

University of Birmingham

**The Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Guidance on
Academic Credit Arrangements in Higher Education in England: August 2008**

Topic and Purpose of this Report

1. The draft document, *Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Guidance on Academic Credit Arrangements in Higher Education in England*, which was discussed by APRC at its meeting on 22 May 2008, was finalised by Quality Assurance Agency in August 2008. The full text of the document is available from the QAA website at:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/england/credit/creditframework.pdf>

2. For APRC to **consider** this finalised QAA Guidance document, paying particular attention to the implications for further action, and especially those that may be relevant to the forthcoming institutional audit.

Background and Context

3. Building upon long-standing and well-established practice across the higher education sector, and written by the Credit Issues Development Group, the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England* and its associated guidance follow the recommendations of the Burgess Group that guidance on a national framework for the use of academic credit in HE in England should be broad, overarching and advisory, allowing HE institutions to adopt and adapt elements as appropriate to their needs and circumstances.
4. The Burgess Group indicated that the arrangements for the use of credit should also be linked to the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The credit framework describes typical practice across the sector and provides a reference point for the introduction or consolidation of the use of credit. It identifies the purposes and benefits of credit and credit frameworks, pointing out the potential roles in supporting progression into and within HE, and the transfer between programmes, by indicating the volume and intellectual demand of learning.
5. The framework, which includes a table of the credit values typically associated with the design of programmes leading to the main qualifications in England (see Table 1 on page 14 of the document), also provides the generic level descriptors and a proposed timetable for implementation. The QAA states that, in order to maximise the benefits of credit, and to include the credits associated with their programmes in the descriptions of each programme they offer, all HE institutions are encouraged to implement the credit arrangements by the start of the 2009/10 academic year.

6. This Guidance refers to national contexts within the UK and also international aspects, describing the relationship between UK credit and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. The relationship between credit and qualification frameworks and the setting and assurance of academic standards is also discussed. In noting that the decision-making processes regarding academic standards and quality remain the responsibility of each institution, the QAA also recognise that whilst all learning may be expressed in terms of credit values, not all credit can or will necessarily be accumulated towards a specific award or programme, and it is a matter for each institution to determine what credit it will accept for purposes of accumulation or transfer. Therefore, the application of these national guidelines on credit remains a matter for individual institutions to decide on at their discretion.

Main Aspects of the QAA Guidance: Revisions to the Draft Guidance

7. Section 1 of the QAA Guidance Document explains the background to the drawing up of the guidance, outlines the purpose and benefits of credit and credit frameworks, describes the operation of credit frameworks (nationally and internationally), the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and Qualifications frameworks. This information is consistent with that provided in the March draft guidance, with the following amendments:
- Having regard to credit frameworks nationally and internationally, paragraph 10 of the Guidance notes that the key elements of these frameworks and of the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England* are aligned. For instance, all frameworks are based on the achievement of learning outcomes and a single credit represents 10 notional hours of learning (as per paragraphs 21-22).
 - The paragraphs dealing with Accreditation of Prior Learning have been relocated and appear later in the document as Accreditation of Learning (paragraphs 35 and 36). There has also been revision to allow not just for learning that has taken, but also for learning that is concurrently taking place, for example, work-based learning, which may be counted towards the requirements of qualifications.
 - The paragraphs dealing with Credit Levels have also been relocated and now appear under Main Features as paragraphs 23-26. The text remains consistent with the earlier version, however.
8. Section 2 of the Guidance sets out the main features, together with Table 1, and the sections relating to assessment and award of credit, accreditation of learning, credit accumulation and transfer and the timetable for implementation. In addition to the incorporation of the above-mentioned information previously contained in Section 1, the following paragraphs have been amended.
- Paragraph 29 has been expanded and it notes that there are, in particular, two main variants in the concept of the graduate diploma both of which are consistent with the expectations of the FHEQ. One is typically a year long and comprises 120 credits; the other relates to programmes for a shorter duration and for which 80 credits is typically the minimum. Similarly, some PGCE programmes comprise 60 credits but typically, the credit volume

exceeds this minimum where HE providers credit rate the professional practice element and integrate it into the programme, the precise requirements for individual programmes being normally specified in regulations and programme specifications.

- Paragraph 30 is an addition to the Guidance, which states that institutions also use credit levels in designing programmes in order to assist in locating modules and subsequently, with appropriate reference to the qualifications descriptors, qualifications at the appropriate level in the FHEQ. Credit levels may also assist programme designers to develop programmes which make an incremental demand on students. The credit levels can then be used to identify planned learner progression through different stages of a programme.
- Table 1 on page 14 has been revised. Column 4 (Typical ECTS credit ranges from FEHEA) has been split into two new columns: 4 (FQ-EHEA cycles) and 5 (ECTS credit ranges from the FQ-EHEA) and more explanatory notes have been supplied. However, the information provided in the revised table is the same as was previously available.
- The paragraph dealing with Assessment and the award of credit has been revised. It has been divided into two paragraphs (33 and 34) and a new sentence added to paragraph 33 states: Institutions will also specify, within their assessment regulations, their position with regard to compensation for, or condonement of, failure and the provision for resit and re-assessment opportunities and any implications of these for credit awarded.

This is addressed by Regulation 7.2.1 (m) of Section 7: Assessment Progression and Award, which states that:

Credit may be awarded only for successful completion of the stated learning outcomes of the module. On undergraduate programmes only, where the positive aspects of the overall performance within the module outweigh the area of failure, 'compensation' of a weak achievement by a strong performance elsewhere should be allowed only in relation to assessments within a single module, or between assessments across linked modules which share an integrated assessment, which leads to a single mark.

- The paragraphs concerned with Credit accumulation and transfer have been enhanced. Paragraph 37 contains an additional sentence stating: Students, employers and other stakeholders who are interested in credit transfer will need to contact the relevant HE provider directly to discuss the opportunities available.

Furthermore, paragraph 38 contains an additional sentence: Both HE awarding bodies, and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies which accredit specific HE programmes, can also have regulatory requirements which must be met in addition to the simple achievement of credits. For instance, these might relate to the number of attempts at assessment for a course or marks achieved.

There is a new paragraph (39), which is reproduced as follows:

39. Each HE awarding body will determine its position on the principles which underpin credit transfer such as:

- the proportion of credit which may be transferred between qualifications and/or accepted by an HEI for inclusion in one of its awards.
 - the currency or shelf-life of credit.
 - the use and re-use of credit.
 - general and specific credit.
 - ab-initio study (for example, learning a new language)
9. Appendices A and B are the same as those provided in the draft guidance, but an expanded set of abbreviations is now provided as Appendix C.

Issues for Consideration and Discussion

10. To note that all institutions are encouraged to implement the credit arrangements by the start of the 2009/10 academic year.
11. The discretionary nature of credit accumulation and transfer, which allows institutions continued freedom to determine what credit is accepted for the purposes of accumulation or transfer.
12. The potential impact of the revision to accreditation of learning to make provision for learning that is concurrently taking place, such as work-based learning, which the Guidance indicates may be counted towards the requirements of qualifications.
13. The implications for the University's PGCE provision (120 credits), when compared with that of other institutions where the qualification is awarded following the attainment of 60 credits.
14. The need to ensure consistency with the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, in terms of achievement of credit and the number of attempts at assessment for a course or mark achieved.
15. The determination of the University's position on the principles underpinning credit transfer, as set out in paragraph 39 of the Guidance.

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