



Higher Education Framework for England: Advice on Academic Credit Arrangements

Welcome

Dr Andy Smith, Quality and Standards Manager, QAA

26 May 2021

Agenda

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| 14.00 - 14.05 | Welcome | Dr Andy Smith, Quality and Standards Manager, QAA |
| 14.05 - 14.15 | Welcome Address | Douglas Blackstock, Chief Executive, QAA |
| 14.15 - 14.25 | Welcome Address | Professor Sue Rigby, Vice-Chancellor, Bath Spa University, and Chair of the Advisory Group |
| 14.25 - 15.00 | Panel Discussion | Chaired by Dr Andy Smith Dr Lucy Dawkins, Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Royal College of Art Professor Clare Milsom, Academic Registrar, Liverpool John Moores University Steven Taylor, Dean of Higher Education, Warwickshire College Professor Darryll Bravenboer, Chair of SEEC, Director of Apprenticeships, Middlesex University Jonny Barnes, PG student, University of Bristol & QAA's Student Strategic Advisory Committee |
| 15.00 - 15.10 | The Credit Framework for England | Dr Andy Smith, Quality and Standards Manager, QAA Simon Bullock, Quality and Standards Specialist, QAA |
| 15.10 - 15.15 | Close | Dr Andy Smith, Quality and Standards Manager, QAA |



Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Advice on Academic Credit Arrangements

Second edition

May 2021



Making Use of Credit: A Companion to the Higher Education Credit Framework for England

May 2021



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How providers can use this advice

Higher education providers can primarily use this advice as a reference point when they are designing courses, whether they are micro-credentials or full degrees. While this is not an exhaustive list, providers can also use this advice to do the following:

- ✓ Help academics design and deliver curricula.
- ✓ Benefit interdisciplinary approaches to learning and assessment.
- ✓ Supply clear information about the credit volume typically associated with different types of course.
- ✓ Quantify the learner 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 micro-credentials.
- ✓ Assist in the assessment of recognition of prior learning (RPL) applications from learners wanting to change course within a provider, or to transfer with advanced standing from another provider.
- ✓ Design student exchanges and study abroad opportunities using the common currency of academic credit to map against other credit systems such as ECTS.
- ✓ Design collaborative courses that use credit to ensure mutual understanding of what will be taught and studied at each partner.
- ✓ Make it clear to future employers on a transcript, diploma supplement or [Higher Education Achievement Report](#) how much learning has been undertaken in a specific subject.
- ✓ Recognise learning achieved through assessed co-curricular or extra-curricular activities in shell modules that then count towards an award.
- ✓ Develop clear, fair and flexible mechanisms to allow learners to leave courses before their originally intended target awards are achieved, enabling them to exit with a recognised award.

Some of these activities can, and do, happen without credit, but credit systems are important as they can provide a fair and transparent framework for such crucial decisions to happen consistently within and across providers.

This advice covers the range of course design models used in higher education, including courses designed by degree-awarding bodies (DABs) which are used in franchise arrangements when working with partner institutions such as further education colleges or private providers, or in validation arrangements where courses are designed by the provider and approved by the validating DAB.

Credit Framework for England 2021

This table draws together the FHEQ levels as well as having an additional column for the ECTS value from the Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). It is a table 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.

Values shown in column 3 are the minimum that are typically associated with the qualification (plus any permissible minimum or maximum at a specified level shown in parentheses).

| Typical higher education qualifications within each level | FHEQ Level | Minimum credit | 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 at FHEQ level 8) | | |
| 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 at FHEQ level 7) | | |
| Integrated master's degrees (eg MEng, MChem, MPhys, MPharm) | | 480 (120 at FHEQ level 7) | | |
| Primary (or first) qualifications in medicine, (eg BM BS) and dentistry (eg BDS) | | Not typically credit-rated | | |
| Postgraduate diplomas | | 120 (90 at FHEQ level 7) | | |
| Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) | 60 (40 at FHEQ level 7) | | | |
| Postgraduate certificates | 60 (40 at FHEQ level 7) | | | |
| Bachelor's degrees with honours (eg BA/BSc Hons) | 6 | 360 (90 at FHEQ level 6) | First cycle (end of cycle) qualifications | 180-240 ECTS credits |
| Bachelor's degrees | | 300 (60 at FHEQ level 6) | | |
| Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (ProfGCE/sometimes referred to as PGCE) | | 60 (40 at FHEQ level 6) | | |
| Graduate diplomas | | 80 (80 at FHEQ level 6) | | |
| Graduate certificates | | 40 (40 at FHEQ level 6) | | |
| Foundation degrees (eg FdA, FdSc) | 5 | 240 (90 at FHEQ level 5) | Short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) qualifications | Approximately 120 ECTS credits |
| Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE) | | 240 (90 at FHEQ level 5) | | |
| Higher National Diplomas (HND awarded by degree-awarding bodies under licence from Pearson) | | 240 (90 at FHEQ level 5) | | |
| Higher National Certificates (HNC awarded by degree-awarding bodies under licence from Pearson) | 4 | 120 (60 at FHEQ level 4) | | |
| Certificates of Higher Education (Cert HE) | | 120 (90 at FHEQ level 4) | | |

