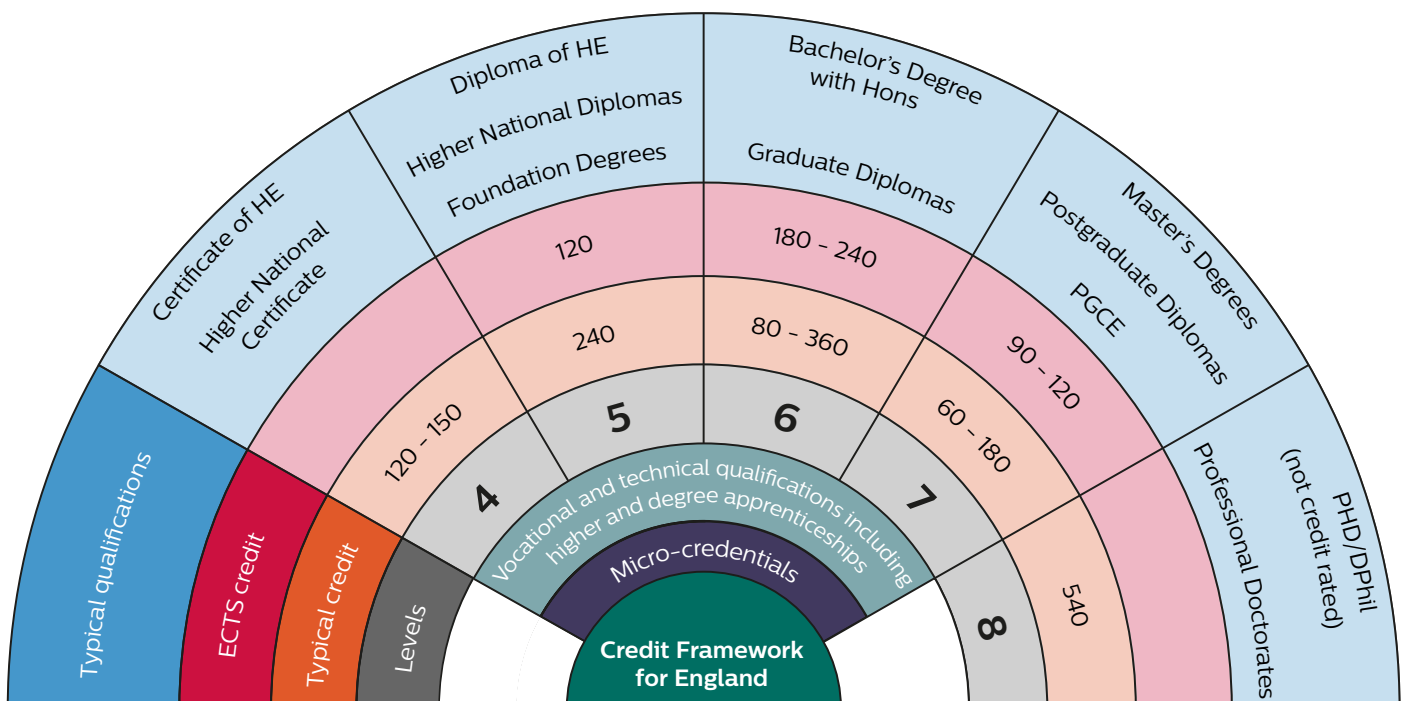


Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Guidance on Academic Credit Arrangements in Higher Education in England

Second edition

Draft for consultation

December 2020



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Definition of terms

Some of these terms are explored in more depth in [Section 2](#).

Term	Explanation
Alternative providers	Higher education providers who do not receive recurrent funding from the Office for Students (OfS) or other public bodies and who are not further education colleges.
Articulation	An arrangement where learners enrolled on a designated course at a partner provider are automatically entitled (subject to academic criteria) to be admitted with advanced standing to a subsequent part or year of a degree-awarding body's course.
Assessment regulations	Regulations of a degree-awarding body governing assessment of a course of study including marking scheme, pass mark, requirements for progression to subsequent levels or stages of a course, and award and classification requirements (for instance, in terms of credits to be achieved and specific marks to be attained).
Apprenticeship	A job with training to industry and/or professional standards, which may or may not include a mandatory qualification.
Credit	Awarded to a learner in recognition of the verified achievement of designated learning outcomes at a specified level.
Credit level	An indicator of the relative complexity, demand and/or depth of learning and of learner autonomy.
Credit value	The number of credits, at a particular level, assigned to a body of learning. The number of credits is typically based on the estimated learning hours (where one credit represents 10 notional hours of learning).
Credit accumulation	A process of achieving credits over time in relation to a course of study. Each higher education awarding body determines what credit it will accept for purposes of accumulation or transfer in relation to its individual courses.
Credit level descriptors	The generic characteristics of learning at a specific level, used as reference points. The England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) generic credit level descriptors and SEEC credit level descriptors are two examples.

Credit transfer	A mechanism which enables credit awarded by a higher education (HE) awarding body to be recognised, quantified and included towards the credit requirements for a course delivered by another HE provider and/or between courses offered by an HE provider.
Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)	A system which enables learners to accumulate credit, and which facilitates the transfer of that credit within and between education providers.
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.
Higher education awarding body	An institution with the power to award degrees conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).
Higher and Degree Apprenticeships	Higher apprenticeships are apprenticeships at Level 4-7 that do not include a mandatory degree qualification but may or may not include another qualification. Degree apprenticeships are apprenticeships at Levels 6 or 7 that must include a bachelor's with honours or master's degree as a mandatory qualification.
Learning outcomes	Statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning.
Micro-credentials	Typically, short courses or component elements of larger courses (but smaller than a current award), and can be certified as credit bearing. For the purposes of the Credit Framework for England, micro-credentials are awarded by a body with the powers to award academic credit, and are quality assured and mapped against the Credit Framework levels.
Module/unit	A self-contained, formally structured, learning experience with a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
Notional learning hours	The number of hours which it is expected that a learner (at a particular level) will spend, on average, to achieve the specified learning outcomes at that level. This may include time spent in class, directed learning, independent study and assessment.

Qualification descriptors	Generic statements of the outcomes of study for the main qualification at each level which exemplify the nature and characteristics of that qualification.
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	The identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of prior learning and achievement, which can also be referred to as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). This may either be certificated learning (APCL) or prior experiential learning (APEL), where learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and recognised for academic purposes. These terms may be used differently in specific regulated disciplines, such as nursing and other healthcare professions.

Membership of the 2021 Credit Framework for England Advisory Group

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Chair's foreword

Study for credit has become the norm in England over the last 20 years, and it was first quantified and articulated with international qualifications in 2008 as part of the work to consolidate the Burgess Report. It is nothing short of brilliant, in combining the right of higher education providers to be autonomous with their capacity to deliver qualifications which are nationally and internationally recognised.

The credit framework for England is the base code for the design of qualifications for Level 4 and above, alongside the credit level descriptors. Take these together, and it is possible to design a transferable, and internationally-recognised qualification of an agreed size and level of difficulty. This might be a bachelor's degree, a masters or a PGCE but, increasingly, it might be a top-up to an HND or a micro-credential.

This revised credit framework document updates the original without altering its substance and value. It considers who are the stakeholders of credit, and how credit is used and might be used in future. It presents the framework in a wider international context than was possible for the original and it ends with a series of case studies and reflective questions, which might prompt an organisation to explore the enormous potential of this simple tool.

As the focus of post-18 education turns to flexible and lifelong learning, the credit framework begins to show its power. It can be used to form a qualification of any size, from a complete degree designed top-down, to a series of bottom-up elements that both stand alone and aggregate at a point that is useful to the learner. They allow higher education providers to be responsive and agile to local needs, from employers or in response to particular patterns of study that might be in demand. But always with the transferability and durability that matches a national qualification, such as an HND or HNC.

