



Department  
for Business  
Innovation & Skills

**ACCELERATED COURSES AND  
SWITCHING UNIVERSITY OR  
DEGREE**

**CALL FOR EVIDENCE**

**MAY 2016**

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# Accelerated Courses and Switching University or Degree: Call for Evidence

Our aim is to encourage more flexible provision to meet students' diverse needs. In this call for evidence we want to determine whether there is student demand for more switching between universities and degree courses. We also want to know more about demand for accelerated degrees. We are interested in getting a better understanding of the barriers that currently prevent both types of more flexible approach from working effectively.

**Issued:** 16 May 2016

**Respond by:** 19 July 2016

**Enquiries to:** Laurence Grafton

Higher Education Strategy and Policy

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

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## 1. What this call for evidence is about

- 1.1 Students considering higher education face many choices: which subject, which location and which institution is the best fit for them. These choices can fundamentally influence the course of a student's life. Alongside the reforms announced in our White Paper, we want to work with the sector on other ways of widening choice for students. This call for evidence addresses two of these areas: flexibility to switch courses and institutions; and flexibility in a particular type of provision, accelerated degrees.
- 1.2 As a result of this Government's reforms, students will have the right information, in the right format, at the right time to help them make the best choices to fit their own individual circumstances.
- 1.3 Sometimes however, those circumstances can change. Part way through their degree, a student might become a carer or a parent. They may need to take time out from their studies, or move to a different part of the country to adapt their life to their new responsibilities.
- 1.4 Other students may face the closure of their course or institution. Students paying for higher education deserve reassurance that they will be protected if their provider is unable to deliver their course.
- 1.5 Alternatively, a student may come to realise that their chosen institution is no longer the best match for them. Research by the Sutton Trust indicates that many students from under-represented groups attend institutions for which they are over-qualified.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true of students who are the first in their family to attend university.
- 1.6 We need a higher education system which is flexible enough to adapt to these – and other – changes in students' circumstances. A competitive and dynamic higher education sector needs students who actively challenge universities to provide teaching excellence and value for money. As the Teaching Excellence Framework becomes established, the quality of provision will be more consistently measured and, by publishing the results, transparent and accessible. Students who are concerned they are not receiving value for money may decide ultimately to switch to a provider that better fits their needs.
- 1.7 Higher education providers can also better meet students' needs through more flexible provision. Around two thirds of all undergraduate higher education entrants are studying a 3-year full-time programme – this is the model that is most commonly associated with higher education. However, there are other modes of study that can support flexible learning.
- 1.8 In this call for evidence we are particularly interested in accelerated degrees where undergraduate students can achieve a Bachelor's degree in 2 years instead of the standard 3 years. We know that around 15 public institutions and at least 5 Alternative Providers offer accelerated courses, but do not know enough about student or employer demand. Given the benefits of accelerated degrees, including allowing

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2004/08/Missing-3000-Report-2.pdf>.

graduates to enter the labour market faster, we want to understand more about the barriers to having more courses available.

## 2. Existing framework for credit transfer

- 2.1 A framework to enable transfer between institutions is currently in place.<sup>2</sup> Credit transfer schemes originated with the Robbins Committee (1961-63), and developed significantly with the growth of the Open University. In 2008 these schemes were consolidated when the Credit Issues Development Group, supported by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) provided a framework for the use of credits in England. When the QAA surveyed higher education institutions in 2009, 93% of respondents confirmed they operated credit arrangements.<sup>3</sup>
- 2.2 In other contexts, if a consumer is unhappy, or if their circumstances have changed so that their original choice is no longer the most appropriate, they are generally able to switch providers.
- 2.3 Since 2011, our higher education system has been designed so that the funding follows the student. Despite this, the evidence of students switching between institutions is limited and anecdotal. Students generally remain locked into the institution they first chose, regardless of any change in circumstances.
- 2.4 In the US, accumulating credits and transferring between institutions are established practices. One third of students transfer institutions, of which a quarter transfer more than once.<sup>4</sup> The vast majority of transfers are after two years at a Community College, at which point the student transfers to a university to turn their Associate Degree (or equivalent credits) into a Bachelor's Degree. Transfers from one university to another are less common, for example 7% of students who transfer to the University of California are from other universities.<sup>5</sup> We are interested in looking at any lessons learnt from the US experience.

