Making credit accumulation and transfer work

Final report on research and evaluation of the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) pilot projects

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Tony Hudson
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1.0 Introduction

This final report brings together in summary form the work of a suite of projects funded by the Association of Colleges (AoC), the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA).

The rationale behind the funding of this suite of projects came from the consultation on *New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills Reform Plan* (BIS: 2011) which emphasised, amongst other things, the need to establish clearer progression routes in to higher education (HE) from apprenticeships, vocational and professional qualifications.

The call for pilot proposals, the operational strand of this suite of projects, sought to establish a small number of demonstrator projects focusing on higher vocational education (HVE) to accomplish this via a common approach to academic credit. The call specified that pilot projects would be expected to meet specific criteria in terms of economic needs and to build on existing established partnerships and relationships between institutions in both higher education (HE) and further education (FE) systems, professional bodies and sector organisations, making use of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) as a means of facilitating learner progression.

The criteria from the call are set out below:

- The stimulation of innovative, robust and scalable models of credit transfer and progression.
- Evidence of a strong economic rationale, for example linked to the growth agenda.
- Building on sectorial, geographical or other appropriate collaborative relationships.
- The creation of new pathways and/or developing, extending and improving existing good practice in the FE and HE sectors.
- The improvement of portability of credits and creation of smoother, more easily comprehensible progression routes.
- Stimulating innovation in qualification design and learning delivery; for example, through an opportunity for the achievement of higher levels through units at level 4 in a level 3 qualification.
- Where possible, leveraging matched resources, including those in kind.

*Source: Promoting Progression: Credit Transfer Arrangements – Proposals for Pilots* (AoC: 2012)

The call sought to fund between six to ten projects with up to £80,000 per project divided in two phases for the 2012/2013 financial year. Following a rigorous application and selection process, seven pilot projects were funded. However, during the first phase, one of the pilot projects ceased activity and decided not to continue with work in the second and final phase. Therefore, only the remaining six pilot projects and completed strands of activity are covered in this final report.

This final report draws on the review of the literature: “Exploring the capacity for credit” and the evaluation report: “Programme evaluation of the CATS pilot projects.” Throughout the report there are single-page case studies of each of the six pilot or demonstrator projects. These summaries set out the key aims of each project, provide details of key partners, summarise the CATS model adopted, highlight key learning outcomes and provide an indication of next steps and future work to be undertaken by the project partners.

Including the introduction, this report is organised into nine sections. The second section sets out the policy context for CAT schemes in England. In the third and fourth sections the benefits and weaknesses of CAT schemes and credit-based modular systems (CBMS) are rehearsed. Having identified potential weaknesses of CAT schemes and CMBS, the subsequent section addresses these weaknesses and considers how such barriers can be overcome. In section six, findings from the evaluation of the six pilot projects are reported. Section seven focuses on how the pilot projects could become embedded and self-sustaining and section eight considers the value and importance of partnership working to such activities. The ninth and final section sets out a series of proposals for the credit accumulation and transfer schemes in general and the pilot projects in particular.
Project name: Building on Competence in the Workplace

Lead institution: University of Greenwich

Key aims
The aims of the project were fourfold. Firstly, together with partner colleges, to develop agreed CATS procedures to promote progression between part-time Level 3 and non-prescribed HE and the Applied Professional Studies (APS) programme resulting in a more unified and navigable higher vocational education (HVE) offer for work-based learners with clearly articulated progression to honours and master’s degrees and higher professional qualifications. Secondly, to provide clear information about the financial implications of different learning pathways. Thirdly, to publish an innovative regional HVE prospectus providing a navigation tool for people in work about the offer across the pilot colleges in SE London and NW Kent. Finally, to trial with experienced work-based learners at Level 3, the potential to reflect on past practices, including those learned to a level of competency in past awards at Level 3, to raise the learning to HE Level four accreditation worthiness.