It has been my privilege to work with an extraordinary community of scholars from across the UK and within QAA, writing at a time of supreme disruption to higher education. That this group has managed to both focus and innovate, and to complete design and writing tasks on time and with good humour, is a testament to their expertise and professionalism.

I hope this is a useful document - keeping the spirit of the first edition but adding some value and perspectives that have emerged in higher education in the decades since. At the speed of change in higher education in England at the moment, it would be a great testament to our work if it lasts a decade, let alone longer.

Professor Susan Rigby, Chair, Credit Framework Review Advisory Group

Introduction and context

About this guidance

This guidance was developed with an Advisory Group drawn from across the sector, including membership of [UUK](#) and [GuildHE](#), under the chairing of Professor Susan Rigby. When revising the 2008 framework and developing the 2021 framework, the aim of the Advisory Group has been to produce an enabling and directive, rather than prescriptive, national credit framework, which will benefit learners and is broad, overarching and advisory, supporting providers to adopt and adapt elements as appropriate to their needs and circumstances.

It is worth noting that since the publication of the 2008 framework, there has been consistent interest from devolved and UK governments in developing a way of recognising more 'bite-sized' chunks of learning, and enabling both accumulation of credit over a longer period and transfer between providers. Indeed, in Scotland the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework has provided a way to recognise smaller pieces of learning (10 hours minimum) since its launch in 2001. Transferable lifelong learning - for example, in the use of short courses and modular learning - has been a key policy driver for successive governments in England. The Advisory Group views the credit framework as a powerful tool to enable lifelong learning and enhance skills and competencies across the UK.

Structure of this guidance

This guidance is organised into four sections:

Section 1 sets out guiding, non-mandatory principles that any provider can use when looking at credit. It hosts the 2021 Credit Framework table, which shows the different levels and awards higher education credit can be used within, and explores the local and international landscapes credit works within.

Section 2 features some examples of how credit can be used in practice, looking in particular at micro-credentials, non-traditional delivery and apprenticeships, among others. It also features reflective questions that may prove helpful when considering the use of credit. As it explores the use of credit in specific contexts, and defines those courses, **this section can be used as a quick reference guide** without having to read through the entire document.

Section 3 examines the history of credit frameworks in England and the wider UK in the context of recent changes in higher education.

Section 4 contains a list of references and further resources.

Who is this guidance for?

This framework offers guidance for higher education providers on the use of credit across a range of provision, from micro-credentials to postgraduate research degrees. Learners can also use the framework to better understand how higher education learning is constructed, and the learning options available to them.

In recognition of the autonomous status of UK higher education providers and the fact that not all providers in England use credit, the framework is not prescriptive; instead, it enables providers to make the most effective use of credit in the context of their own mission and values.

How to use this guidance

Providers will find the framework to be an enabling reference point when they are designing courses, whether they are credit-bearing short courses or full degrees. Students on courses which use credit, or participants on credit-bearing short courses, will find it useful in terms of understanding the workload associated with particular modules or courses.

The UK context

Qualifications frameworks map qualifications against learning outcomes which are broken down into credits expressing the volume and level of intellectual difficulty of the learning undertaken for a qualification, and its constituent parts, as well as the notional workload, study hours or learning time required to achieve them. Two of the four nations within the UK have an integrated Credit and Qualifications Framework that incorporates higher education. The [Credit and Qualifications Frameworks for Wales \(CQFW\)](#) and the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework \(SCQF\)](#) define the role of credit and provide a national qualifications framework for learners at all levels. This is not the case in England, where the Credit Framework and [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(FHEQ\)](#) are separate documents. The reasons for this are given as follows:

'The FHEQ is a qualifications framework, based on the outcomes represented by the main qualification titles. It is not an integrated credit and qualifications framework, nor is its use dependent on credit. This is because not all degree-awarding bodies in England use credit... Nevertheless, credit is widely used by most degree-awarding bodies in England and Northern Ireland in the design and management of their taught programmes and has been for many years. A higher education credit framework has been agreed, and all degree-awarding bodies in England and Northern Ireland that award credit (other than ECTS) are required to use this.'

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies, 2014, p14

This Credit Framework is designed to be complementary to the FHEQ and mirrors the levels and main qualification types found in the FHEQ. Higher education providers in England and Northern Ireland use the FHEQ, while providers in Scotland use the SCQF to define and describe their provision. In Wales, the CQFW is used, which is a meta-framework covering higher education as well as general qualifications; the FHEQ is a constituent part of the CQFW, being one of the information sources listed in its higher education pillar. The [Regulated Qualifications Framework \(RQF\)](#) lists qualifications regulated by [Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment \(CCEA\)](#) in Northern Ireland and [Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulations \(Ofqual\)](#) in England.

International referencing

The FHEQ aligns with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area ([European Qualifications Framework - EQF](#)) - an eight-level framework that is designed to draw useful working comparisons across borders and education systems. The EQF is based on learning outcomes which describe the content of qualifications and what is expected from learners. The FHEQ was first mapped against the EQF in November 2008 as part of the Bologna Process to verify the comparability between the two frameworks. The FHEQ was most recently referenced to the EQF as part of the referencing process of the [Qualifications Frameworks of England and Northern Ireland](#) in 2019. The *Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS)*, a constituent part of the SCQF, and the CQFW were also referenced to the EQF in 2019. The variation in credit

systems at national and provider levels led to the development of the [European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System \(ECTS\)](#) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Section 1: Credit levels and volumes within higher education awards

Part 1: How the credit framework works for the benefit of learners

This framework is written with learners at the centre of its discussions and development. It intends to encourage a system in which lifelong learning and flexible progression reflects the developing needs of learners and contributes to diverse learning environments within providers. The framework encourages a transparent and consistent approach to credit across the sector so that learners may gain a better understanding of how they accumulate credit throughout their studies, and how this knowledge can benefit their progression. Learners may benefit from understanding their journey in terms of learning outcomes and credit accumulation at each level of study. Should they wish to change their circumstances, or should their circumstances change - such as relocation, non-academic responsibilities or health - they may adapt and respond without having to retake or interrupt their learning.

Such an approach to credit can benefit learners by clarifying compatibility and comparability, enabling a better understanding of relevant progression routes and identifying flexibility in course structures. The development of learning achievements, articulated in a clear way as a common currency, enables more efficient mobility of learners. The framework seeks to clarify comparability of various academic and professional qualifications now available to learners across UK higher education. Student mobility may be improved across degree types and providers through a more transparent understanding of this process. The framework encourages providers to develop a common currency for learning achievements which is recorded as academic credit, enabling a student to transfer between courses and providers.

While this is not an exhaustive list, providers can use the framework to:

- design courses that incorporate modules of different credit volumes in order to facilitate flexibility of course structure and learner choice
- supply clear information about the credit volume typically associated with different types of course
- quantify the workload associated with different modules and empower learners to measure their progress through their course
- adopt a transparent and sector-recognised common approach to the design and workload of credit-bearing short courses or micro-credentials
- assess Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) applications from learners wanting to change course within a provider, or to transfer with advanced standing from another provider
- organise student exchanges and study abroad opportunities using the common currency of academic credit to map against other credit systems such as ECTS
- design collaborative degree courses that use credit to ensure mutual understanding of what will be taught and studied at each partner
- make the volume of learning in specific subjects clear to future employers on a transcript, diploma supplement or [Higher Education Achievement Report](#)
- recognise learning achieved through assessed co-curricular or extra-curricular activities in shell modules that then count towards an award.

Learners can use the framework to gain a better awareness of options and processes associated with progression or return to learning, enabling them to consider a provider's openness and flexibility toward non-linear and non-traditional learning journeys. It can also

support students to exit from their originally intended target awards and enable them to leave with a recognised award.

