation of their partnership arrangements. Any urgent issues with credit and grade conversion, or indeed any other aspect of the partnership, should be reported immediately to the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching). Any non-urgent issues should be reported during the annual review of exchange agreements, co-ordinated by the Collaborations & Study Abroad team. Termination of the agreement should be considered and discussed with the Registry Manager (Collaborations & Study Abroad), in any case where a School consistently experiences difficulties with a particular partner.

Feedback about the robustness of University-level arrangements with overseas partners is welcome and should be directed in the first instance to the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching).

### 2. Study Abroad in the Degree Programme

Study abroad for credit is only permitted on existing University approved programmes. No informal arrangements should be made for students to undertake academic programmes abroad which involve credit towards our degrees. For information on all existing exchange and study abroad programmes, and how to propose a new University exchange, please see: [www.st-andrews.ac.uk/studyabroad/staff](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/studyabroad/staff).

Students who have not had their study abroad programme officially agreed in full by the School(s) in which they are studying at St Andrews will not be permitted to claim credit for study abroad and will be required to complete the full complement of Degree programme credits on their return. Such official agreement includes both permission to study abroad before departure and approval of the

Learning Agreement in the course of the study abroad period.

The normal expectation is that students study abroad during their third year. Honours entry is a minimum requirement for study abroad, and it is therefore not possible for Sub-Honours students to undertake study abroad. Some School study abroad programmes permit final year students to participate. Where a student spends their final semester abroad, the School must ensure that the student is fully aware that they will not be eligible to graduate until the following academic year (due to the grade conversion process). This does not apply where a student's academic programme abroad is fully assessed by St Andrews, e.g. an Honours project.

### **3. Contact and Communication**

Each School must have a designated Study Abroad co-ordinator, who may also be an Adviser of Studies. A role description for Study Abroad Co-ordinators is available at: [www.st-andrews.ac.uk/studyabroad/staff](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/studyabroad/staff). Study Abroad co-ordinators and Advisers must work closely together to establish a suitable study programme for each student.

Every student preparing and undertaking Study Abroad should be clearly informed of the name of the co-ordinator in their School(s) and must undertake to maintain contact with that person throughout the Study Abroad period, normally by email.

Students should be carefully briefed by the School before departure, particularly in relation to academic procedures and, in the case of School exchanges, host institution/country information. Students also have a responsibility to familiarise themselves fully with all documentation and requirements signalled to them by the University, School and partner institution.

Students with disabilities should be aware that SENDA legislation will not necessarily be applicable in partner institutions, and should therefore take particular care to initiate a discussion of their circumstances with the Study Abroad co-ordinator before applying.

Students should be aware of the contents of this Policy and should note in particular the sections relating to the number and level of credits and the Learning Agreement, and the desirability of bringing back copies of all work submitted for assessment in the partner institution, together with grades and tutors' comments where possible.

All students intending to undertake Study Abroad for credit must attend the compulsory pre-departure meeting organised by the University.

### **4. Number of Credits**

Students undertaking study abroad as part of a Degree programme are expected to register for the equivalent of 120 St Andrews credits for one academic year, and 60 for one semester. No more and no fewer credits may normally be transferred back to St Andrews. This usually means taking the credit load considered by the host institution to be normal for the year or semester for a full-time home student, excluding summer schools and with the total credits spread equally over all semesters of study leading to a Degree.

For students within the Erasmus scheme, the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS) is equivalent to 120 St Andrews credits per year (60 ECTS per year) or 60 St Andrews credits per semester (30 ECTS per semester). It is expected that most St Andrews students will take 60 ECTS

credits during their study year abroad, however in some countries this has proved to be excessive in comparison to the average UK student workload. Therefore, with the agreement of the relevant School, a St Andrews student may take fewer credits, ie a minimum of 48 ECTS credits per year (or 24 ECTS credits per semester). Where students have been given permission to take fewer than 60 ECTS credits per year (down to a minimum of 24 ECTS credits per semester) the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) may ask the School to justify the decision.

All approved modules which are taken during a period of study abroad will count towards the student's final degree programme and therefore **all** of the grades obtained (passes and fails) will be entered into the Honours degree classification. There will be no retrospective discounting of credits.

