

## **SEEC response to the BIS Consultation on 'Accelerated courses and switching university or degree: call for evidence'**

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

Many of the essential elements of a credit transfer system are already in place so the question is not about the system but about the extent of its use. Currently SEEC member institutions are actively involved in the following types of credit transfer arrangements which significantly benefit learners:

- Transfer between courses internally within institutions
- Progression and articulation arrangements enabling students to move to higher awards utilising their credit within and between institutions
- Students moving between professional and academic qualifications and utilising some or all of the credit in so doing.
- Enabling the identification of credit for work-based learning (either prior-learning through RPEL arrangements or contemporaneous learning through course design)

SEEC is a long established consortium of universities and other HE providers working to promote the use of credit to support learner development and progression. It would see the potential benefits as:

- Supporting life-long and life-wide learning through enabling seamless transfer between periods of education and work
- Enabling the flexible recognition of learning from a range of contexts including work and enabling this to be counted towards a qualification
- Supporting student mobility both geographically and in terms of personal ambition and career development
- Providing access to higher education for those in work, who still represent a significantly under-represented group within HE

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

Credit transfer could be more effectively embedded if:

- There was greater commonality in terms of a national framework within which credit decisions are taken

- An explicit entitlement to the recognition of prior learning (including both certificated and experiential learning) were established, regulated and monitored.
- All Institutions were required to make their credit transfer practices open and transparent to establish credit as the 'common currency' for learning.
- The Competitions and Market Authority had a role to ensure that institutional policies governing the transfer and recognition of credit were implemented as advertised.
- Learners had an independent source of advice on credit transfer (currently only some institutions provide advice and they may have vested interests that may not align with those of the learner). Some other countries provide independent advice (see for example <http://www.nationaal-kenniscentrum-enc.nl/werknemers/english>). SEEC currently provides some independent advice if learners contact us but this has not been our primary purpose although we would gladly consider such a role.
- There was a register of the volume of credit given by institutions for professional awards against designated qualifications both to enable learners to consider routes for utilising professional awards towards higher qualifications and for institutional benchmarking purposes.
- A more consistent learner record existed enabling admissions tutors to make detailed decisions on students entering with advanced standing without the need to ask for significant additional evidence.

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

We would consider the main barriers are:

- Lack of awareness by learners (and some institutions) of existing institutional policies that enable credit transfer
- Self-interest of institutions. Institutions do not gain tuition fee income from credit transfer unless (as some institutions do) they offer specific modules to support the process of making credit claims.
- Lack of promotion of the opportunities of credit transfer. Often institutional policies on credit transfer are not actively promoted by institutions and there is very little public promotion of how credit transfer can operate to reduce tuition fees and study time in gaining higher education qualifications.
- Lack of independent advice.
- Over emphasis on the need for specific credit (the meeting of a full range of specified programme or module learning outcomes) where it may not be needed rather than general credit appropriate to level.
- Lack of a detailed learner record that goes with the learner so that admissions tutors don't have to approach the current (or past) institution which causes delays and may place additional barriers. Learners may not wish their current institution to know that they are considering moving.
- Risks to admissions tutors from accepting students where subsequent failure may count against them

- Institutions providing effective induction/orientation for students entering higher education programmes at later stages.
- Resistance of some institutions to consider the standards of other institutions as being directly comparable.

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

There is no level playing field and mobility can be hampered by a lack of transparency and recognition of inequivalence by US HEIs. Experience shows that there are significant differences in the standards set across HE within different HE systems. Year of study is not a proxy for level of study. Transfer of grades between systems is therefore difficult although transfer of credit should be more transparent and manageable.

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

The barriers to credit recognition and transfer also act as barriers for accelerated degrees. One of the most effective ways to accelerate the time it takes to complete a degree is to recognise the prior learning of students. For example, this can mean that students with credit can complete an Honours degree in a year to 18 months.

The traditional academic year is a significant barrier to the introduction of accelerated degrees. Some of the best practice relates to 'intensive' degrees that use the full calendar year as the timeframe within which learning is undertaken. For example, this can include work-based degrees that fully integrate the activity of work with higher-level learning. The development of fully integrated Degree Apprenticeships also has the potential to provide examples of good practice in addressing the barriers for accelerated degrees.

Students often need to work alongside study and the summer period can provide a period for additional work and hence income.

Staffing intensive accelerated degrees provides a challenge to institutions who need to provide research and holiday periods for staff although in compensation it can make more effective use of physical resources.

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

SEEC's purpose is closely aligned with a mission to overcome the barriers to credit recognition and transfer and, as indicated above, SEEC members typically actively promote credit transfer and have well established mechanisms for:

- The recognition of prior learning – including certificated and experiential learning
- Quality systems to recognise 'general' as well of 'specific' credit
- The provision of modules that are designed to support the development of a claim for the recognition of prior learning.
- Flexible curriculum frameworks that are designed to enable credit for prior learning to be built into programmes of higher education study.

- The provision and transparent promotion of the opportunities for credit recognition and transfer.
- Working in partnership with institutions across different HE systems to promote progression and articulation.
- Consistent approaches to the training of Admissions Tutors with regards to credit recognition and transfer

We would refer you to the following representative web sites for details of the additional advice and support typically given by SEEC member institutions to support these activities.

## **SEEC**

[www.seec.org.uk](http://www.seec.org.uk)

### **The Open University:**

<http://www.open.ac.uk/study/credit-transfer/>

### **Middlesex University:**

<http://www.mdx.ac.uk/courses/help-with-your-application/undergraduate-application/accreditation-of-prior-learning>

<http://www.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/our-schools/institute-for-work-based-learning>

### **University of Hertfordshire**

<http://www.herts.ac.uk/apply/entry-requirements/apl-faqs-for-applicants>

### **University of West London**

<http://www.uwl.ac.uk/students/undergraduate/accreditation-of-prior-learning>

### **University of Portsmouth**

<http://www.port.ac.uk/institute-of-criminal-justice-studies/courses/recognition-of-prior-learning/>