Part 2: Guiding principles for the use of credit

The guiding principles given here are not mandatory for any provider. They are intended as a point of reference for providers to consider when looking at credit in the context of developing new or reviewing existing higher education provision.

Principle	Use of credit will enable you to:
Clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide a clear structural basis which providers can use to develop flexible courses of study • support transparent progression routes in course design that help learners to understand the importance of learning outcomes and credit, and to navigate personal learning pathways • identify, codify and clarify the levels of difficulty of different types of academic and professional qualifications.
Consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish a consistent base equivalence of one credit per 10 hours of notional learning time, at all levels of study • provide the basis for a consistent approach to total study time and student workload across courses and disciplines • promote a common language and awareness of structure that diverse higher education providers can use to articulate curriculum development.
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a common currency for learning achievement based on recorded and documented academic credit that helps learners transfer between courses and/or providers • support partnerships between providers through the development of joint curricula, progression arrangements and credit transfer • facilitate international student mobility by relating the English credit framework to the credit frameworks of the other nations of the UK, and beyond.
Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable providers to use academic credit as the building blocks of new and innovative courses within existing disciplines • develop interdisciplinary courses that draw different volumes of academic credit from existing disciplines in order to create new ones, with appropriate internal flexibility in accreditation • offer providers the tools required to create new educational products, such as micro-credentials, that respond to and reflect changing social and educational priorities.

Part 3: 2021 Credit Framework for England

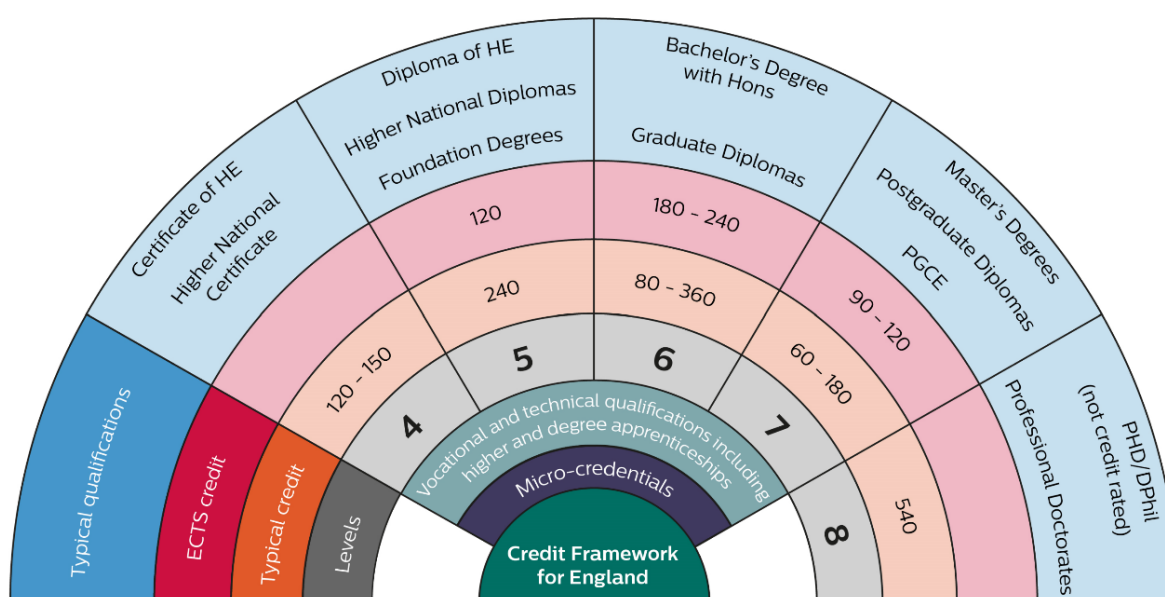
The following table is a non-exhaustive list of typical qualifications, levels and credit volumes awarded by higher education providers. It cannot and does not attempt to contain all types and titles of higher education awards. '[Qualifications can cross boundaries](#)' illustrates the comparability between English credit and level requirements with those of other UK countries and Ireland, and those with a different focus such as the RQF which includes secondary and further education.

Typical higher education qualifications within each level	FHEQ Level	Minimum credit	Minimum credits at the level of the qualification	QF-EHEA cycles	ECTS credit ranges from the QF-EHEA
PhD/DPhil	8	Not typically credit-rated		Third cycle (end of cycle) qualifications	Not typically credit-rated
Professional doctorates (eg DProf, EdD, DBA, DClInPsy)		540	360		
Research master's degrees (eg MRes, MPhil)	7	Not typically credit-rated		Second cycle (end of cycle) qualifications	The minimum requirement is 60 ECTS; however a range of 90-100 ECTS credits is more typical at second cycle level
Taught master's degrees (eg MA, MSc)		180	150		
Integrated master's degrees (eg MEng, MChem, MPhys, MPharm)		480	120		
Primary (or first) qualifications in medicine, (eg BM BS), dentistry (eg BDS) and veterinary science (eg BVSc)		Not typically credit-rated			
Postgraduate diplomas		120	90		
Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)		60	40		
Postgraduate certificates		60	40		
Bachelor's degrees with honours (eg BA/BSc Hons)	6	360	60	First cycle (end of cycle) qualifications	180-240 ECTS credits
Bachelor's degrees		300	60		
Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (ProfGCE/sometimes referred to as PGCE)		60	40		
Graduate diplomas	6	80	80		
Graduate certificates		40	40		
Foundation degrees (eg FdA, FdSc)	5	240	90	Short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) qualifications	Approximately 120 ECTS credits
Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)		240	90		
Higher National Diplomas (HND awarded by degree-awarding bodies under licence from Pearson)		240	90		
Higher National Certificates (HNC awarded by degree-awarding bodies under licence from Pearson)	4	150	120		
Certificates of Higher Education (Cert HE)		120	90		

- Credit values shown are the minimum which are typically associated with the qualification and are included as guidance (in the light of sectoral practice) but are not prescriptive.
- Credit is usually described as 1 credit = 10 hours of notional learning
eg 20-credit module = 200 hours of notional learning.

Table 1 in the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England* (August 2008) provided an overview of the credit values typically associated with the design of courses leading to main higher education qualifications in England. This was then supplemented by Annex C of *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* (October 2014), which drew together the FHEQ, the CQFW and SCQF levels as well as having an additional column for the ECTS value from the Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). The 2021 Credit Framework for England table is a composite of these two tables. While the table of credit in Annex C was adopted in 2018 as a sector-recognised standard in England under the OfS regulatory framework, the 2021 table has no such regulatory function. It is designed to support higher education providers in England to use credit for the benefit of learners and encourage consistency in the use of credit across the sector.

Part 4: The credit 'fan' diagram



The fan diagram graphically represents the way credit, qualifications and levels can combine to assist learner mobility. The blue section represents typical qualifications on the FHEQ. The pink section shows the ECTS credit level. Orange indicates the typical number of credits at each level. Grey contains the levels of qualifications as laid out in the FHEQ. Also included are those qualifications that span several levels on the FHEQ, including higher technical qualifications, higher and degree apprenticeships and micro-credentials.

Fuller explorations of these qualifications, and others, are available in Section 2:

- **Micro-credentials** are usually short courses designed to be self-standing, but can sometimes aggregate into a larger award. Credit-bearing MOOCs are one example of a micro-credential. For the purposes of the Credit Framework for England, micro-credits are awarded by a degree-awarding body, and are quality assured and mapped against the Credit Framework levels.
- **Apprenticeships** that include a higher education qualification, or higher levels of learning, have been developed to meet the need for higher-level skills, technical, graduate and professional occupations across the UK. Apprenticeships are aligned to established qualification levels and credit level descriptors to promote and build clear pathways for professional careers.