Students who take between 48-60 ECTS credits per year and 24-30 ECTS credits per semester will have this converted to 120 and 60 St Andrews credits respectively.

Students who enrol for more credits than the expected norm will *not* have the demands of a heavier workload taken into account when their grades are converted.

## **5. Choice of Modules and Levels**

Students studying abroad should take full advantage of the academic opportunities on offer, with the proviso that modules taken should be pitched at the equivalent level to the student's Honours or Integrated Masters subject at St Andrews. Modules selected should respect the principles of progression as far as possible, and should provide students with an adequate preparation for the next stage of their studies on return to St Andrews. Students must take subjects which are recognised as qualifying towards their degree programme - details of which can be found in the Faculty Senate Regulations.

In many instances, this will mean that a St Andrews student visiting an exchange partner institution will be taking a different course of study from that followed by a home student in that institution.

Where a partner institution offers an internship for credit, students may include this in their overall credit load only where approved by the St Andrews co-ordinator. Where a co-ordinator judges that an internship does not provide adequate academic progression, s/he may authorise the student's selection of the internship as an extra activity, from which credits will not count towards the overall total.

Students should be advised on the level and choice of modules by St Andrews co-ordinators before their departure and by the local co-ordinator while at the host institution. Students should ensure they also receive further advice as necessary from St Andrews co-ordinators via email during their period of residence abroad.

Students should enrol for modules at a level higher or lower level than their own only:

- when a particular course component is essential and no other alternative exists; and
- when they have the explicit permission of their St Andrews co-ordinator.

Only exceptionally, and only with the recommendation of the School to the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching), can a higher level of difficulty be taken into account when grades are converted. Students who enrol for modules which have not been approved by their School may be denied St Andrews credits in those modules.

Students must follow the guidance given to them about the completion of the Learning Agreement, available at [www.st-andrews.ac.uk/studyabroad](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/studyabroad). The Learning Agreement records the student's study choices for the period of study abroad. **Students should finalise their choice of modules and have them approved using the Learning Agreement by the end of their first four weeks at the host institution.** The Learning Agreement, and any subsequent changes to it, must be signed by the host institution and by the St Andrews Honours Adviser or the Study Abroad co-ordinator in consultation with the Adviser. Joint Honours students must have the Learning Agreement signed by both Schools. **Learning Agreements are official documents required by national agencies for audit purposes: failure to follow the correct procedure will have serious consequences for the student, School and University.**

Students and co-ordinators must check the student record and Schools should ensure that the Advising Database and Data Warehouse show the appropriate Study Abroad indicators by the end of the Advising period. Any problems with student record information should be reported to Registry.

Students must not register for modules that cover essentially the same material at the same level in the two institutions. Co-ordinators must ensure that no student is registered for modules with a substantial academic overlap.

Students may attend language or culture modules that have been created for international students (non-native speakers), during either the pre-sessional or termtime periods. While highly recommended, such modules do not normally count towards the number of credits the student may transfer to St Andrews. The same rule applies to other equivalent modules, e.g. study skills or basic computer skills acquisition.

Language modules that do not count towards the number of credits the student may transfer to St Andrews but that have been successfully completed abroad may be recognised in the student's HEAR transcript as an additional achievement, at the request of the School.

## **6. Conversion of Grades to St Andrews Reporting Scale**

### Overall Procedure

Conversion should take place in five identifiable stages.

Upon a student's return to St Andrews, it is expected that the Study Abroad Co-ordinator will inform the student about the grade conversion process. The School Study Abroad Co-ordinator calculates the conversion of all grades obtained by students for whom s/he has responsibility, and selects the appropriate corresponding St Andrews modules (see information about selecting St Andrews modules). The Study Abroad Co-ordinator is the first point of contact for students who have any questions or concerns about the conversion process. Any movement in the proposed grade from the base level covered in the Conversion Tables should be based on clear evidence and academic judgement.

