

Promoting Progression: Credit Transfer Arrangements – Proposals for Pilots

Introduction

Many responses to the consultation on New Challenges New Chances¹ (NCNC) emphasised the need to make progression routes to higher education from apprenticeships, vocational and professional qualifications clearer and more easily navigable. In order to achieve this, institutions in both higher and further education need to develop ways of working together, particularly in the alignment of the systems they operate. A key area is the development of jointly-recognised credit systems, meaning that learning acquired in an FE, vocational or professional context is recognised and valued by HE institutions, (and vice versa) and counts towards the achievement of qualifications.

The document responded to these points as follows:

BIS plan to introduce loans for certain students and courses in FE institutions. In order to help more learners reach their full potential more work is needed to support transferability through levels and across sector divides. We therefore intend to invite collaborative proposals to increase credit accumulation and transfer opportunities across further and higher education.'

2. These proposals are not intended to duplicate or replace existing arrangements or provision, but are intended to pilot new ways of bridging the gap between level 3 and level 4 qualifications and related opportunities for progression, making use of the agreements and structures that currently exist. A successful proposal should be directed at areas in which there is the greatest need and/or significant opportunity (for example, through utilising a sectoral or geographical approach). Proposals should also be aligned wherever possible with the Government's growth agenda. This document provides further background to this initiative and invites relevant and appropriate organisations to make applications. Annex A also provides details on the relationship of this initiative with other related Government activities in this area.

Background

3. In February 2008, SQW Consulting reported on a study they had carried out on behalf of HEFCE and the (then) LSC on the overarching principles and operational criteria for a common approach to credit, to encourage learner progression between the FE system and higher education². NIACE then carried out trials' in two phases building on this work, reporting at the end of each phase³. These involved a range of bodies (Lifelong Learning Networks, National Skills Academies,

¹ New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills Reform Plan: Building a World-Class Skills System (BIS, 1 December 2011)

² Evaluation of the Overarching Principles and Operational Criteria for a Common Approach to Credit (February 2008)

³ Testing and Trialling the Overarching Principles and Operational Criteria for a Common Approach to Credit across Further and Higher Education (July 2009); and Developing Credit Transfer Arrangements between the Qualifications and Credit Framework and Higher Education (March 2010)

Sector Skills Councils, QCF Awarding Organisations and HEIs), and the second trial was intended to build on successful and innovative features of the first set of trials. However, due to challenging timescales and delays in the identification of appropriate organisations, one of the trials (exploring the acceptance of QCF credits at higher levels towards the general credit requirements of qualifications awarded by the HEIs) did not go ahead at all, and the other three trials were only partially completed. However, the trials were of value in beginning to work through some of the challenges and also identify some of the potential benefits of using credit across FE and HE, and looking at what role it may play as one aspect of supporting clearer and stronger progression opportunities.

4. The purpose of this initiative is to build on this work and progress it. We are therefore calling upon organisations across the sector to submit collaborative proposals that focus on increasing credit accumulation and transfer opportunities that support progression across the adult skills, further and higher education sectors. The proposals can be based on geography, on sectors or specialisms or on some other criterion; and must also embrace arrangements that are fit for purpose, can be put into operation and are scale-able. In this way, we hope to minimise some of the issues in identifying appropriate participants which delayed the NIACE project.

AoC are managing the allocation of funds and will be monitoring the pilot schemes on behalf of BIS.

The Current Initiative

5. We are intending to fund pilots which are focussed on progression and opening up new or enhancing existing vocational progression pathways for learners, in line with NCNC's emphasis on "a ladder of opportunity of comprehensive Vocational Education and Training Programmes" (page 5). These should conform to the following criteria:

- The stimulation of innovative, robust and scalable models of credit transfer and progression;
- Evidence of a strong economic rationale, for example linked to the growth agenda;
- Building on sectoral, geographical or other appropriate collaborative relationships;
- The creation of new pathways and/or developing, extending and improving existing good practice in the FE and HE sectors;
- The improvement of portability of credits and creation of smoother, more easily comprehensible progression routes;
- Stimulating innovation in qualification design and learning delivery, for example through an opportunity for the achievement of higher levels through units at level 4 in a level 3 qualification;
- Where possible, leveraging matched resources, including those in kind.

6. We are looking for trials which have a strong economic rationale. Applicants may choose to build on the previous SQW and NIACE work, for example through taking forward work on the key issues identified in the first phase of the NIACE project:

- Managing different approaches to (or models of) credit transfer within HEIs and the interface with credit in a FE QCF context (issues of articulation and alignment);
- Level descriptors;
- Qualification design features; and
- Communication and information about the QCF and the routes to achievement of higher level skills it offers.

7. The pilots may also explore improving sharing of student achievement data between FE and HE in order to support credit transfer and student progression. In particular, trials may focus on:

- a. exploring using the Unique Learner Number and Personal Learning Record to establish and/or improve information exchange between FE and HE institutions to facilitate better progression paths for students.
- b. alignment with Lifelong Learning Accounts
- c. incorporating FE achievements into an HE degree, and how this might be reflected in an HE Achievement Report (HEAR) which can be shared with employers to promote career progression.
- d. the pilot might also explore the opportunity for the UCAS online system to support and accept the transfer of credit to enable learner progression.