## 3. Potential barriers to a successful credit transfer market

3.1 We have identified a number of potential barriers which may deter students from transferring institutions:

- *Lack of information*: we want to explore whether in some cases students are simply unaware that it is possible to switch between institutions. We want to understand more about the information provided to students on how to switch.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Academic-Credit-Framework.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Academic-Credit-Survey-Dec-09.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014163.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/13CATFullReport.pdf>.

- *Inertia*: many students see university as a one off purchase, and so are more tolerant of poor quality teaching, continue unhappily with the wrong course, or simply drop out rather than actively change course or provider. Logistical factors (such as a lease they may have signed for the following year) and social factors add to the reluctance to move. We want to explore these factors, and consider how to change the perception of switching from something a student does in response to negative events (such as failing a course) into something which could be seen as a positive choice.
- *Credits are not a universal currency*: even courses which share the same name (for example: BA Hons Economics) differ between institutions in both content and quality. Credits gained for a course at one institution are not necessarily equivalent to those at another, and students who transfer may be at a different stage from their new course mates. We want to examine the extent of this factor, and look at ways in which it might be overcome.
- *Bureaucratic burden*: admissions processes present a sizable task for institutions, who invest considerable resource in selecting their students. Expanding this process to include applications between years of study is likely to require additional resource. We want to examine the scale of the potential burden, together with ways in which it could be minimised.
- *Other barriers*: measures on student retention may have created an unintended barrier to students switching institutions. This should not impact on an institution's TEF score, as students who transfer will not be counted as dropping out, provided they begin their new course the following year after leaving (for full-time students) or in either of the following two years after leaving (for part-time students). However, similar unintended barriers may exist. We want to examine these and identify ways to address them.

3.2 There may be other barriers that deter students from transferring institutions and we want to explore what these might be.

3.3 During this call for evidence, we will actively engage with students, higher education institutions and others in the sector to gather information on the scale and impact of the barriers we have identified, along with any additional barriers. We are looking to understand whether there is demand for switching to become a more common practice, and what steps might be appropriate in seeking to meet that demand.

## 4. Accelerated degrees

4.1 We have identified a number of potential barriers which may deter students from transferring institutions:

- Staff availability outside of term time including contracted hours.
- Timetabling and other administrative limitations on campus, including hiring out of facilities.

- Student and employer awareness of the possibility of accelerated delivery.
- Student preference for a longer time studying, including to allow for part-time work.
- Accelerated learning being perceived to be unsuitable for some subjects.

4.2 There may be other barriers at individual and institutional level that stops this type of provision being widespread and we would be keen to understand more about them. We do not expect the response to those barriers to fall only to government; we hope that the sector will also take the impetus to respond.

## 5. How to respond

The call for evidence will begin on 16 May 2016 and run for 10 weeks, closing on 19 July 2016.

You can reply to this call for evidence online at:

<https://bisgovuk.citizenspace.com/he/accelerated-courses-and-switching>

The response form is available electronically at Annex A and on the call for evidence page (until the call for evidence closes):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/accelerated-courses-and-switching-university-or-degree-call-for-evidence>

If you decide to respond the form can be submitted online, by email or by letter to:

Laurence Grafton  
Higher Education Strategy and Policy  
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills  
1 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0ET

Tel: 020 7215 5000

Email: [flexiblehe@bis.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:flexiblehe@bis.gsi.gov.uk)

Citizen Space: <https://bisgovuk.citizenspace.com/he/accelerated-courses-and-switching>

Versions of this document are available in other formats, for example Braille, other languages or audio-cassette on request.

BIS calls for evidence are digital by default but if required, printed copies of the call for evidence document can be obtained from the contact above.