For Joint Honours students, the Study Abroad co-ordinator reaches agreement concerning the converted grades with the co-ordinator(s) in the other subject(s). The co-ordinators must ensure that they have used *exactly* the same conversion procedures, that they agree with each others' grades, and that they agree on the distribution of credits;

If the School has a Study Abroad committee, proposed grade conversions should be approved at

this stage by the committee, with the Director of Teaching; if there is no such committee, the Study Abroad co-ordinator should agree the grade conversions with the Director of Teaching before submitting them to the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching);

Grades are submitted for scrutiny to the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching). **Note that the Assistant Vice-Principal will conduct random checks of Schools' arithmetic, and the appropriateness of specific grades.** The purpose of this stage is to ensure that all Schools involved in similar exchanges have observed the same procedures and used the same methodology for grade conversion. Any conversions for which the process adopted is unclear or not in accordance with this Policy will be questioned by the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching).

Once approved by the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching), Registry will liaise with Schools to add the credits and grades to the student's record. **Note that if a student is informed of a converted grade in advance of final reporting, it must be made clear that the grade is a provisional recommendation only and may change.**

## Technical Process

### *Conversion tables*

The principle of Study Abroad and the integrity of the grading process at partner institutions should be respected. Grades obtained at partner institutions are accepted in principle as valid, just as St Andrews grades are accepted in partner institutions across the world.

Grades obtained at partner institutions are normally converted to the St Andrews scale in accordance with the approved Conversion Table.

Approved conversion tables are available at: [www.st-andrews.ac.uk/studyabroad](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/studyabroad). New or revised tables will be added here only once they have received decanal approval. Schools should note that, where appropriate, the creation and approval of a new Conversion Table is an integral part of the exchange approval process - no student will be permitted to take part in a new exchange until a Conversion Table has been approved by the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching). Where appropriate, Schools may propose revisions to existing Conversion Tables using the template at [Staff](#). New or revised conversion tables will be made available to students by the date of the pre-departure meeting held each year in St Andrews.

The Conversion Table follows the principle of equivalence established between the St Andrews grade scale and the grade scales adopted in the countries of partner Universities.

Where a partner institution alters its grading structure, St Andrews will consult with the partner and amend the relevant Conversion Table accordingly. In most cases these changes will be made before departure, but on rare occasions where a partner institution makes changes later in the academic year, students will be notified via email should a Conversion Table be revised after the April pre-departure meeting. In such cases, it will be particularly important for students to bring back copies of work and any other evidence (see Converting Grades) to support the grade conversion process. Where a Conversion Table is revised to allow for changes to the partner institution's grading and/or marking structure, comparison of converted grades against the previous Conversion Table for that partner will not be considered by the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching).

### *Selecting St Andrews modules*

St Andrews 'shell' modules for Study Abroad grades exist in values of 10, 12, 15, 20, 24, 30 and 60 credits, at 3000, 4000 and 5000 level. Modules should be selected whose credit value reflects the work done by the student as closely as possible. For example, four equally-weighted modules taken in one semester abroad should be translated into four 15-credit modules; three equally-weighted modules into three 20-credit modules, and so on. 12 and 24 credit modules should be used with care to ensure appropriate credit loads, eg 12 credit modules should be used to convert five equally weighted modules abroad into 60 credits at St Andrews.

Advisers and Study Abroad co-ordinators must be attentive to the need for Honours students to obtain 90 credits at 4000 level, and should use shell module codes accordingly.

It will often be necessary to aggregate two or more overseas results in order to make them fit into the credit-values available in St Andrews. Schools should use their judgement and knowledge of the partner institution to find the most appropriate combination, which must never be of detriment to the student.

As far as possible, Schools should seek to convert credit for a full year abroad into 60 credits per semester at St Andrews (ie to balance 120 credits equally across both semesters).

### *Aggregating Grades*

Where it is necessary to report an aggregate of two or more overseas grades for a single St Andrews module, Schools should first establish the average of the overseas grades before carrying out the conversion using the Conversion Table. Credit weighting of the average is not necessary or recommended unless there is a very clear imbalance in the weightings of the grades to be averaged.

### *Converting Grades*

As for assessments completed in St Andrews, the full 20-point reporting scale should be used for conversions.

Where a range of foreign grades map to a single St Andrews grade, St Andrews grades may be reported to one decimal point (eg where 73-76 is converted to 14 on the Canada-St Andrews scale, a grade of 74 might be converted as 14.3). Similarly, where a single foreign grade maps to a single St Andrews grade, St Andrews grades may be reported to one decimal point where appropriate for differentiation (eg a French grade of 12.4 may be converted to a 14.4 on the St Andrews scale).