Key partners and roles
The project was delivered through a collaborative partnership of the University of Greenwich and five of its partner FE colleges: Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich Community, Hadlow and North West Kent colleges. A steering group was established comprising senior managers from the colleges, the project team and an employer representing SMEs and large companies in SE London. The University of Greenwich also developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the South East Region TUC Unionlearn.

Description of CATS model
The Higher Education at Work prospectus gives potential learners and their employers information about the new flexible work-based Foundation Degree (FD) in APS and the Higher Apprenticeship (HA) in Business and how they can import credit from existing higher level qualifications in order to gain an FD more quickly and, by doing so, pay reduced fees. It included:

- A joint CAT scheme protocol agreed by the partners to promote progression between part-time Level 3 and non-prescribed HE and the APS and HA programmes.
- A 'plain English' explanation of credit, including credit levels and credit values.
- A progression map of college-based part-time HVE opportunities for people in work.
- A tariff of work-based part-time higher vocational education courses offered by the colleges arranged in subject sectors and indicating credit level, credit value and type of loan available.
- Details of the FD in APS and the HA in Business and Professional Administration and progression pathways.
- Information and advice about course fees and part-time student loans.

Key learning outcomes
Comments taken from partner college final reports illustrate key learning outcomes:

“Increased partnership working between the colleges involved resulting in enhanced relationships between staff and sharing of both good practice and problem solving.”

“Better awareness of the issues around higher level skills.”

“Better marketing products that will ensure that our key stakeholders will have a better understanding of our products.”

Future plans
There is clear institutional commitment from partners to continue the work. The University of Greenwich has committed to maintain and update the website and it will report back on usage statistics. It will continue to support the colleges in delivering APS and the Higher Apprenticeship and especially in firming up the progression to the APS honours degree top-up. Colleges have also stated explicitly how project activities will be embedded in their operational plans and used in curriculum planning.
2.0 Policy context

“A coherent framework for building up learning credits is a central component of an overall system of lifelong learning. It is essential for flexibility, for progression and for bridging the differences between different types of learning, especially inside and outside work.” (Schuller & Watson, 2009)

In this section we provide a brief overview of the policy context in which Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) schemes have developed and operate in. Credit-based learning is advocated as an essential part of an inclusive education system and support for credit systems is found throughout the widening participation discourse. The debate over credit is not new, and policy papers have reflected the potential for credit systems to facilitate learning which is student centred and contributory to lifelong learning. Credit can be seen as a vehicle to more accessible education in post-compulsory institutions that can, in turn, increase the numbers of post-16 learners in order to fulfil the needs of the economy and improve the personal and financial prospects of individuals.

Credit: A definition

(Final Report of the Burgess Group)

Credit can serve a number of purposes, be used in a variety of ways, and is understood differently by different people. Credit is, however, fundamentally a tool for assessing the equivalence of learning achieved by an individual. Credit is usually defined by a specific number of credit points... credit points allow students, institutions and employers to compare different qualifications on the same or different levels. (UUK, 2006)

The rationale surrounding the development of CAT systems has been based on advantages of credit frameworks for learners in terms of accessibility and mobility. Ashworth defines “a good credit system” as “one that also increases motivation by providing shorter-term targets for learners, and provides a reliable and credible measure of learning gain that can be used in the allocation of resources” Ashworth (1995:2).

2.1 The development of credit in the UK

The concept of ‘credit’ is not new, although its definitions and manifestations have emerged differently in various contexts. Below we outline credit developments in England since the early 1970s with reference to the policy frameworks that have tentatively advocated its use.

The introduction of academic credit in the UK can be traced back to 1970 when the Open University was established with the first cohort of students being admitted two years later in 1972. Unfettered by tradition it was the former polytechnic sector which was at the forefront of curriculum change with a small but significant number of polytechnics adopting credit as a part of their modular schemes. However, as Smith and Betts (1998) note, credit-based modular systems (CBMS) were: “created through a fragmented and inconsistent process of piecemeal development. For good practical reasons they were developed by deconstructing the traditional model of higher education rather than by building a new system from the bottom up.”