Guiding principles for the use of credit

These guiding principles, in a similar way to the [Advice and Guidance](#) themes which support the [Quality Code for Higher Education](#), are a point of reference for providers to consider when looking at credit in the context of developing new or reviewing existing higher education provision.



Clarity

Use of credit will help you to:

- provide a clear structural basis which you can use to develop flexible courses of study
- support transparent progression routes in course design that help learners to understand the importance of credit, and to navigate personal learning pathways
- identify and clarify the levels of difficulty of different types of academic and professional qualifications.



Consistency

Use of credit will help you to:

- provide a consistent approach to notional learning hours across courses and disciplines
- promote a common language and awareness of structure that you can use to discuss curriculum development.



Flexibility

Use of credit will help you to:

- develop a common currency for learning achievement that helps learners transfer between courses and/or providers
- support partnerships between yourself and other providers through the development of joint curricula, progression arrangements and credit transfer
- facilitate student mobility by relating the English credit framework to the credit frameworks of the other nations of the UK, and beyond.



Creativity

Use of credit will help you to:

- 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
- create innovative educational products, such as micro-credentials, that respond to and reflect changing social and educational priorities.



Achievement, workload, complexity - the different uses of credit

Credit is typically used to denote two things: a) a measure of the contribution particular units of learning will make to the overall outcome - in other words, a recognition of achievement, and b) a measure of the study time a learner is expected to allocate to the module/unit - in other words, workload.

In this advice, we mainly talk about credit in the former sense, although understanding the relationship between credit and notional hours of study is an important consideration. While notional hours of learning typically equate to one credit for every 10 hours of learning time, how this is applied to a range of learning experiences at a modular or course level will differ according to types of delivery, subject content and student cohorts. Credit assigned to modules or courses is based on the approximate number of hours a learner is expected to spend learning to achieve the learning outcomes for that module, including guided and independent study. For example, a 20-credit module equates to 200 hrs, divided into different modes of learning.

Providers also typically require learners to have studied at a particular level, as well as having achieved a minimum number of credits to indicate achievement of learning outcomes, in order to progress to the next year, another course, or graduate. This leads to the use of credit as a description of the complexity of learning at a certain level, and is a way of ensuring the quality of design and integration of a qualification. This can be facilitated by 'credit level descriptors' (see page 13) which providers use to determine the level of credit assigned to individual modules and units and together form courses of study, which often include modules or units from more than one level.



Europe

The [European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System \(ECTS\)](#), developed in 1989 to promote the international recognition of qualifications and student movement, is used by many higher education providers in England, and across the UK, to support student mobility in Europe.

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 (see Annex B of [The Frameworks For Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#)).

[The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area \(FQ-EHEA\)](#) 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 in the second cycle.



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Short courses and executive education

Short courses and executive education can either be non-credit bearing or credit bearing (effectively making them micro-credentials). When these courses are non-credit bearing, participants might receive a certificate showing that they have completed the course. To be credit bearing, the course should 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 provider might approve the courses through their quality assurance framework.

The structure of short courses and executive education, and the credit associated with it, takes several forms. These include a standalone qualification or a micro-credential, either of which can be portable and could, through RPL, contribute at a future point to a higher education qualification, and be one of the building blocks of a flexible degree structure.

Reflective questions

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

Placements

A wide breadth of placements currently exists in higher education. For instance, for a professional qualification the placement is often integral to the course. Placements are often modules within degree courses and can lead to the award of credit, providing that the learner passes the required assessment and meets the approved learning outcomes. The discipline studied will determine the style and importance of the placement element, as well as its duration and use of credit. 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.

Membership of the 2021 Credit Framework for England Advisory Group

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