9. However, applications are not limited to the above issues, and we are not necessarily looking to re-run the second phase of the NIACE project. Applicants who have a radically different approach and are able to provide a strong economic rationale for this are welcome to apply. However, provision identified must be drawn from the QCF and/or within the Higher Education Qualification Framework

The Application Process

10. We are looking to fund a limited number of pilots – between six and ten - depending on the scope of the proposals which come forward. Indicative funding of up to £80,000 per pilot will be available in this financial year – 2012/13. Applicants should submit the attached application form (maximum 2,000 words) by 4 April 2012, which must provide the following details:

- Applicant details including proposal name, lead organisation name and name of authorised contact, participants in the pilot (which can include any relevant organisation, but should represent a range of different bodies appropriate to the aims of the proposal, including in all cases a progression partner). These can include (but are not limited to) awarding organisations, FE Colleges, independent providers, HEIs, professional bodies, LLNs, LEPs and SSCs. Applications should have a strong element of collaboration between a variety of bodies;
- The barrier the pilot is intended to overcome and propositions to be tested, the ways in which it fills a gap in or adds value to existing provision, likely outcomes and success criteria;
- Any relationship to previous work and the track-record of the participants in this area;

- The economic rationale for the trial, including its sectoral and geographical basis (where appropriate);
- Details of the likely sustainability and transferability of the pilot;
- Details of how the pilot will be evaluated; and
- Details of costs and timescales including where relevant any matched investment, which may be in kind.
- The applications will be considered by a panel consisting of representatives from AoC, BIS, SFA, HEFCE and NUS. The project will have an advisory group including: DfE, Ofqual, UKCES, QAA, AELP, UUK, LSIS, the LLN National Forum, GuildHE, and NIACE.
- Successful bidders will be informed by 23 April 2012, and will receive funding in the 2012-13 financial year.
- We expect successful bidders to supply a project work plan within a month of confirmation; and adherence to this plan will be a key part in the monitoring process of the project.
- The pilots are expected to run for one year from commencement date. Successful partnerships will be expected to produce a short interim report.

Outputs

- Final Project report detailing the outcomes of the project, lessons learned and advice for future policy formulation.
- Contribution to an overall Project Case Study publication summarising the work of the project.

Outcomes

- Successful lead organisations will be expected to form a practitioner network to share experience and best practice, and disseminate findings from the project. BIS will help to facilitate this.

11. Any queries about this process should be addressed to: cats@aoc.co.uk

Annex A

Government invests in skills through a number of different routes. Existing skills funding to colleges, training providers and employers remains in place alongside this pilot. Below is a summary of the most relevant related funding routes.

Employer Ownership Pilots

A prospectus issued in February 2012 invited employers to come forward with proposals to test the potential of employer ownership of skills development.

The overall aim of the pilot is to find more effective and sustainable ways to improve skills in the workforce and to use these improved skills to drive up productivity and growth.

The Government is looking for proposals that support the following key objectives:

- Increase the impact of work readiness, workforce development and Apprenticeships activity
- Employers are better able to secure the training they need by having the influence they require over quality and content and can shape training provision to meet their needs
- Collaboration amongst employers to address cross-sector or supply chain skills challenges is increased
- Employer leadership, commitment and investment in skills is increased, including the involvement of employers who do not have a track record of investing in skills.

Public investment will be provided directly to employers that are successful in their bids. The pilot will make available up to £250 million of public investment for successful bids over two years from August 2012. Up to £50 million in 2012/13 and up to £200 million in 2013/14 will be available, subject to quality bids from employers and positive evaluations. The Government expects to hold subsequent rounds of bidding building on lessons learnt and successful activity from this first round. Where proposals include training or apprenticeships that commence within the two year timeframe but will not be completed within that period, it will fund the completion of that activity where appropriate.

Growth and Innovation Fund (GIF)

GIF supports business networks by co-investing in the infrastructure to support innovative skills solutions with the potential to transform growth in the sector, region or supply chain. For employers interested in developing skills infrastructure proposals, such as professional standards and guilds, GIF support may be available. Where bids submitted to this pilot have elements of infrastructure costs, BIS and UKCES may discuss with bidders how they might access GIF if appropriate. GIF is managed by UKCES.

Employer Investment Fund (EIF)

The EIF is a UK-wide fund by UKCES to encourage employers across the UK to invest more in raising the skills of their workforce. It is open only to licensed Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and enables them to run and pilot innovative solutions to raise skill levels and business performance.

Higher Apprenticeship Fund

The Higher Apprenticeship Fund is a £25 million programme of targeted support to extend the range of Higher Level Apprenticeship frameworks available and support the capacity and capability of the delivery infrastructure. Bids can be submitted by collaborative partnerships including employers, Sector Skills Councils, Professional Bodies, National Skills Academies and a range of other partners. A second round of bids for the Fund will be launched shortly.

The Advanced Manufacturing Supply Chain Initiative (AMSCI)

AMSCI is a competition for funding to improve the global competitiveness of advanced manufacturing supply chains and help to attract major new suppliers to set up and manufacture here. Up to £125 million is available to support innovative projects that deliver economic growth.

The initiative aims to develop a globally competitive supply chain (or supply chains) through projects that deliver the following.

- Generate a genuine and measurable impact on competitiveness and economic growth preferably at a sectoral level
- Make a contribution to innovation and technology development
- Increase the UK manufacturing capacity, capability and efficiency
- Provide positive economic and employment impacts that support rebalancing of the economy and overall economic growth
- Raise skill levels or close skills gaps.

Beneficiaries must be located in England, although discussions are taking place with the Devolved Administrations as to whether support for companies based elsewhere within the UK may be available for successful bids, where appropriate. Further details will be available on the Technology Strategy Board website (www.innovateuk.org)