The real expansion in the polytechnic sector was in the 1980s when the former Council of National Academic Awards (CNAA) introduced the national Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (Bridges, 2010). According to Walsh and Johnson (2001), the purpose of this effort within higher education was based on a desire for “a tailored response to the needs of the broader range of students who were beginning to enter higher education” and as a way of avoiding multiple delivery of the same modules on different courses (p. 2). This early beginning of a credit accumulation and transfer system (CATS) was
gradually devolved to the universities and now most institutions in the higher education system have modular courses or programmes and use some aspects of credit accumulation and transfer. Some institutions are members of regional consortia, which aim to encourage the further development of CATS, enabling the movement of students from one HE institution to the other without a loss of achievement. The Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC), the Higher Education Credit Initiative Wales (HECIW) and the Northern Universities Consortia for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (NUCCAT) are examples of major consortia that operate in the UK.

The second thrust was the development of the National Open College Network (NOCN) and Open College Networks (OCNs). The first OCNs were established in the 1970s and 80s, and the Networks remain a very important awarding body for credit. The Networks support credit-based learning, created and adapted for local markets. OCNs have ‘off the shelf’ courses as well as working with further education colleges and training providers to develop credit-bearing courses, primarily for adults. Davies (1999) cites three uses for OCN credit:

- To certify previously unrecognised learning, sometimes work-based/
- To bolster other learning programmes.
- To provide a ‘bridge’ between courses or programmes of learning.

In general, OCNs fill the needs of colleges and students by offering courses that fall outside of the national qualifications and one study reports that, although variable, adults are more heavily represented on OCN courses (Davies, 1999).

### 2.2 Surveys on credit practices

In more recent times the adoption and development of credit-based modular systems in the HE sector can be charted from a number of national surveys in 1998 (Armstrong et al, 1998), 1999 (Turnbull, 2000; Johnson and Walsh, 2000; Johnson and Walsh, 2001), 2003 (Johnson, 2004) and 2012 (UK Credit Forum, 2012). In the survey of UK universities conducted by Johnson and Walsh (2000), over two-thirds of universities operated a credit-based modular system at undergraduate level and had a semester calendar. (Johnson and Walsh, 2000:26) In theory, this should allow not only the accumulation of credits but the transfer of credits between institutions if students elect to move from one institution to another. However, Bekhradnia (2004) noted at the time, of the 11,000 students who “transferred” to another HE institution in the academic year 2002-3 most did not receive credit for previous work due to due incompatibility between accounting methods, course content, and standards (Bekhradnia 2004:7).

In the most recent institutional survey, the UK Credit Forum (2012) noted that the convergence in the method and application of credit in higher education towards a single credit system, identified in earlier surveys, continued. Findings from the survey demonstrate institutions’ alignment with national credit frameworks and that an increasing number also use the European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS) in parallel with the national frameworks. As with previous surveys, the latest survey (UK Credit Forum, 2012) usefully identifies variation in practice on matters such as condonement and compensation highlighting the fact that there is uncertainty in the sector as to what constitutes good practice. The survey also identifies other issues, such as the reuse of credit, which needs to be addressed given the lack of consistency across the sector. However none of the surveys have sought to quantify credit transfer in terms of the number of transfers and the amount or volume of credit transferred within the HE system.

In July 2003, with the publication of the Government’s White Paper on skills, 21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential, the desirability to moving towards a credit-based system within the national qualifications framework was made apparent, particularly, for adults (DFES, 2003a). The 2003 White Paper, The Future of Higher Education, maintains the importance of credit transfer and accumulation
systems in providing flexibility and facilitating participation both in further and higher education, among institutions in terms of consortia as well as within institutions themselves (DfES, para 1.19 and 5.25). The White Paper also advocates the use of credit as a means of responding to increasing student diversity (DfES, 2003b). With respect to the FE community, Learning Works states that credit transfer can provide students with a degree of control over their own learning as well as “accreditation for interim achievement . . . recognition for their work” and the opportunity to “build up credit throughout their lives” (Kennedy, 1997, p. 86). In addition, the DfES report Success for All (2002) calls for ensuring:

- Greater choice.
- Higher standards.
- Clear progression routes to HE and employment.
- Engagement between employers and “a transformed and responsive network of further education colleges and other providers committed to meeting regional and sub-regional skill needs” (DfES, 2002).