- **Professional doctorate programmes** include some taught elements in addition to the research dissertation. Credit practice varies but typically professional doctorates include a minimum of three calendar years' postgraduate study with Level 7 study representing no more than one-third of this.
- **Higher technical qualifications** are qualifications in England that map skills, knowledge and behaviours against occupational standards, and are usually aligned to Levels 4 and 5 on the FHEQ/RQF.

Part 5: Supporting information

Alignment of credit with new awards and PSRB requirements

Higher education course design and delivery is predicated on the alignment of learning outcomes with assessment at all levels. At the level of the 'course', a number of new models have been developed, including the introduction of degree apprenticeships, accelerated degrees, integrated foundation year courses, and a growing number of professional awards, previously referred to as 'non-prescribed qualifications'. These can be considered as key building blocks of a wider definition of higher education, requiring careful consideration of how such awards align with traditional models. In order to achieve this, providers need a clear understanding of both the level and the quantity of academic credit being studied, and how this compares to established models based on the study of 120 credits in a typical academic year.

Where courses are integrated with professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements, there are further considerations that inform course design and delivery. For example, providers consider student workloads when aligning curricula with professional competences to avoid overburdening, particularly where accreditation is in addition to learning hours for approved courses of study. Additionally, where accreditation is embedded within learning outcomes, attention is paid to course progression rules and regulations, at approval and review. This ensures that academic and professional achievements, including placements, complement one another, and reduce the risk of course failure or delays to course progression, wherever possible.

Flexibility of credit

Most higher education providers operate within a credit accumulation and transfer scheme, with academic courses delivered within a modular structure. Regional consortia, such as Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) and Northern Universities Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (NUCCAT), have played an important voluntary role in facilitating and promoting the consistent development of these frameworks. This approach supports inter-institutional credit transfer arrangements that enable the movement of learners between higher education providers without the forfeit of credit achievement or repeating learning.

The flexibility of credit can be thought of using three key methods or models of credit transfer, namely - topping up, experiential recognition and credit transfer (or 'switching'), as expressed by Emma Pollard, Kari Hadjivassiliou, Sam Swift and Martha Green in a 2017 [Department for Education literature review](#), summarised below.

Topping up

Top-up degrees are promoted as enabling learners to proceed to the 'next level'. Often identified within a provider's strategy for widening participation, they permit the conversion of an existing qualification, commonly a foundation degree or higher national diploma, to an undergraduate honours degree. Foundation degrees are often designed with top-up routes

in mind, in order to facilitate progression. This flexible approach to the qualification attainment provides the opportunity for a student to study the initial levels of study at a more local college, transferring to a university to complete the bachelor's course. Formalised top-up arrangements between local providers and higher education providers ensure effective progression through the levels while providing the flexibility in the approach to the delivery of the award. Managed and mapped effectively, they also denote a level of cohesion within the award despite the different locations of study

Experiential learning recognition

The accreditation of skills and knowledge achieved through work, community or voluntary experience provides flexibility in relation to the acquisition of credit at appropriate levels. Delivered through a formal recognition process, this approach places a credit value on prior experiential learning that can be counted towards the completion of course of study and the award or qualification associated with it. Most university RPL processes involve evaluating a portfolio of evidence against level descriptors to assess the level achieved across the relevant learning outcomes, as well as assuring themselves of the relevancy and currency of the experience being put forward. Section 2 of this document explores how RPL can be integrated into the design of courses.

Credit transfer

Credit transfer, or switching, is the cornerstone of modular frameworks. It provides flexibility in terms of award completion, permitting a student to step off a course for period of time or withdraw from a provider. Withdrawal may be through a decision by the learner to change their course, leave their study, an articulation agreement, or via academic non-progression – a decision normally reached by the original institution. In all cases, the qualifications framework and level descriptors permit the transfer of credit achieved to another provider or course that may be more closely matched to a student's social or academic needs. This document offers no guidance as to credit longevity, that being a matter for autonomous institutions, but careful assessment will be necessary to ensure currency, as well as relevance between potentially differing disciplines.

Credit level descriptors

Credit level descriptors provide more detailed descriptions of the learning at each level and deliver a structure for credit accumulation and transfer, complementing the threshold descriptors at each level of the FHEQ which define the expectations of an award. The fundamental premise of national qualifications frameworks is the award of qualifications through achievement of learning outcomes. Written as generic statements used to determine the demand, complexity, depth and learner autonomy associated with a specific level of learning and achievement (QAA FHEQ 2008; [European Qualification Framework Series note 4](#)), they also link with academic, vocational or professional practice and detail the range and sophistication of the application of knowledge/skills to practice. Such descriptors can be used in drafting a provider's course learning outcomes and inform assessment criteria. Some credit level descriptors also make reference to the context of learning and the educational setting expected at each level as well as cognitive, practice and personal skills. All level descriptors, regardless of the framework, are a developmental continuum within which the characteristics of the preceding levels are subsumed, and are a necessary precursor to those that follow.

There are a number of substantive level descriptors relating to credit accumulation and transfer which providers may find useful. The England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) generic credit level descriptors - formerly the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS) Level Descriptors - were associated with the FHEQ in 2008 as the reference credit structure. SEEC Credit Levels Descriptors for Higher Education provide

an additional related reference point for credit level and accumulation. Additionally, the Qualification Frameworks document, containing the FHEQ, features an annex which describes generic threshold standards for awards positioned at Level 6 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Level 10 in Scotland.

Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) credit levels

In 2020, SEEC reviewed their [Credit Level Descriptors for Higher Education](#) to reflect the structure of the UK qualification frameworks and to reflect the changes to the context of higher education learning, particularly in relation to higher and degree apprenticeships, work-based learning and personal development planning. Supporting the qualifications descriptors, these credit level descriptors provide an important reference point in the discussion of the structure of the learning environment. They also characterise the progressive transition through the levels of an undergraduate degree through to research degrees, the level of challenge and complexity of a subject, and specify the degree of learner autonomy. The descriptors also indicate the breadth and balance of skills development that is required in a particular level of study.

SEEC level descriptors position the learning as operating within five main domains: the setting; application of knowledge and understanding; cognitive skills; practical skills; and behaviours and values. As the learner progresses through the levels, the operational context becomes increasingly complex and less prescribed, with the students developing increasing autonomy through to Level 8 where they are fully autonomous. Understanding broadens and deepens through the levels as the awareness of competing perspectives and practices increases. Analytical skills and approaches become more critical and selective through the levels as the learner demonstrates effective practical skills, increasing ethical awareness and leadership capacity across wider and more specialised areas of expertise.

QAA Subject Benchmark Statements

The EWNI, SEEC and Qualifications Frameworks descriptors operate at the generic level. Subject-level competencies at the threshold level can be found within QAA's suite of [Subject Benchmark Statements](#). The statements, like this guidance, are intended to be illustrative and enabling, and are not prescriptive.

Section 2: Examples of the use of credit

The following examples begin by looking at how credit can support learner mobility through short courses and micro-credentials, move on to examine the innovative use of credit across a range of new awards and types of delivery, and finish with a case study of how credit works within traditional course structures.

Each example is followed by a series of questions which can be used to reflect upon your current use of credit in those contexts, or inform development of new processes. These questions often cross multiple areas, so while each example and its questions can be used on their own, it may also be useful to read this section as a whole.

