



**Higher education credit framework for England:
guidance on academic credit arrangements
in higher education in England**

August 2008

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), a Credit Issues Development Group (CIDG) was established to carry out the detailed work of refining the arrangements for a national credit framework and develop guidance to accompany its implementation. The CIDG comprises the nominees of Universities UK, GuildHE, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), the Higher Education Funding Council for England, practitioners and representatives from existing credit consortia. QAA is also acting as secretariat to the CIDG. This guidance document has been produced by the CIDG and published by QAA on its behalf.

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Explanation of terms

Most, if not all, of our readers will be familiar with the terms associated with credit in this document. However, given that these terms can be used in different ways, we include our explanations here so that the way in which we are using each term is clear.

Term	Explanation	
Accreditation of prior learning (APL)	The identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of prior learning and achievement. 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.	
Assessment regulations	The rules governing assessment of a programme of study including marking scheme, pass mark, requirements for progression to subsequent levels or stages of a programme and award and classification requirements (for instance in terms of credits to be achieved and specific marks to be attained).	
Credit	Credit is 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 based on the estimated notional learning hours (where one credit represents 10 notional hours of learning).	
Credit accumulation	A process of achieving credits over time in relation to a planned programme of study.	Each HE awarding body determines what credit it will accept for purposes of accumulation or transfer in relation to its individual programmes.
Credit transfer	A mechanism which allows credit awarded by a higher education (HE) awarding body to be recognised, quantified and included towards the credit requirements for a programme delivered by another HE provider and/or between programmes 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.
HE awarding body	An institution with the power to award degrees conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the <i>Further and Higher Education Act 1992</i> , or under Section 48 of the <i>Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992</i> , 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).
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.
Credit level descriptors	The generic characteristics of learning at a specific level, used as reference points.
Module/unit	A self-contained, formally structured, learning experience with a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
Notional hours of learning	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.
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.

Executive summary

The *Higher education credit framework for England* and its associated guidance builds upon long-standing and well-established practice across the UK higher education (HE) sector. Written by the Credit Issues Development Group, it follows from the Burgess Group¹ recommendations that guidance on a national framework for the use of academic credit in HE in England should be broad, overarching and advisory, allowing higher education institutions to adopt and adapt elements as appropriate to their needs and circumstances.

The Burgess Group also indicated that the arrangements for the use of credit in HE in England should also be linked to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The credit framework is written for HE providers in England as a description of the typical practice developed across the sector - to provide a reference point for those wishing to introduce or consolidate their use of credit.

The document identifies the purposes and benefits of credit and credit frameworks, pointing out their potential roles in supporting progression into and within higher education, and transfer between programmes, by indicating the volume and intellectual demand of learning. The framework:

- comprises a table of the credit values typically associated with the design of programmes leading to the main HE qualifications in England; these are expressed, for each qualification, both as the minimum total credits and the minimum credits at the level of the award
- includes the England, Wales and Northern Ireland generic credit level descriptors which may be used as a reference point
- includes a proposed timetable for implementation.

The document refers to national contexts within the UK and also international aspects, describing the relationship between UK credit and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. The relationships between credit and qualifications frameworks and the setting and assuring of academic standards are also discussed.

The framework and guidance importantly note that: institutions' decision-making processes regarding academic standards and quality should, and will, remain properly and entirely the responsibility of each autonomous institution. Further, while all learning may be expressed in terms of credit values, not all credit can, or will, necessarily be accumulated towards a specific programme or award, and each higher education institution will determine what credit it will accept for purposes of accumulation or transfer. The application of these national guidelines on credit will remain a matter for individual institutions to decide on at their discretion.

¹ The Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Scoping Group chaired by Professor Robert Burgess, known as the Burgess Group.