## 6. Confidentiality and data protection

Information provided in response to this call for evidence, including personal information, may be subject to publication or release to other parties or to disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004). There is also a statutory Code of Practice issued under section 45 of the FOIA with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence.

If you want information, including personal data, that you provide to be treated in confidence, please explain to us what information you would like to be treated as confidential and why you regard the information as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the department.

## 7. Help with queries

If you have questions about the policy issues raised in this document, please contact:

Laurence Grafton  
Higher Education Strategy and Policy  
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills  
1 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0ET

Tel: 020 7215 5000

Email: [flexiblehe@bis.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:flexiblehe@bis.gsi.gov.uk)

## 8. Comments or complaints

If you wish to comment on the conduct of this call for evidence or make a complaint about the way this call for evidence has been conducted, please write to:

Angela Rabess  
BIS Consultation Co-ordinator  
1 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0ET

Tel: 020 7215 1661

Email: [angela.rabess@bis.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:angela.rabess@bis.gsi.gov.uk)

A copy of the Code of Practice on consultations can be found here:

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Consultation-Principles.pdf>

## Annex A: Response Form – Accelerated Courses and Switching University or Degree: Call for Evidence

**We welcome responses to the questions below (any or all) as well as any other comments respondents may wish to make.**

A copy of this call for evidence can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/accelerated-courses-and-switching-university-or-degree-call-for-evidence>

You can complete your response online at:

<https://bisgovuk.citizenspace.com/he/accelerated-courses-and-switching>

Alternatively, you can e-mail or post the completed response form to:

Laurence Grafton  
Higher Education Strategy and Policy  
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills  
1 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0ET

Tel: 020 7215 5000

Email: [flexiblehe@bis.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:flexiblehe@bis.gsi.gov.uk)

The closing date for responses is 19 July 2016.

Information provided in response to this call for evidence, including personal information, may be subject to publication or release to other parties or to disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes. Please see page 9 of this call for evidence for further information.

If you want information, including personal data, that you provide to be treated in confidence, please explain to us what information you would like to be treated as confidential and why you regard the information as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the department.

I want my response to be treated as confidential

Comments:

## ALL STUDENTS

### Your details

Name:

University/higher education institution:

Degree subject:

Telephone number:

Email address:

Q1: Have you transferred university/higher education institution during your course?

Yes       No

Q2: Have you changed degree course?

Yes       No

Q3: Have you considered transferring university/higher education institution?

Yes       No

Q4: Have you considered changing degree course?

Yes       No

### For students who have transferred degree course or university/higher education institution

Q5: Between which institutions/courses did you transfer?

Course

University/higher education  
institution

From		
To		

Q6: At what stage of your degree did you transfer?

- By the end of the first term       By the end of the first year  
 During the second year       During the third/final year

Q7: Why did you transfer university/higher education institution? *Please mark all that apply.*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Family/friends
<input type="checkbox"/>	Location
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reputation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Student life
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teaching quality
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teaching style
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other? Please include any other relevant information:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable

Q8: Why did you change degree course? *Please mark all that apply.*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Course too easy/too difficult
<input type="checkbox"/>	Subject matter/course content
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teaching quality
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other? Please include any other relevant information:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable

Q9: How easy was it to transfer university/higher education institution? 1 = very easy, 2 = easy, 3 = neutral, 4 = difficult, 5 = very difficult.

1      2      3      4      5      Not applicable

                  

Q10: How easy was it to change degree? 1 = very easy, 2 = easy, 3 = neutral, 4 = difficult, 5 = very difficult.

1      2      3      4      5      Not applicable

                  

Q11: What additional information from your university/higher education institution would have helped inform your decision?

Q12: What else would have improved the process?

**For students who have not transferred degree course or university/higher education institution**

Q13: What has prevented you from transferring university/higher education up until now?  
Please mark all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	I like my course
<input type="checkbox"/>	I like where I study
<input type="checkbox"/>	I wasn't aware that a transfer was possible
<input type="checkbox"/>	It would be too much hassle
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other? Please include any other relevant information:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable

Q14: What has prevented you from changing degree course up until now? Please mark all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	I like my course
<input type="checkbox"/>	I like where I study
<input type="checkbox"/>	I wasn't aware that a transfer was possible
<input type="checkbox"/>	It would be too much hassle

<input type="checkbox"/>	Other? Please include any other relevant information:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable

Q15: What additional information from your university/higher education institution would have helped inform your decision?