- [Micro-credentials](#)
- [Non-traditional delivery - placements/short courses/executive courses](#)
- [Articulations](#)
- [Collaborative approaches to the accreditation of learning](#)
- [Integrated approaches to the Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning \(RPL/APL\)](#)
- [Apprenticeships](#)
- [Postgraduate taught courses](#)
- [Professional doctorates](#)
- [Evolution of the bachelor's degree](#)

Micro-credentials

In the UK, typical qualifications have credit values generally ranging from 120 to 360 credits (although there are examples as small as 60 and as large as 540 credits), with considerable variation in the credit rating of their constituent modules. However, many providers are exploring ways in which the flexibility of the credit framework can be used to create smaller 'bite-sized' qualifications that can be studied more flexibly, often on a part-time basis, and achieved in much less time than traditional awards. Such qualifications have a range of names, including 'micro-credits' or 'micro-credentials', and 'nano-credits' or 'nano-credentials'. Micro-qualifications may not be appropriate for all subjects, nor will they answer the needs of all students, but they can be useful where learners need to address a short-term skills or knowledge gap in a way that can be part of the lifelong learning journey. For example, they can be used to offer accessibility to more traditional higher education certification, like degrees, by being produced from within a 'stackable framework' where qualifications articulate and accumulate. Providing such 'stacking' is quality assured and subject to robust governance, it can provide the flexibility for both access and lifelong learning to address real skills shortages and disrupted environments, and to address emerging skills gaps.

Not all students want or need micro-qualifications, but for those who do there are no nationally-recognised reference points and, unlike larger awards, at the time of writing they are not eligible (on a pro rata basis) for student loans. Many of the successes in micro-credentials have been market-driven offerings, accredited by employers or professional bodies, where CPD certification is rigorous and tends to be based on measurable face-to-face hours.

The FHEQ is flexible enough to accommodate smaller packages of credit as qualifications, such as the Certificate of Higher Education which is a Level 4 qualification for 120 credits. However, there is a problem of perception since, at present, this certificate is generally used as an exit qualification. Rather than signalling achievement of 120 credits, it is often associated with non-continuation. Consequently, it would support the lifelong learning agenda if micro-credentials can be recognised as 'stackables', which have value as stand-alone certifications of knowledge and skills, rather than merely as exit qualifications. As the world of work changes, with serial careers and skills gaps, there is real opportunity to develop flexible, innovative qualifications in conjunction with employers and/or professional bodies that achieve the necessary viability, focus and portability.

Another shift might be towards developing modules as 'digital assets', which can be offered across qualifications. This is not appropriate for all academic provision, but it could contribute to making a real difference to learners and talent development in some subject fields. The concept aligns with the 'shell qualifications and frameworks', often used in work-based learning. This 'bottom up' approach to curriculum design can ensure quality assured relevance and flexibility within the Credit Framework that makes for portability and stackability, according to learners' needs.

With thanks to Professor Mary Bishop (Former Director of Learning ACCA Global, Visiting Chair Staffordshire University) for her contribution to this example on the use of credit. Mary advises both higher education institutions and professional bodies on the development of digital qualifications and frameworks.

Reflective questions

- 1 What opportunities are there to offer micro-credentials in the context of your existing provision and student cohorts?
- 2 If you offer micro-credentials, at what level(s) are they positioned on the FHEQ?
- 3 What is the gain for learners and employers for a micro-credential to be credit rated to the FHEQ?

Non-traditional delivery - short courses, executive courses, placements

Short courses and executive education

Short courses and executive education can either be non-credit bearing or credit bearing. When these courses are non-credit bearing, participants might receive a certificate showing that they have completed the course. In order to be credit bearing, the course will map to the relevant framework level of the FHEQ, have learning outcomes appropriate to the level, and be formally assessed. Providers may have a designated short course framework to approve such courses. Alternatively, the courses might be approved through the provider's quality assurance framework.

The credit associated with short courses and executive education takes a number of forms. It could be a standalone qualification or a micro-credential which would be portable and could, through RPL, contribute at some point to a higher qualification. In future, it could also be one of the building blocks of a flexible degree structure.

Placements

Placements are often modules within degree courses and therefore lead to the award of credit providing that the learner passes the required assessment and meets the approved learning outcomes. Placements which include study abroad may involve the import of credit into the awarding body's degree course or they might involve the import of both credit and marks. Where the latter is the case, the degree-awarding body will develop a detailed marks conversion scheme in order to reliably translate the marks obtained at the other provider.

Reflective questions

- 1 What are your provider's processes for approving short courses and placements?
- 2 What are the challenges associated with awarding credit for short courses and executive education?
- 3 If you only import credits, not marks, for study abroad placements, what is the rationale for this?

Articulations

An articulation arrangement is a form of partnership where all learners who are enrolled on a designated course of study at a partner provider are automatically entitled (subject to satisfying the academic criteria) to be admitted with advanced standing to a subsequent part or year of a course of a degree-awarding body.

Articulations are governed by formal agreements between the two parties. Prior to entering into the agreement, the degree-awarding body will carry out appropriate due diligence checks including a check on the quality of provision at the partner, a detailed curriculum mapping to ensure that learners who transfer will have covered the required subject content, and that the credit volume of the studies already completed at the partner is sufficient to grant exemption from corresponding modules at the degree-awarding body.

Credit accumulation and transfer is a feature of articulation arrangements as the credit achieved at the partner contributes to the award completed at the degree-awarding body. Typical articulation arrangements are: 1+3 (one year at the partner followed by three years at the degree-awarding body); 2+2 (two years at the partner followed by two years at the degree-awarding body); or 2+1 (a Level 4/5 qualification such as an HND, Foundation degree or Diploma of Higher Education followed by top-up study at a degree-awarding body). The credit accumulated across both parties meets the credit requirements for the particular award at the degree-awarding body. These arrangements are written and approved, drawing on quality processes within the awarding body, referencing appropriate documents such as the [Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement](#).

With regard to admissions, if having undertaken RPL it is apparent that the completed Level 5 award does not satisfy the entrance requirements for direct entry to Level 6 top-up study, then the provider considers offering the student the option to undertake bridging study. Given that all Level 5 awards approved in the UK will be subject to parity within FHEQ benchmarking, it is unlikely that there should be an expectation of significant further Level 5 study for a progressing student. Where the chosen discipline is cognate, the repeating of an entire level, equivalent to 120 credits, is not deemed necessary.

Reflective questions

- 1 What are your provider's processes for considering credit as part of an articulation arrangement?
- 2 Do your processes cover articulation across the UK, that is, from a Scottish to an English provider?
- 3 What are the challenges associated with incorporating credit from a partner provider into an award at your own provider?
- 4 When considering progression for an applicant from Level 5 to Level 6 (2+1 model), how should you consider the relevance of Level 5 learning outcomes, that may be different in character from those studied at stage 2 (Level 5) of an honours degree? For example, have you familiarised yourself with the Foundation Degree Characteristics statement (February 2020)?
- 5 Has the foundation degree provided learners with the appropriate level of skills to succeed on the top-up degree?

Collaborative approaches to the accreditation of learning

The formal recognition of external learning opportunities provided by organisations or employers who are collaborating with higher education providers regarding the award of credit, can provide flexible access to higher education for underrepresented groups and/or non-traditional entrants. For example, where employers have developed in-company staff development and training programmes, higher education providers work with the organisation to both formally accredit and further develop the higher-level learning that is demonstrated. The accreditation process includes equivalent arrangements to those established for the award of higher education credit by awarding providers, including the specification of: appropriate learning outcomes; summative assessment requirements; associated credit level and volume; appropriate qualifications and expertise of staff assessing learning; approved arrangements for external scrutiny of standards and quality assurance, monitoring and reporting. In addition, these collaborative arrangements are underpinned by a formal written agreement between the higher education provider and the collaborating organisation.

Such collaborative arrangements afford opportunities to provide routes into higher education courses with appropriate recognition of accredited learning, enabling learners to access courses at a later stage through advanced standing. Similarly, it is also possible for higher education providers to develop bespoke employer-sponsored courses that are designed using a combination of accredited in-company learning and higher education provider modules that lead to the award of higher education qualifications. Some providers have developed work-based or work-integrated frameworks comprising modules designed specifically for this purpose. The flexibility provided by combining accredited learning with work-integrated modules can support employers in the recognition of the value of the provision and provide sponsored opportunities for employees who may not otherwise have accessed higher education.