Introduction

This guidance, developed by the Credit Issues Development Group (CIDG) and revised in the light of very helpful sector feedback during consultation, builds on long experience within the HE sector in England in the use of credit. For more than 20 years, many institutions have been credit-rating their programmes and refining their understanding of credit and learning outcomes. During the consultations by the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group (known as the 'Burgess Group') in 2006, there was a strong sense that the sector would now welcome a description of this developed practice in order to foster a common approach and shared understanding, and to provide a reference point for others wishing to introduce credit. We would want to recognise, in particular, the painstaking and thoughtful development over many years of the various credit groups, including the credit consortia, which have done so much to ensure a significant shared practice and thus enable us to present what we would see as a statement of the current situation with regards to credit use in HE in England.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in England are, of course, autonomous bodies and our task was to produce a permissive framework which would enable those who wish to develop their use of credit to be aware of the most commonly held approaches within England at this time. Through the consultation process we have become aware that there is a minority within those institutions who are most deeply committed to credit who would argue for a more prescriptive approach, but both our own consultation and that conducted by the Burgess Group have also made it clear that this is, at the moment, a minority position and that the sector as a whole very much values its autonomy. In particular, we feel that any institutions not yet using credit are far more likely to consider such developments if these are offered freely for their consideration rather than imposed. We would, however, strongly encourage any institutions working with this guidance to adopt it as a whole rather than taking selected elements from it, as we feel that this is the best way to arrive at a well-understood common approach across English HE.

In producing this guidance, we have been very aware of the challenges around alignment with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), with best practice internationally (not only in Europe and the rest of the UK but also, for example, North America, Australasia and South Africa), with existing further education (FE) work by the Open College Network and the significant current developments around the Qualifications and Credit Framework and the 14-19 curriculum and qualifications structure. Our job was not to create a new structure which would offer an all-embracing approach to credit but to report on the most common practice in HE in such a way as to clarify and make explicit HE practice and in particular the typical credit values associated with the awards contained within the revised FHEQ. Our belief is that the most important thing is to be very clear about the principles behind the use of credit and to focus at all times on the potential benefit to the learner as at the heart of what we do.

The audience for this document is very specifically English HEIs, in particular those members of staff who deal regularly with credit issues and course design. As such the document attempts to be relatively specific in its focus; we define our terms so that the audience can see how we are using them, but assume a familiarity with the basic principles of credit.

To accompany this guidance, we are also revising the straightforward guide *Academic credit in higher education in England*² issued by the Burgess Group, taking into account adjustments and developments to the FHEQ in particular. This revised text will, we hope, prove a useful introduction to credit in HE for a wider audience, including students, employers, sector skills councils and others new to the field, and thus sit alongside the more technical guidance within this volume.

I would want to add a personal word of thanks to the members of the CIDG, who have given great thought to the many complex issues we have considered, and to the members of the QAA secretariat who have supported us throughout the process.

Muriel Robinson,

Chair of the Credit Issues Development Group

August 2008

² *Academic credit in higher education in England* is available at www.qaa.ac.uk/england/credit/guide.asp

Section 1: Context

Background

1 In 2004, the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Scoping Group (known as the 'Burgess Group') published its first report, *Measuring and recording student achievement*³, calling for the adoption of a common HE credit system/framework in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group was established in February 2005 to consider and consult on practical proposals for the implementation of the Scoping Group's recommendations.

2 The Steering Group's extensive consultations revealed overwhelming support for a permissive, rather than prescriptive, national credit framework, supported by the issuing of national guidelines.

3 The final report of the Burgess Group, *Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England*, was published in November 2006⁴. The proposals were made in the context that:

- institutions' decision-making processes regarding academic standards and quality should, and will, remain properly and entirely the responsibility of each autonomous institution
- while all learning may be expressed in terms of credit values, not all credit can or will necessarily be accumulated towards a specific programme or award. Each HEI will determine what credit it will accept for purposes of accumulation or transfer
- the application of any national guidelines on credit will remain a matter for individual institutions to decide on at their discretion.

4 The Burgess Group recommended that guidance on a national framework for the use of credit in HE in England should be broad, overarching and advisory, allowing institutions to adopt and adapt elements as appropriate to their needs and circumstances. The group also indicated that the arrangements for the use of credit in HE in England should also be linked to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*⁵.

5 The CIDG was established to draw up the guidance. The HE credit framework for England and associated guidance is set out in Section 2. The terms of reference, guiding principles and membership of the CIDG are included as Appendix A.

The purpose and benefits of credit and credit frameworks

6 Credit has an increasingly important role to play in recording student achievement and providing support for students and their progression both into and within HE. It is a key tool for promoting lifelong learning and student mobility.