Where one foreign grade maps to a range of St Andrews grades, the default position will be the lowest integer in the St Andrews band. Schools may propose a higher conversion within the St Andrews band if appropriate.

Factors such as the following may be taken into account in positioning the single foreign grade *within the published St Andrews band*:

- level of the student's achievement as evidenced by copies of coursework brought

- back from the host institution;
- level and ambition of the course followed;
- written comments of the tutors concerned;
- the mean and/or median grade for the class and the position within the class.

**Note that students who are unable to provide copies of coursework and tutors' comments will be unable to benefit from some of the types of consideration allowed by the above rubric. Students must submit any supporting evidence to their Study Abroad Co-ordinator by the end of Week 2 of the semester immediately following the Study Abroad period(s). Evidence submitted after Week 2 may not be considered in the conversion process.**

Where a School has evidence for recommending, exceptionally, a grade belonging to a band other than that indicated by the Conversion Table, or any other non-standard result such as a Deferred assessment or the discounting of a particular module or elements of it, a reasoned argument for the recommended grade must be made to the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching). For Joint Honours students, the case should be agreed by both Schools. It should be understood, however, that departure from the Policy is rarely permitted. **Note that no argument will be accepted that is based simply on a student's adjusting to life abroad.**

Where a student wishes formally to contest a grade obtained during Study Abroad, the matter should be taken up immediately under local rules at the partner institution before the student leaves. The partner institution's rules will apply.

Where a student wishes to request an S code for a Study Abroad module or modules, s/he should consult the Study Abroad co-ordinator as early as possible, and follow the normal procedures within the School for making such a request. The decision on whether to apply the S code is made within the School, but the School may seek advice from the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) if necessary.

Where a student wishes to contest a grade obtained by conversion upon her/his return to St Andrews, the student should first contact the Study Abroad Co-ordinator. The usual Appeal procedures apply, and the Policy on Student Academic Appeals and Complaints should be consulted. It should be noted that student appeals against study abroad grades converted in St Andrews should be lodged with the Head of School within **five working days** of the results being posted on the datawarehouse by Registry.

## **7. Reassessments**

In the event of failed modules, a student may request review of the result(s) in St Andrews by providing copies of work submitted, course documentation, examination papers, etc. Where the result is not confirmed as a Fail, the School may suggest a grade on the St Andrews reporting scale based on the material reviewed and assessed by the School. Where the Fail grade is confirmed, or insufficient material is available for review, options for re-assessment include the following:

- reassessment by the host university where available, whether in the host university or (by special arrangement, where possible) in St Andrews;
- reassessment in St Andrews based on the original syllabus, in a form to be determined by the School;
- no reassessment in the failed module, but a reported Fail grade and credits to be made up in the following year. Students and Advisers should however be aware of the risks



attached to the taking of extra credits in a student's Senior Honours year.

The usual Senate regulations will apply to Fail grades at Honours, and the reassessed grade will be capped at 7.

These procedures may also apply as a failsafe mechanism in exceptional cases, for example of missing assessments or faulty transmission of results. In such cases the result of the St Andrews reassessment replaces the faulty or missing grade from abroad.

Any such operations are to be declared and justified to the External Examiner and to the School examinations committee of the subject(s) involved, as well as to the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching).

If an Erasmus student is granted permission to discount the Erasmus year and to repeat the academic year in St Andrews, it is likely that s/he will have to repay any Erasmus grant money received. The student and the School must inform the Collaborations & Study Abroad team immediately if this situation arises.

## 8. Timetable for Establishing Grade Conversion and Credit Transfer

Grade conversion and credit transfer are normally carried out in the first semester following the student's return from the period abroad.

Students should be aware that results reporting from the partner institutions might not take place until relatively late in the year.

For students who have spent all year or semester 2 abroad, the grade conversion and credit transfer process should be completed no later than the results of first semester modules of the following year.

For students who have spent only semester 1 abroad, results should be reported no later than the results of second semester modules in that year.

Full procedural details and deadlines are available at: [www.st-andrews.ac.uk/studyabroad/staff](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/studyabroad/staff).

## 9. Grade Conversion Tables

See the [Credit and grade conversion webpage](#).

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date