Reflective questions

- 1 What systems and procedures do you need to put in place to ensure that credit awarded for external collaborative provision is established through equivalent expectations of standards and quality of learning opportunities?
- 2 What opportunities for higher education innovation are provided by the combination of accredited external learning and specialist and/or work-integrated higher education provider modules?

Integrated approaches to the Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning (RPL/APL)

It is common for higher education providers to have established mechanisms to award credit through RPL, set out within regulations, but such processes may not typically be an integrated aspect of course design. An illustrative example of an integrated approach is an undergraduate award, two-thirds of which is awarded through RPL. The process requires an RPL applicant to provide a narrative account of their learning with supporting evidence which is directly mapped to the SEEC credit level descriptors. In this way, learners can draw on a range of learning contexts and individualise their applications. The course itself comprises 120 credits, in four 30-credit taught modules. The remainder of the credit is awarded through the RPL process. The level descriptors inform the design of both a rigorous assessment process for quality assurance purposes and assessment tasks which are meaningful to the learners.

One provider uses an RPL assessment tool, which requires a student to put together a portfolio which has a number of pre-determined requirements. These include documents which provide context and support the authenticity of the claim: a job description, CV and employer reference; a written task and professional dialogue; along with other contextual portfolio documentation. Further assessment tasks, called Areas of Learning, are designed to meet the Level 5 descriptors and to underpin the Level 6 programme learning outcomes. These tasks are themed in relation to leadership and professional development activities - such as, managing change, stakeholder engagement, developing self and others, leadership challenges - supported by selected evidence. A final overarching piece of written work, which draws on the learner's current leadership challenge, brings in relevant ideas, models and theories covered during workshops provided.

This process is now well established and has seen a number of successful and high achieving cohorts of graduates since its inception. The RPL process has also been adapted for other higher education courses in Construction, Business and for the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship, and has the potential to be applied more broadly.

As there is generally a charge for RPL, cost can act as a disincentive for applicants, especially if the application fee is not significantly lower than the cost of sitting the module in full. This poses the risk of students repeating learning. At the same time, cost may not be a student's primary motivation for seeking RPL - many are seeking to reduce the amount of time they study overall and avoid repeating a portion of formal learning. For these students, it is possible that a slow RPL process may be a disincentive. RPL could, in fact, be high risk for those with no prior higher education experience or whose experience is dated when it comes to assessment against learning outcomes. Clear information for students on cost, timescales and repercussions of failing module assessments is therefore important.

Reflective questions

- 1 How can you more fully integrate RPL/APL into the design of higher education courses, and how can this be supported through the process of course approval?
- 2 While level descriptors support the consistent assessment of credit level, how can approaches to the assessment of prior learning consistently recognise the volume of credit in relation to the evidence of learning provided - within your provider and across providers?

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships that include a higher education qualification, or higher levels of learning, have been developed to meet the need for higher-level skills, technical, graduate and professional occupations across the UK. In order to ensure that increases in skill levels can be measured consistently, apprenticeships across the UK are aligned to established qualification levels and credit level descriptors. An apprenticeship also provides progression opportunities for further (lifelong) study which could include, for example, another apprenticeship at a higher level, professional qualifications and other higher education study.

The provision of higher and degree apprenticeships by higher education providers in England requires that an initial assessment of prior learning is made in advance of starting an apprenticeship programme. This is driven by both public funding requirements and quality of learning expectations. Firstly, to ensure that public money is not used to develop knowledge, skills or behaviours that an individual has previously acquired. Secondly, to ensure that an assessment of prior learning informs an individual's personal learning programme to maximise learning potential.

Where initial assessment identifies prior learning, higher education providers, with the agreement of employers, can deliver a full programme of planned learning but may not charge for identified knowledge, skills or behaviours that have already been achieved. Alternatively, higher education providers may agree to implement RPL procedures to a) recognise prior learning through the award of credit and/or b) permit apprentices to progress to later stages of apprenticeship programmes with advanced standing and/or exception (as long as the remaining programme of learning has a duration of at least 12 months). These requirements establish a legal entitlement (set out in the Education and Skills Funding Agency Apprenticeship Funding Rules) for both apprentices/learners and employers to recognise prior learning before the start of higher education apprenticeship courses.

For example, the Police Constable degree apprenticeship (PCDA) requires that all providers make an initial assessment of prior learning, not just of any prior qualifications but also in relation to the evidence of prior knowledge, skills and behaviours required to undertake the role as a professionally competent officer. Where prior learning is identified, this will be reflected in an individual student officer's personal learning plan and will inform the tripartite discussions between the workplace coach, the student and their higher education tutor that serve to monitor learning progress. Providers delivering the PCDA often also deliver a degree holders entry programme (DHEP) to enable graduates to achieve a Level 6 graduate diploma and become Police Constables as an alternative route to the PCDA, accredited by the College of Policing. Even though the DHEP is not an apprenticeship and there is no formal requirement to initially assess prior learning, the good practice exemplified through the PCDA is being taken up by providers and employers to enhance their learning experience.

Reflective questions

- 1 Can you learn any lessons from the required processes for the recognition of prior learning for higher and degree apprenticeships for the provision of other forms of higher education?
- 2 How can the regulated entitlements that higher and degree apprentices have with regard to the initial assessment of their prior learning be equivalently reflected in the experience of other higher education learners?

Postgraduate taught courses (PGT)

There are two main types of master's awards - research awards and taught awards. They operate across a continuum between supervised individual research courses leading to a substantial major project or thesis at one extreme (the MPhil, for example), and taught courses comprising modules with a range of linked assessments and a shorter major project or dissertation at the other. For both types, providers make use of credit to build flexibility into PGT courses.

Both research and taught master's awards can include practice or work-based elements, and both are placed at Level 7 of the FHEQ, and at second-cycle master's level in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Both types of award can lead to doctoral-level study (Level 8 of the FHEQ and third cycle in the EQF), and some doctoral courses integrate a PGT master's which is taken prior to starting work on the thesis. This is sometimes referred to as a '1+3' course.

Postgraduate taught (PGT) awards outnumber postgraduate research (PGR) awards, partly because of their close identification with a vast range of established and emerging subjects, partly because they include interim qualifications such as the popular Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCertEd or PGCE), and partly because in some subjects they can be combined with undergraduate degree courses to form a four-year integrated or undergraduate master's award, such as the Master of Engineering (MEng). PGT courses also include a vast array of postgraduate or post-experience 'conversion' courses and professional training programmes. Their close linkage to employer/market needs means that a range of very similar but differently titled awards have been developed - for example, the range of MBAs now on offer.

PGT courses can be based on single subjects which are studied in greater and more specialised depth than their undergraduate equivalent. Alternatively, they can adopt multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary approaches capable of generating new insights into existing disciplines, or developing new ones. Master's courses in artificial intelligence, for example, draw on disciplines as varied as computer science, linguistics, psychology, philosophy and biology. Credit-based approaches can support such courses laterally, by using the same or different volumes of credit to define the relative weighting of their constituent elements; and longitudinally by flexing content to facilitate progression into them from undergraduate courses completed previously, and from them to doctoral programmes taken subsequently. Furthermore, the interim awards within PGT courses enable learners to leave with a master's award (all taught elements passed plus the major project - 180 credits), a postgraduate diploma (all taught elements passed - 120 credits), a postgraduate certificate (some taught elements passed - 60 credits) or a certificate of credit (one taught element passed - 30 credits).

PGT courses aiming for the detailed study of a single discipline may opt for a standard credit-rating of, say, 30 credits per taught module, with an allocation of 60 credits for the major project or dissertation module. This provides a simple, five-module award which achieves academic depth through a total study time of 300 hours per taught module and 600 hours for the major project/dissertation. Conversely, courses whose originality lies in bringing together cognate disciplines, or sub-disciplines within the same broad discipline, may opt for a standard credit-rating of 20 credits per taught module, plus 60 credits for the major project or dissertation module. This makes for a seven-module award whose originality lies in the subject mix. Individual elements may be studied in less depth (20 rather than 30 credits), but the originality of the mix enables the completion of a major project/dissertation whose depth derives precisely from the creative synthesis of traditionally unconnected subjects. Other credit geometries are of course possible.