³ *Measuring and recording student achievement* is available at <http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/measuringachievement.pdf>

⁴ *Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England* is available at http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/Burgess_credit_report.pdf

⁵ *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* is available at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure

7 Credit can serve a number of different functions. It is fundamentally a tool for describing the comparability of learning achieved in terms of its volume and intellectual demand. It can help HE providers to design modules/programmes in different disciplines and contexts which are similar in volume and intellectual demand. It also provides a basis for recognising learning achieved in other institutions or elsewhere. Credit values give information about the amount of learning and academic demands of that learning.

8 Credit frameworks can:

- acknowledge, codify and provide clarity about the relative demand and level of diverse HE and professional development qualifications
- provide a 'route map' showing progression routes to enable students to navigate personal learning pathways more easily
- facilitate the accreditation of small amounts of measurable learning which can build confidence and encourage further learning
- enable students to interrupt their studies and/or transfer more easily between and within institutions, while maintaining a verified record of achievements (credit transcript) to date
- provide a common language supporting curriculum development within and between HEIs
- support the achievement of consistent student workloads across programmes within different disciplines
- encourage and facilitate partnerships between institutions
- facilitate students' entry to an international education arena where national credit frameworks can be recognised as a passport to mobility.

Credit frameworks nationally and internationally

9 Credit has been used widely by many HEIs in the United Kingdom (UK) for over 20 years. This has led to groups of HEIs in England and Northern Ireland, called credit consortia, meeting to discuss the role of credit in programme design and to consider best practice in the use of credit. In 2001, the four credit bodies: the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW); the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS); the Northern Universities Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer and the Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer jointly published *Credit and HE Qualifications: Credit Guidelines for HE Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*⁶.

10 Similarly, nationally agreed approaches to using credit have been developed in Wales: the CQFW Credit Common Accord⁷; and in Scotland: the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)⁸. The vocational education and training sector in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is also developing a qualification and credit framework: the Qualifications

⁶ *Credit and HE Qualifications: Credit Guidelines for HE qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* is available at www.nicats.ac.uk/doc/prop_guidelines.pdf

⁷ Further information about CQFW and the Credit Common Accord is available at www.elwa.ac.uk/elwaweb/elwa.aspx?pageid=2752 (please note that this website will be migrated to the Welsh Assembly Government website www.wales.gov.uk)

⁸ Further information about the SCQF is available at www.scqf.org.uk

and Credit Framework (QCF)⁹; and it may be possible, when this is fully established, for learning and credit awarded within this framework to be recognised by an HE awarding body. Key elements of these frameworks, and that of the *Higher education credit framework for England* are aligned. For instance, all frameworks are based on the achievement of learning outcomes and a single credit represents 10 notional hours of learning (see paragraphs 21-22).

11 Increasingly HEIs, students and employers operate and compete in a European and international context. The FHEQ and national arrangements for credit in HE in England are designed to align with these international developments. The FHEQ is designed to meet the expectations of the Bologna Declaration¹⁰, and align with the overarching *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area* (FQ-EHEA)¹¹. The FQ-EHEA contains a set of overarching descriptors of the generic outcomes of qualifications that signify completion of each of the three main cycles of the framework. These descriptors are commonly known as the 'Dublin descriptors'¹². The national frameworks of participating countries in the Bologna Process are expected to align with the Dublin descriptors. The qualification descriptors of the FHEQ are consistent with the Dublin descriptors.

12 Within the FQ-EHEA the term 'cycle' is used to describe the three sequential levels identified by the Bologna Process: first cycle (which broadly corresponds to undergraduate qualifications in the UK), and the second and third cycles (which correspond to postgraduate qualifications). The 'end of cycle' qualifications are typically the bachelor's degrees with honours in the first cycle, master's degrees in the second cycle and doctoral degrees in the third cycle.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

13 The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)¹³ was developed in 1989 to promote the international recognition of qualifications and student mobility within Europe. Although there are a number of key differences between ECTS and the credit framework described in this document, many HE providers in England make use of ECTS to support student mobility in Europe.

14 ECTS is based on the principle that 60 ECTS credits are equivalent to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a typical full-time academic year of formal learning. In everyday practice, two UK credits are equivalent to one ECTS credit. For the award of ECTS credits, the learning outcomes of a qualification must be consistent with the relevant outcomes set out in the Dublin descriptors. The UK HE Europe Unit has provided a detailed explanation of the relationship between national arrangements for credit in HE in England and the ECTS¹⁴.

