



Accelerated Courses and Switching University or Degree: Call for Evidence

GuildHE response

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.*

Our higher educational institutions have a collective responsibility to help students get the best education they can, and that includes improving their ability to transfer to another university or course.

Improve comparability of courses and qualifications:

Currently, credit transfer processes exist within individual institutions across the higher education sector, based on the notion of academic judgement. In order for there to be a more coherent approach to credit transfer across the sector there needs to be greater transparency in both the process for doing so and in the way the learning gained at one institution is recognised by another. This would require a UK-wide system which, while recognising institutional autonomy, allows a more standardised approach that is accepted by both universities and students, improves the transparency and comparability of courses and enables the mutual recognition of learning outcomes and qualifications. This is not straightforward. But even with no standard degree curricula and the academic freedom to create bespoke modules and courses, it is possible to have increased transparency about what learning is transferable and what modules and core content would have to be covered for a student to be eligible to transfer, with added clarity about the application process and timeframe. Students are increasingly learning in different flexible ways including distance-learning and blended learning approaches, alongside degree apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning. These developments within higher education place an increased importance on credit transfer processes.

Credit transfer and social mobility

Credit transfer can play an important role in achieving greater social mobility. Non-traditional and disadvantaged students entering higher education need appropriate and practical routes for progression. There needs to be a system in place that acknowledges a student's circumstances can change over the course of their higher education and then facilitates them being able to pursue the most appropriate course in the right environment. For example, a disabled student who chooses to study locally, living at home may decide that a year down the line, they want to transfer to another university that better suits their present needs.

Additionally, an effective credit transfer system would support student retention in 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.*

The government and our sector could jointly develop greater transparency criteria for switching courses – with more information for students provided on universities websites including information on the process, procedures, timeframe and APEL. Higher education providers would then have a mandate to further develop their policies and credit frameworks around managing transfer students, both departures and arrivals.

It is important that institutions have Credit Frameworks that are fully compatible with the QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education the FHEQ and the Subject benchmark Statements. Some of the universities in the UK seem to have successfully adopted the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), a Europe wide credit transfer system for higher education, in order to facilitate participation in the Erasmus programme and other European connections and activities

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.*

Potential barriers to creating a more extensive credit transfer system may vary in relation to changing degree and/or changing university.

Differences in course content: a student transferring from one course to another may not have covered the same or similar topics necessary to pass the new course and may not have the equivalent level of understanding as their new peers. Moreover, all higher education providers are free to regulate their recognition of prior learning systems which means that the use of credits to meet course requirements is not uniform across HEIs. This is a fundamental principle of institutional autonomy and academic judgement.

Another major barrier to student transfers is the complicated and confusing way in which student loans are accessed and administered. Because use is calculated over a 12 month period rather than per credit, students who obtain 60 credits (50%) and then wish to change providers will have to use up a whole year's worth of SLC funding allocation in order to make up the additional 50% of the first year before continuing on their course, even when they have not drawn down a full year's worth of money. Providers do not have access to financial information of transferring students, and it is very hard to offer advice or to determine whether a student has the means to re-enter higher education; whether they are able to access the student loan or if they will have to pay for the additional credit upfront. Some providers will need to charge students upfront for the additional credit, which is a big disincentive for students and is often an unnecessary barrier.

Other issues include:

- Lack of student demand – students may not be fully informed of the credit transfer system and may fear taking different a different course at another

institution. They will also have the burden of contacting not only their own institution about transferring but also their intended transfer institution. Practical difficulties may arise in terms of communication.

- Time-scales for which students would have to apply to transfer course or university. A student may have not been given sufficient time to complete the whole credit transfer process, particularly when it involves transferring to another institution.
- Devolution may also be a barrier to changing degree or university as there are different governance issues across the UK.
- Universities have different weightings for different years, which makes it difficult for a student to transfer any later than the end of the first year.
- There may be significant costs of implementing an extensive transfer system, particularly for smaller institutions.
- It would not always be in the student interest to change institutions as it can cause significant disruption including access to accommodation. This is not a decision which should be taken lightly if a student is a little bit unhappy with their current course, and this needs to be reflected in guidance to students wishing to do this.

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.

British Columbia, Canada have an interesting model for credit transfer. They have an established council for facilitating transfers across British Columbia's public and private postsecondary institutions - known as the [British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer](#). The council works with institutions to help them develop policies that facilitate credit transfer of postsecondary courses, allowing students to formally transfer from one institution to another. There are currently 36 institutions, both public and private, that are members of the transfer system. This system enables institutions to develop formal transfer agreements between courses where there is high demand and affinity.

The principles and guideline for transfer within the membership can be seen here: <http://www.bccat.ca/system/principles>

The consultation cites the happenings in the US as a good example of how credit transfer can work. However, this is much easier in a country with a strong tradition in liberal arts degrees whereby there is little or no imperative to undertake specific modules in order to gain a Bachelor's degree. Our system is much more prescriptive and must map to the Subject Benchmark Statements outlined by the sector and HEFCE require students to be assigned a specific course outcome. Institutional standards and quality are linked to this function and any new system must respect both national and institutional level standards which have been set by the academic community.

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

The main barrier to further expansion of these types of degrees is the financial implications of providing non-traditional degrees both to students and to institutions. HEFCE have shown in their earlier study that accelerated degrees do come at an additional cost to institutions and it is near impossible to deliver these 2 year programmes for 2 years' worth of tuition fees. This is especially true in alternative providers who often have their teaching staff on hourly paid contracts and so have a significantly increased staff bill when running these programmes. Institutions are therefore experiencing financial difficulties in covering the costs and resources of implementing accelerated degrees because students are only able to access two years' worth of funding. Most institutions who offer these degrees are therefore also having to charge students additional up-front fees to pay the difference. In GSM's response to this consultation they provide clear evidence that this has been a particular disincentive for students and uptake of these types of degrees has dramatically decreased over time. **If government wish to accelerate these types of degrees it must look again at students' access to loans.** We mention a potential solution to this in our response to credit transfer whereby if access to loans were administered by credit accumulation rather than per 12 month basis then students would have the ability to have their tuition fees paid by their loan for a 2 year accelerated degree.

Another issue with developing accelerated degrees is that it does not suit all types of academic disciplines. So whilst this mode of delivery may work well for some courses and for some students, many others need time to focus on their academic and personal development which cannot be achieved in an accelerated degree. We believe it is worth reiterating that whilst students may only have formal scheduled classes for 24 weeks of the year, they continue to think and work over the holiday period and this additional time is vital to grow their knowledge, understanding and skills development of their discipline.

There may also be issues in institutions being able to provide the appropriate facilities over the summer term such as the library/IT/ specialist equipment and student support, as many staff contracts do not include working over the summer period.

For accelerated degree to grow in number BIS must allow students to be able to access up to 1.5x the tuition fee loan per year to reflect the additional fee's they are being charged. Student maintenance must also be increased as the current annual rate reflects the ability to work over the summer holidays, and students on accelerated courses do not have this ability. Without this financial support, these degrees are not a viable option for many students.

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

There some examples within the GuildHE membership whereby institutions are successfully offering accelerated degrees such as GSM, London and SAE Institute. All of the BSc and BA courses that SAE Institute offer are 2 year accelerated

degrees. GSM offer either both a 2 or three year option on their Undergraduate degree courses. Winchester also offer a 2 year accelerated degree in Street Art. But all of our members have to charge an additional upfront fee to students which is currently not able to be covered by the student loan system.