Reflective questions

- 1 How effectively can existing elements of PGT courses serve as micro-credentials?
- 2 From the designer and learner perspectives, what are the relative merits of 'large' and 'small' modules in PGT courses?

Professional doctorates

The amount of professional doctorates in the UK has grown in recent years and there are a number of similarities between professional doctorates and traditional PhD study. They are both research degrees that require candidates to contribute significant subject knowledge in their field of research, and show originality and independent critical judgement - which is practice-related in the case of the professional doctorate; and they are of equal value in the FHEQ (Level 8). Both involve the writing of a thesis and a viva voce examination. However, there are also some significant differences.

Firstly, professional doctorates have a practical orientation that is closely related to professional practice. They enable practitioners to research and specialise in their area of practice, and to use the outcomes of that research both to enhance their own performance and to contribute to the wider development of the field. In this way, practice informs theory which in turn informs practice. Professional doctorates are generally designed to be studied part-time, over four to six years, and involve a substantial volume of placement/professional activity - a pattern which recognises that many applicants are currently working, allowing them to study and work simultaneously.

Secondly, professional doctorates comprise a taught stage and a research stage, which are credit-rated in most cases. Credit allocation for different elements within the overall 540 credit total varies between courses and providers, with between 120 and 180 Level 7 credits for the taught stage, and 420-360 Level 8 credits, respectively, for the research stage.

Thirdly, some professional doctorates carry PSRB accreditation or a licence to practice (in the case, for example, of the NHS-funded DClinPsy). The Careers and Research Advisory Centre (CRAC) found that the main subject areas for professional doctorates were education (EdD), business (DBA), psychology (DClinPsy), and subjects allied to medicine (MD, DDent), but the range of subjects has expanded and professional doctorates are now available in areas ranging from theology through fine art to policing. Some professional doctorates (DProf) are transdisciplinary and are designed to recognise doctoral-level learning in any area of professional practice.

Reflective questions

- 1 What factors would influence a departmental decision to seek to approve a professional doctorate instead of, or as an alternative to, a traditional PhD in a given area?
- 2 How would you use academic credit to differentiate between the relative weighting of the taught, practice-based and research elements of the programme?

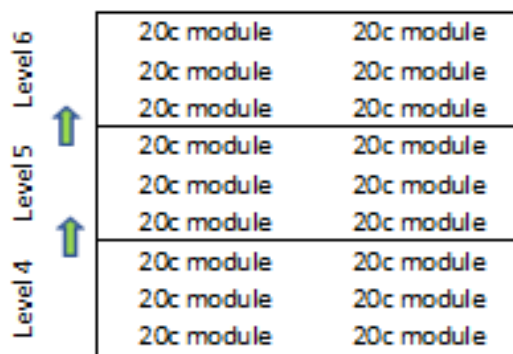
Evolution of the bachelor's degree

The following examples illustrate different models of how credit can facilitate progression through multiple levels of a course. They can be used to review current, and design new, courses.

Linear progression

Assuming (for the purpose of illustration) that an undergraduate award comprises 360 credits and that each module counts for 20 credits, the way in which modules are arranged, and credit accumulated and/or transferred, can facilitate different models of progression. Example A illustrates a straightforward, linear progression through an honours degree award where completion of credit requirements at Level 4 facilitates progression to Level 5, completion of credit requirements at Level 5 facilitates progression to Level 6, and completion of credit requirements at Level 6 equates to completion of the award. Credit is therefore awarded in recognition of achievement, to facilitate learner progression and to meet the requirements of award.

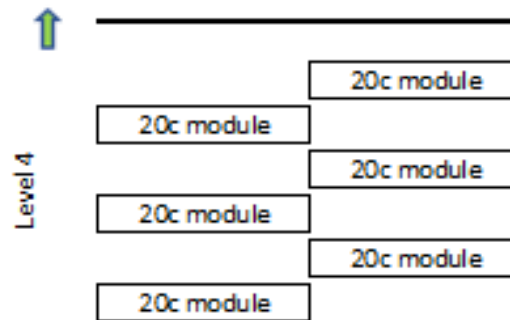
Example A: Credit facilitating progression through the levels of a bachelor's degree



Intercalated progression

Example A facilitates credit accumulation and transfer by 'metricating' an otherwise traditional course structure. However, if the goal is to place learners at the heart of higher education, then greater attention has to be paid to their preferences and needs, so that they can exercise judgement in relation to the pace, location, mode and purpose of their learning. In such a scenario, credit becomes the means by which their learning is both portable and coherent in relation to awards. As shown in Example B, a student may engage with learning over time and on a module-by-module basis, the cumulative weight of which may determine progression to a higher level of the same award, or transfer with advanced standing to another award.

Example B: Credit facilitating recognition of both attainment of discrete packages of learning and progression through the levels of a degree with honours

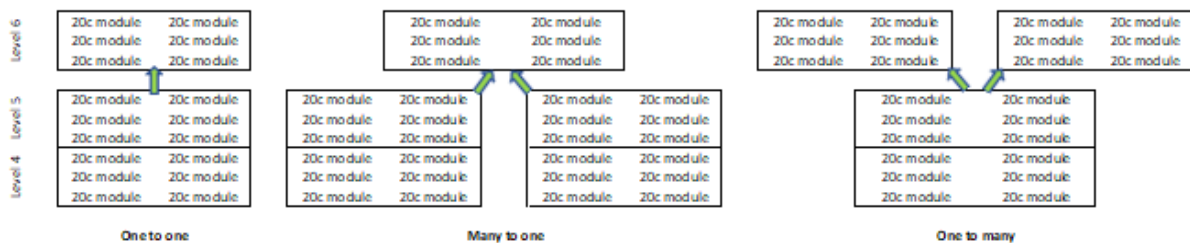


Example B exemplifies an episodic learning mode. This may be an attractive option to those returning to learning after a period in work, where short periods of study can be balanced alongside their professional commitments. This can present challenges for the learner and the awarding body in guaranteeing the currency and cohesion of the award when studied over a protracted period of time.

Articulated progression

Another way in which credit can promote learner flexibility is in articulated progression from a 'first cycle' to a 'second cycle' (as with Diplomas of HE and Foundation degrees). This arrangement may provide a one-to-one mapping between sub-degree awards and honours top-ups, or a many-to-one relationship, or indeed a one-to-many relationship as outlined in Example C.

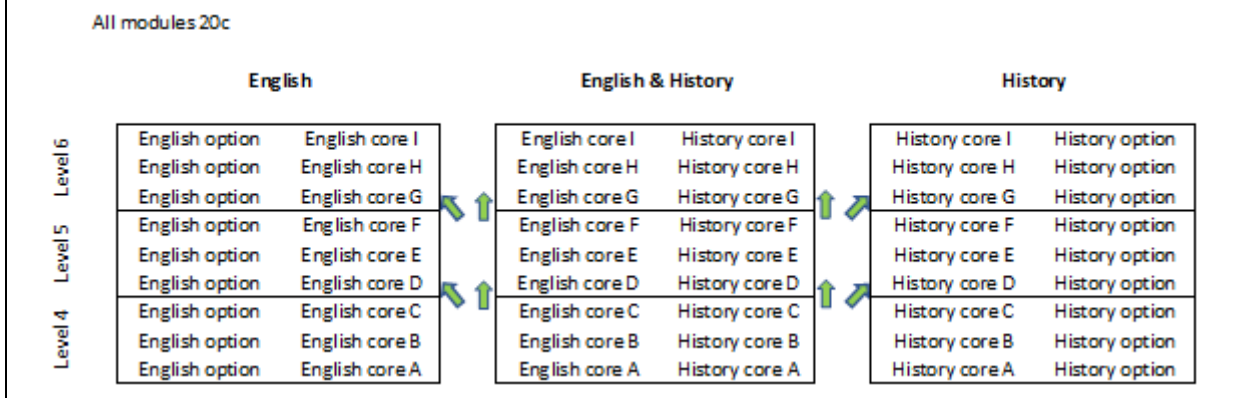
Example C: Credit facilitating different modes of articulated progression between Level 5 and Level 6 awards