⁹ Further information about the QCF is available at www.qca.org.uk

¹⁰ Further information on the Bologna Declaration is available at www.ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html

¹¹ Further information about the FQ-EHEA is available at www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf

¹² The Dublin descriptors can be accessed at www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf

¹³ Further information about the ECTS is available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm

¹⁴ See www.europeunit.ac.uk/sites/europe_unit2/resources/E-09-06_ECTS_Users'Guide.pdf

15 The FQ-EHEA identifies the range of ECTS credits typically associated with the **completion** of each cycle as follows:

- short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) qualifications - approximately 120 ECTS credits
- first cycle qualifications - 180-240 ECTS credits
- second cycle qualifications - 60-120 ECTS credits. However, a range of between 90 and 120 is more typical of many awards
- third cycle qualifications do not necessarily have credits associated with them.

16 Therefore, bachelor's degrees with honours in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, with a typical total volume of at least 360 credits, equate to 180 ECTS credits as long as the learning outcomes are consistent with the relevant Dublin descriptor. Integrated master's degrees comprising 480 credits, of which 120 credits are at level 7, equate to 60 ECTS credits at second cycle level. More typically, master's degrees which have a minimum total of 180 credits equate to 90 ECTS credits. For each of these master's qualifications, 120 of the UK credits (60 ECTS) must be at level 7 and the outcomes must meet the expectations of the Dublin descriptor at the second cycle level.

Qualifications frameworks

17 Different qualifications reflect the distinct levels of intellectual challenge of the learning involved. The qualifications descriptors of the FHEQ set out the outcomes for the main UK HE qualifications at each level and demonstrate the nature of change between levels.

18 The qualification descriptors include a statement of intended outcomes, achievement of which are assessed and which a student should be able to demonstrate for the award of the qualification. They also provide a statement of the wider abilities (in terms of higher level skills and other attributes) that the typical student could be expected to have developed. A qualification descriptor summarises the holistic outcomes of the overall learning experience.

Section 2: The higher education credit framework for England

Main features

19 As recommended by the Burgess Group, this guidance is broad, overarching and advisory, allowing institutions to draw on it as appropriate to their needs and circumstances. It includes a summary of the main HE qualifications indicating the credits which institutional frameworks might typically expect in the **design of the qualification** and expectations about the minimum number of credits which might typically be associated with the level of the qualification. Thus, the guidance indicates how much learning is expected to be undertaken for the main HE qualifications referenced in the FHEQ. Table 1 (page 14) summarises this information and the explanatory text below indicates the assumptions on which it is based.

20 Institutions use credit in the **design of their programmes** to indicate how much learning is expected to be undertaken. Institutions decide for themselves on the range of module sizes that are available at each level taking into account the flexibility needed for programme design.

21 The framework is premised on the concept of intended learning outcomes (statements of what the student is expected to know, understand and be able to do) which are approved by the HE awarding body for individual modules/units, and for programmes as a whole, and which are assessed.

22 The credits assigned to each module or unit are based on the approximate number of hours a typical student is expected to spend learning to achieve the learning outcomes for that module (notional hours of learning). There is broad agreement amongst institutions in England that one credit represents 10 notional hours of learning. This includes not only formal contact hours, but also preparation for these, private reading and study, and the completion of formative assessment tasks and revision. The credits associated with the main qualifications in table 1 are based on that assumption.

23 Credit levels are typically aligned to the levels of the FHEQ which span study in HE. These commence at level 4 (in succession to levels 1-3 which precede higher education) and extend to level 8. HE providers use **credit level descriptors** to assist in determining the level of credit assigned to individual modules and units which comprise programmes of study. Often, programmes leading to HE qualifications, typically those taken over a number of years, include modules or units from more than one level.

24 Credit level descriptors are **guides** that identify the relative complexity, intellectual challenge, depth of learning and learner autonomy expected at each level and the differences between the levels. They reflect a range of factors including:

- the complexity and depth of knowledge and understanding
- links to associated academic, vocational or professional practice
- the degree of integration, independence and creativity required
- the range and sophistication of application/practice
- the role(s) taken in relation to other learners/workers in carrying out tasks.

They are used as general descriptions of the learning involved at a particular level, and are not specific requirements of what must be covered in a module or unit.