### Accelerated degree questions for all students

Q16: Have you completed or are you undertaking an accelerated degree?

Yes       No

Q17: If you are undertaking or have completed an accelerated degree, why was it attractive to you?

Q18: If you are not undertaking or have not completed an accelerated degree, did you know that it was an option to complete an undergraduate degree in a 2 year programme?

Yes       No

Q19: Would an accelerated degree be a good option for you? *Please mark all that apply.*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes - I would have started employed work quicker
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes - I would not have had living costs for the third year
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes - I would not have had to live away from home for so long



<input type="checkbox"/>	No - I don't think I would get the same quality of learning
<input type="checkbox"/>	No - I think the pace of work would be too fast
<input type="checkbox"/>	No - I use my holidays for work/leisure and like it like that
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other? Please include any other relevant information:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable

## ALL UNIVERSITY/HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

### Your details

Name:

Role:

University/higher education institution:

Telephone number:

Email address:

Q1: How many students changed degree course within your higher education institution over the last three academic years? *I.e. students who changed course but continued to study at your higher education institution.*

2012/13:

2013/14:

2014/15:

Q2: How many students have transferred into your higher education institution over the last three academic years?

2012/13:

2013/14:

2014/15:

Q3: Are there any common patterns as to why they have transferred into your higher education institution?

Q4: How many students have transferred out of your higher education institution over the last three academic years?

2012/13:

2013/14:

2014/15:

Q5: Are there any common patterns as to why they have transferred out of your higher education institution?

Q6: Have you got a credit transfer process in place?

Yes       No

Q7: If no, why not?

Q8: If yes, how are students made aware of your credit transfer process?

Q9: What would the impact of a credit transfer system be on the higher education sector?  
*If you reference other sources in your answer please state the name of the source.*

Q10: What would the impact of a credit transfer system be on your institution? If you  
*reference other sources in your answer please state the name of the source.*

Q11: By what mechanisms could a system of credit transfer be more effectively embedded across the sector? *If you reference other sources in your answer please state the name of the source.*

Q12: What do you see as the main barriers to a more extensive credit transfer system? *If you reference other sources in your answer please state the name of the source.*

Q13: Are there any lessons we can learn from international credit transfer models, e.g. from the US? *If you reference other sources in your answer please state the name of the source.*

Q14: Does your institution offer accelerated degrees?

- Yes       No       No - but we are considering it

Q15: If yes, what are the advantages to the students and your institution of offering degree programmes designed in this way?

Q16: If no, what are the institutional barriers that would need to be overcome to offer more accelerated degrees?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty in covering costs
<input type="checkbox"/>	Concern about adequately covering the course requirements in a shorter time period
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty in getting staff available to work outside term time
<input type="checkbox"/>	Availability of facilities

<input type="checkbox"/>	Have not seen any demand from students or employers
<input type="checkbox"/>	It would be unsuitable for most of the subjects we offer
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other? Please include any other relevant information:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable

## ALL OTHER INSTITUTIONS

### Your details

Name:

Role:

Organisation:

Telephone number:

Email address:

Q1: What would the impact of a credit transfer system be on the higher education sector? *If you reference other sources in your answer please state the name of the source.*

Q2: By what mechanisms could a system of credit transfer be more effectively embedded across the sector? *If you reference other sources in your answer please state the name of the source.*

Q3: What do you see as the main barriers to a more extensive credit transfer system? *If you reference other sources in your answer please state the name of the source.*

Q4: Are there any lessons we can learn from international credit transfer models, e.g. from the US? *If you reference other sources in your answer please state the name of the source.*

Q5: What do you see as the barriers to more accelerated degrees being available?

Q6: Where have you seen attempts (successful or otherwise) to overcome those barriers either in the UK or overseas?



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