Multi-disciplinary progression

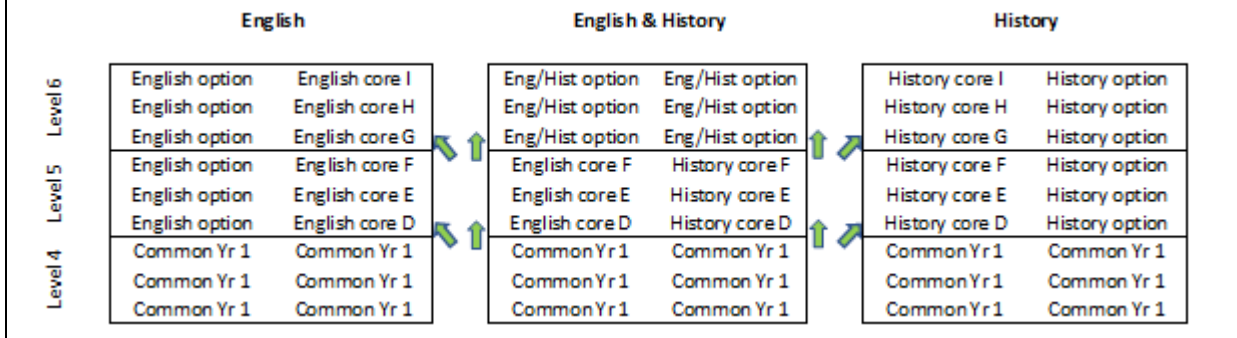
Credit-based curricula may also be attractive to learners seeking to engage in multidisciplinary study before selecting subject-specific specialisation. Examples D and E present two models which illustrate how such provision may be constructed. In Example D, the learner may enrol upon Level 4 of a 'joint-honours' (for example, English and History) course in which the core material of both the 'single honours' courses are delivered. At the point of satisfying credit requirements for progression to Level 5, learners are empowered to either continue their multidisciplinary study (and progress to Level 5 of the joint-honours award) or to specialise in one or other of the contributing subjects and drop the other one from that point onwards. Constructing the joint-honours course around the core content of the single honours course in this way enables the learner to defer choice of specialisation until the commencement of Level 5 or Level 6.

Example D: Credit facilitating deferred learner specialisation with prescribed Level 6 content



The possibilities afforded by the flexibility of a credit-based curriculum are extensive and may be carefully constructed to both anticipate and meet learner needs. Example E offers a variant of Example D, in which the whole of an academic department's provision is initially multi-disciplinary, with a common first year underpinning subsequent 'single' or 'joint' honours' progression. This model makes it possible to combine a range of coherent subjects to meet the learner's specific requirements.

Example E: Credit facilitating deferred learner specialisation with generic Level 4 and flexible Level 6 content



The evolution of the bachelor's degree described above exemplifies variations on a theme.

Section 3: History of credit

The impact of the introduction of credit

Academic credit was initially used to transform 'traditional', non-modular course structures into credit-rated modular course structures. While the academic content of the original course may not have changed, its new form permitted learning to be expressed as outcomes and described as quantified units or modules characterised by a numeric level of difficulty and credit value predicated on the approximation of study time required to achieve them. This metrication of learning provided a consistent basis for student progression and for mobility within and, later, between national higher education systems.

But the creative power of academic credit as the basic building block of higher education courses went some way beyond repurposing existing courses. The credit-based approach has made it possible both to experiment with the design of the 'traditional' academic course and to depart radically from it by creating 'bite-sized' chunks of credit-rated learning, academically credible in their own right, but which can be aggregated to support lifelong learning.

Previous versions of the credit framework

The *Higher Education Credit Framework for England*, published in 2008, and incorporated into the [2014 Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications for UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#), was the culmination of much work in the area of credit and credit frameworks. Following publication of the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group report - [Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England \(2006\)](#) - led by Professor Robert Burgess, a Credit Issues Development Group (CIDG) was established to carry out the detailed work of refining the arrangements for a national credit framework for England and develop guidance to accompany its implementation. This framework, and the accompanying guidance, was published in 2008 by QAA on behalf of the CIDG.

Changes in higher education since 2008

In the 13 years that have elapsed since the publication of the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England* in 2008, the higher education sector has changed considerably. The number of [awarding bodies](#) has increased significantly, and includes independently-funded providers, employers, charitable bodies, chartered associations and institutes, and professional bodies. In brief, the sector has seen a substantial increase in the number and nature of providers, with universities, further education colleges, alternative providers and small, specialist providers all contributing to the diversity of the higher education landscape. This diversity is reflected in the variety of provision that now includes accelerated degrees, integrated foundation-year courses, degree apprenticeships, professional awards and a growing interest in micro-credentials.

1986-2021 A brief history of higher education credit frameworks

The infographic below highlights just some of the development of credit frameworks in the UK and Europe over the last 35 years.

1986	CNAA National Credit Framework established
1997	Dearing Report recommended 'a framework of qualifications for institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland ('other UK' institutions)'
1999	The Bologna declaration set up the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), allowing students to transfer qualifications and credit between European countries
2001	<i>Credit and HE Qualifications: Credit Guidelines for HE Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland</i> published
2003	<i>Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)</i> first published The Future of Higher Education White Paper called for 'widespread and consistent use of credit across higher education'
2004	Measuring and recording student achievement 'Burgess' Report published
2005	Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group established Berlin Ministerial Summit established the Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)
2006	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) published Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England published
2008	<i>Higher education credit framework for England: guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England</i> published by QAA
2012	Minor changes to SCQF level descriptors
2014	<i>The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies</i> published by QAA
2015	The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) was replaced by the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)
2017	CQFW revised
2018	January 2018 saw the creation of the Office for Students (OfS) in England, merging the Higher Education Funding Council for England with the Office for Fair Access as provided for under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 . The OfS Regulatory Framework paragraph 342 incorporated Annex C from the 2014 <i>Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies</i> as a 'sector recognised standard'
2020	QAA established the Credit Framework Review Group to review the 2008 <i>Higher education credit framework for England</i> guidance
2021	QAA publishes revised and updated <i>Higher education credit framework for England: guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England</i>

Section 4: List of references and further resources

[Higher Education in the learning society \(the Dearing Report 1997\)](#)

[Measuring and recording student achievement \(UUK, 2004\)](#)

[Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England \(UUK, 2006\)](#)

[Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications for UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(QAA, 2014\)](#)

[Provision of professional doctorate programmes in English HE Institutions, the Careers Research and Advisory Centre \(CRAC, 2016\)](#)

[Credit and Qualifications Frameworks for Wales \(CQFW\)](#)

[Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework \(SCQF\)](#)

[Regulated Qualifications Framework \(RQF\)](#)

[The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area \(EQF\)](#)

[European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System \(ECTS\)](#)

[Higher Education Achievement Report \(HEAR\)](#)

[Qualifications can cross boundaries \(QAA, 2019\)](#)

[MicroHE - a European project to survey the impact of modularisation](#)

[Using Learning Outcomes: European Qualifications Series Note 4](#)

[Credit Transfer in Higher Education: a review of the literature \(DfE, 2017\)](#)

[The Council of Europe's 2017 recommendation on the EQF](#)

Published - 18 December 2020

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786
www.qaa.ac.uk