25 A range of level descriptors is available to HE providers. Many HE awarding bodies have developed detailed sets of level descriptors to meet their particular needs. Credit consortia have supported the development of such sets of descriptors which have been agreed and generally been adopted by their members.

26 The Burgess Group recommended that the well-known and widely used summary EWN credit level descriptors (hitherto known as NICATS descriptors) should be included as a point of reference in any guidance. These are included as Appendix B. All descriptors, however derived, should be viewed as reference points, rather than prescriptive.

27 Table 1 refers to the **main** HE qualifications awarded by HE awarding bodies in England. It does not express PhD/DPhil qualifications or, for example, qualifications in medicine, dentistry or veterinary sciences in terms of credit, as these are not typically credit-rated. Nor does it encompass the wide range of university certificates and diplomas which are awarded at levels 4 and 5 as these, and their titles, are diverse; individual institutional frameworks describe the arrangements for these. Similarly, references to graduate certificates and diplomas and to postgraduate certificates and diplomas embrace a wide range of programmes which increasingly include short programmes offered to meet the needs of employers for continuing professional development of employees.

28 Column 1 of table 1 indicates the corresponding level of the qualification in the FHEQ which is the framework with which institutions in England are expected to align their qualifications.

29 Column 2 of table 1 indicates the minimum credits which institutions typically use in designing programmes leading to the relevant qualification. Individual institutions may choose to specify a higher requirement or to allow students to undertake study leading to a higher number of credits in the context of their individual frameworks or on specific programmes. There are, in particular, two main variants in the concept of the graduate diploma both of which are consistent with the expectations of the FHEQ. One is typically a year long and comprises 120 credits; the other relates to programmes of shorter duration and for which 80 credits is typically the minimum. Similarly, some Professional Graduate Certificates in Education comprise 60 credits but typically, the credit volume exceeds this minimum where HE providers credit rate the professional practice element and integrate it in the programme. The precise requirements for individual programmes are normally specified in institutional regulations and indicated in programme specifications¹⁵ published by institutions. References to HNCs and HNDs are to those awarded by HE awarding bodies under licence from Edexcel and where the regulatory requirements may differ from those qualifications awarded by Edexcel.

30 Institutions also use credit levels in designing programmes in order to assist in locating modules and subsequently, with appropriate reference to the qualification descriptors, qualifications at the appropriate level in the FHEQ. Credit levels may also assist programme designers to develop programmes which make an incremental demand on students. The credit levels can then be used to identify planned learner progression through different stages of a programme.

¹⁵ Further information about programme specifications is available at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/default.asp

31 Column 3 of table 1 indicates the typical minimum credit at the level of the qualification. For example, a programme leading to a bachelor's degree with honours would normally comprise a minimum of three years study with planned progression through the programme (in the relative difficulty and complexity of learning) culminating in most, if not all, of the final year of study at honours level. Using credit, this might be expressed as a typical **minimum credit** value of 360 credits of which 90 credits would be the minimum credit at the level of the qualification (ie in this case at level 6).

32 Column 4 indicates the corresponding FQ-EHEA cycles and column 5 provides the ECTS credit equivalents for the main UK HE qualifications.

Table 1: Credit values typically associated with the design of programmes leading to main HE qualifications in England

	1	2	3	4	5
HE qualifications as set out in the FHEQ	FHEQ level	Minimum credits*	Minimum credits at the level of the qualification	FQ-EHEA cycles	ECTS credit ranges from the FQ-EHEA
PhD/DPhil	8	Not typically credit-rated		Third cycle (end of cycle) qualifications	Not typically credit-rated
Professional doctorates (only if credit based) (eg EdD, DBA, DClinPsy)**		540	360		
Research master's degrees (eg MPhil, MLitt)	7	Not typically credit-rated		Second cycle (end of cycle) qualifications	The minimum requirement is 60 ECTS credits; however a range of 90-120 ECTS credits is more typical at second cycle level
Taught MPhil		360	240		
Taught master's degrees (eg MA, MSc, MRes)		180	150		
Integrated master's degrees (eg MEng, MChem, MPhys, MPharm)***		480	120		
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	90	First cycle (end of cycle) qualifications	180-240 ECTS credits
Bachelor's degrees		300	60		
Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)****		60*****	40		
Graduate diplomas		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)		240	90		
Higher National Certificates (HNC)*****	4	150	120		
Certificates of Higher Education (Cert HE)		120	90		

