

CATS Project Community of Practice – Submission 2, 7 December 2012

Achievements since COP Submission 1

- Initial mapping and credit transfer offers received from 4 of the 11 partners.
- Information received from CMI regarding civil service request for a list of providers offering 60 credit transfer for L5/L7 diploma communicated to partners, resulting in 1 of the 4 above adjusting their credit offer.
- Alleviated situation of potential for 4 FE College partners to withdraw from the project due to changes in validation arrangements (1 still at risk).
- Secured a date for a full partner meeting to discuss progress, credit model options etc. for 12 December.
- Presentation of the project aims and intended outcomes to a CMI Development Network event for CMI centres in the region.
- Discussion of the project held with the Leeds City Region Local Enterprise Partnership Director to raise profile and engage with wider partnerships.
- Evaluator engaged in early meetings to establish framework with partners.
- On-line communication portal established for discussion.

Problems/Challenges of developing CATS

- Similar problems and challenges continue as per COP Submission 1, namely:
 - Concept of matching learning outcomes between awards, some partners taking more liberal approaches than others to 'equivalence'. Initial offers therefore already suggesting a confusing range of offers with the potential for causing difficulty in communicating the offer transparently to learners.
 - CMI and ILM awards range of optional units preventing partners from offering 'concrete' offers of credit transfer.
 - New validating bodies for FE colleges delaying work on mapping/credit transfer offers – most unlikely to be able to confirm offers until the New Year and one potentially securing validation after the deadline for this project.
- Additional problems/challenges encountered since COP Submission 1:
 - Significant changes within a number of partners in terms of organisational structures, including closure of some units and changes to personnel requiring changes to named qualifications for progression and establishing new working relationships.
 - It should be noted that the broader context for this is the impact of fees on the recruitment of HE learners locally. This has had an impact on previous policies of growth and expansion which has now become one of ensuring their current main student numbers are filled. This has caused 're-sizing' of institutions with the loss of key staff, and in particular the withdrawal of degree validation and transfer of learners between FE and HE institutions. One university in particular which provided the majority share has had issues of quality and has now withdrawn from its previous 'growth' through 'franchising'. This is being mitigated by working closely with partners, but nonetheless has had some impact on the speed of implementation of the project.

Working across the FE/HE interface

- Some tensions due to changes in the validation arrangements for a number of FE partners although the FE partners have handled this extremely well and continue to engage in the project despite the delays being caused by these changes.

Working with other agencies

- CMI/ILM continue to offer ongoing support, not least the intelligence from both organisations in relation to credit models in operation in other parts of the country. The relationship between HEART and CMI/ILM has strengthened since COP Submission 1.
- Some development of relationships with the local authorities has taken place with specific links in Kirklees to the economic development team in response to a specific enquiry from a CMI centre.
- Preliminary discussions with the HEART website developers in relation to possible solutions to the potentially confusing array of progression and credit transfer offers has taken place but detailed decisions on design are on hold waiting mapping/credit transfer offers from a larger cross section of partners.
- A tentative link has been established with a local NHS trust to establish loose protocols for informing CMI/ILM learners of the opportunities available once published.

'Eureka' moments/Key learning outcomes for the project

- Recognition that no 'one size fits all' outcome will be possible, this leading to discussions around on-line searchable database models for communicating offers.
- Emerging clarity of the complexity of relationships within individual partners and the number of hurdles that have to be cleared to gain outcomes - course leaders, Deans, academic quality/standards, admissions and so on. The ultimate concept of APEL being an 'academic decision' is not always the reality.

Emerging themes?

- Difficulty for some partners in relation to 'silos' of operation within their institution causing internal difficulties of securing a cohesive offer, for example one partner initially offered up three MA level awards for progression but it now looks as though only one will be offered as the differences in course leader willingness to offer credit transfer varied significantly and the partner wishes to present an offer that presents well against other partners.
- Through conversations with partners and interestingly also picked up in the LEP Skills Needs Research is the issue of wider understanding of the QCF (amongst employers, learners and some providers). A comment from a Head of Department in an FE College:

'The QCF was supposed to end the 'alphabet soup' of different names and acronyms for qualifications but it seems things are now more confusing than ever'.

There appears to be a limited and dated understanding of qualifications amongst many employers who do not yet trust the QCF and in certain situations this lack of trust is present amongst providers too (particularly academics within Universities).