Notes to table 1

- * 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.
- ** 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.
- *** Integrated master's degree programmes typically include at least 480 credits of which at least 120 credits are at level 7.
- **** In April 2005, the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers, the Standing Conference of Principals (now Guild HE), Universities UK and QAA issued a joint statement on the PGCE qualification title. The full statement may be accessed at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/PGCEstatement.asp
- ***** Typically, the credit volume is likely to exceed this minimum where HE providers credit-rate the professional practice element and integrate it in the programme in line with guidance included in the *Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*¹⁶ published by QAA.
- ***** Higher National Certificates (HNCs) are positioned at level 4, to reflect typical practice among higher education awarding bodies that award the HNC under licence from Edexcel.

Assessment and the award of credit

33 Institutions specify in their individual assessment regulations what their requirements are, including the number of credits to be achieved, both for progression within a programme and for the award of a qualification. Institutions will also specify, within their assessment regulations, their position with regard to compensation for, or condonement of, failure and the provision for resit and re-assessment opportunities and any implications of these for credit awarded.

34 Institutional decision-making processes regarding academic standards for awards are, properly and entirely, the responsibility of each autonomous institution.

Accreditation of learning

35 An HE awarding body can recognise (accredit) learning which has taken place (or is concurrently taking place, for example, work-based learning) elsewhere and count this towards the requirements of its own qualifications. This might involve the recognition of certificated learning completed in another formal educational setting (a process known as accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL)). Alternatively, it might involve the assessment and recognition of experiential learning (for academic purposes) which has taken place in an informal setting such as the work-place or voluntary sector (known as accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL))¹⁷.

¹⁶ The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* is available at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure

¹⁷ Further information about QAA's Guidelines for the accreditation of prior learning is available at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure

36 Credit can be a useful aid to the accreditation of prior learning (APL) and the accreditation of work-based learning. Institutions may make reference to credit level and credit volume when deciding how much and at what level they might formally recognise the learning presented for accreditation as part of a specific programme.

Credit accumulation and transfer

37 Most HE providers are open to credit transfer and have well-developed and long-standing mechanisms to consider applications from students wishing to transfer credit awarded elsewhere. The work of Lifelong Learning Networks has expanded this activity. Students, employers and other stakeholders who are interested in credit transfer will need to contact the relevant HE provider directly to discuss the opportunities available.

38 HE providers will be aware that they may need to make clear to students that, while all learning may be expressed in terms of credit values, not all credit can or will necessarily be accumulated towards a specific programme or award. The design, content and requirements of individual programmes are unique and are determined by individual institutions. Each HE awarding body will determine what credit it will accept for purposes of accumulation or transfer and the interests of the potential student are taken into account in determining this. Both HE awarding bodies, and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies which accredit specific HE programmes, can also have regulatory requirements which must be met in addition to the simple achievement of credits. For instance, these might relate to the number of attempts at assessment for a course or marks achieved).

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

- the proportion of credit which may be transferred between qualifications and/or accepted by an HEI for inclusion in one of its awards
- the currency or shelf-life of credit
- the use and re-use of credit
- general and specific credit
- ab-initio study (for example, learning a new language).

40 The recognition of credit enables institutions to consider applications from the holders of credit. However, the acceptance of students onto HE programmes depends on the direct relevance of prior learning achieved to the intended programme of study and the availability of places on the programme. Recognition of credit indicates eligibility for consideration but not entitlement to enter.

Timetable for implementation

41 In order to maximise the benefits of credit, all institutions are encouraged to implement the credit arrangements as indicated by the guidance in table 1 by the start of academic year 2009-10, and to include the credits associated with their programmes in the descriptions of each of the programmes which they offer.

Appendix A: Credit Issues Development Group

The Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group (the Burgess Group) proposed that a CIDG should be established for a short term to carry out the detailed work of refining the arrangements for a national credit framework for England. In carrying out this work, the Burgess Group also proposed that the CIDG adopt the guiding principles which it had also worked towards.

Terms of reference

The CIDG should:

- consider the recommendations contained in the report of the Burgess Group, *Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England*
- in consultation with key stakeholders, make the framework operational by identifying and addressing the key anomalies and issues which remain
- in consultation with key stakeholders, develop guidance to support the framework
- consider the interface and potential integration with other frameworks - in further education and other parts of the UK and beyond, and interface with the ECTS and European developments
- have completed this work no later than the start of the academic year 2008-09.

Guiding principles

The Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Scoping Group developed and followed a set of principles to guide its activities. At its first meeting, the Burgess Steering Group endorsed these principles and resolved that they would also underpin its work, augmented by some additional principles. The principles are:

- to respect institutional autonomy and academic professionalism
- to ensure that the interests of students are a primary concern of all aspects in the work of the group
- to ensure that proposals are, as far as possible, 'owned' by the sector via effective communication and consultation
- not to shy away from suggesting radical change if this is the consensus of the group
- not to shy away from suggesting change which has general support, even if a significant minority of institutions are opposed to it
- to ensure clarity about the problems we are trying to address/opportunities we are trying to exploit or create
- to ensure that proposals are, as far as possible, evidence-based through reviewing previous work as well as commissioning further research and highlighting examples of good practice
- at all times to be concerned about the possible burden of recommendations on institutions and staff
- proposals should, where possible, go with the grain of existing developments
- proposals must be seen to be useful by the sector and make reference to practical examples to show that they are workable.

Membership

Ms Helen Bowles	Policy Advisor	GuildHE
Ms Tish Bourke	Joint Manager	UK HE Europe Unit
Professor Paul H Bridges	Clerk to Governing Council, University of Derby	EWNI credit forum representative
Ms Sarah Butler	Assistant Director, Development and Enhancement Group	QAA
Ms Margaret Cameron	SCQF Manager	SCQF
Mr Trevor Clark	Head of Credit Framework Development	Welsh Assembly Government
Dr Nick Harris	Director, Development and Enhancement Group	QAA
Ms Dorothy Haslehurst	Associate Dean University of Portsmouth	EWNI credit forum representative
Dr Kath Hodgson	Director of Learning & Teaching Support	University of Leeds
Dr Jayne Mitchell	Assistant Director, Development and Enhancement Group	QAA
Ms Jessica Olley	Joint Manager	UK HE Europe Unit
Professor Muriel Robinson (Chair)	Principal	Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln
Professor Rob Robson	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning)	University of Reading
Mr Wes Streeting	Vice President, Education	National Union of Students
Mr Greg Wade	Policy Advisor	Universities UK
Ms Cath Walsh	Director	Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance
Ms Sheila Wolfenden	Policy Officer, Learning and Teaching	Higher Education Funding Council for England

Appendix B: Summary of the England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) generic credit level descriptors (previously known as NICATS)¹⁸

Learning accredited at this level* will reflect the ability to:

Level 8

- make a significant and original contribution to a specialised field of inquiry, demonstrating a command of methodological issues and engaging in critical dialogue with peers and accepting full accountability for outcomes

Level 7

- display mastery of a complex and specialised area of knowledge and skills, employing advanced skills to conduct research, or advanced technical or professional activity, accepting accountability for related decision making, including use of supervision

Level 6

- critically review, consolidate and extend a systematic and coherent body of knowledge, utilising specialised skills across an area of study; critically evaluate concepts and evidence from a range of sources; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills and exercise significant judgement in a range of situations; and accept accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes

Level 5

- generate ideas through the analysis of concepts at an abstract level with a command of specialised skills and the formulation of responses to well-defined and abstract problems; analyse and evaluate information; exercise significant judgement across a broad range of functions; and accept responsibility for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes

Level 4

- develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base; employ a range of specialised skills; evaluate information, using it to plan and develop investigative strategies and to determine solutions to a variety of unpredictable problems; and operate in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs.

* Note: only levels relevant to HE learning are reproduced here.

¹⁸ The level descriptors should be seen as a developmental continuum in which preceding levels are necessarily subsumed within those which follow.

Appendix C: Abbreviations

APL	Accreditation of prior learning
APCL	Accreditation of prior certificated learning
APEL	Accreditation of prior experiential learning
CIDG	Credit Issues Development Group
CQFW	Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EWNI	England, Wales and Northern Ireland
FQ-EHEA	Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area
FHEQ	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
HEI	Higher education institution
NICATS	Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
NUCCAT	Northern Universities Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer
PSRBs	Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SEEC	Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer
WHECC	Welsh Higher Education Credit Consortium

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