The initiatives to make education more accessible are many and diverse. “Aspiration raising” among young learners to increase their awareness of future educational opportunities; access courses for adults; modular course structures; and distance learning are examples of ways in which access can be improved and lifelong learning promoted. Credit accumulation and transfer is central to these initiatives.

More recently, in 2011, the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) replaced the National Qualification Framework (NQF) which closed for accreditation at the end of 2010. Only accredited qualifications can be included in the QCF, which has eight levels (see Figure 1 below). Unlike the NQF, the QCF does not exclude vocational learning.
Figure 1: Qualifications and Credit Framework

The QCF is also referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (see Figure 2 below) so that qualifications in the QCF can be understood across other member states. Higher education qualifications, which are awarded by universities and other institutions with degree-awarding powers, are included within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).
The pace and development of credit and qualification frameworks has been uneven if not slow and issues identified by leading academics and practitioners, such as the reporting and recording of credit transfer (Robertson, 1994), remain unresolved. Adam and Bridges (2010) provide an analysis of the factors which influence both the type and pace of development. The first factor is degree of government understanding and commitment to make such frameworks a reality. Second is the capacity of quality and standards agencies to work together in partnership. Thirdly, development should be consultative with opportunities for all stakeholders to contribute. The final point should be establishing mechanisms to maintain and develop the framework once it has been populated.

2.4 Credit and Vocational Education and Training (VET)

The recent review of vocational education (Wolf, 2011) whilst focussing on 14-19 provision makes a number of observations and recommendations regarding the regulatory framework.

In terms of the present arrangements Wolf notes that: “If vocational qualifications (in the very broadest sense) are to promote successful progression by young people into the labour market, they need to be recognised and ‘owned’ by employers; and if they are to provide a successful route into higher levels of study, they need to be recognised by gatekeepers, and provide information that selective courses and institutions can use in making offers. Present arrangements fail on both counts. (Wolf, 2011:132) One of key issues, particularly in terms of the labour market,
that in comparison to academic qualifications which have remained relatively stable, vocational qualifications have been subject to constant change, no sooner introduced and implemented than abolished and replaced by another new qualification. This compounds the challenges learners encounter when they seek to transfer credit, particularly in higher vocational education.

At European level the development of a European credit (transfer) system for vocational education and training (ECVET) which is designed to enable the validation, recognition and accumulation of work-related skills and knowledge in different education systems and settings has yet to be proven in the UK context. Whilst there have been a number of pilot projects, there is no reported evidence to date on the ‘Developing ECVET in Practice’ project which commenced in 2012. The project will pilot a conversion tool ‘QCF/ECVET Converter’ testing against different types of qualifications in order to determine its validity and wider usefulness. However, one possible unintended consequence of the development of ECVET is the creation of a two-tier credit system where ECVET is not regarded as highly as ECTS.

Given the lack of appetite for a national credit system and a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) based on ‘academic credit’ it is not surprising that the national team of ECVET experts reported that: “There is a low level of awareness of ECVET in the UK so the majority of the work so far has been to raise awareness and understanding of what it is.” Much of the activity in ECVET development is reliant on EU funds and to date national governments have not provided financial support for such activity demonstrating the low level or absence of interest in such developments.

At present, ECVET operates as a transnational transfer system, facilitating the mobility of vocational students between different educational jurisdictions rather between systems within particular jurisdictions. If it only operates in this way then, like ECTS, its impact will remain limited. Convergence between the two systems - ECTS and ECVET - may go so way to bridging the gap between the academic and vocational divide at national level. A number of national and transnational organisations, such as EUNEC (European Network of Education Councils), have also identified the potential of ECVET as a ‘communication instrument’ within national systems:

- “to bridge the gap between education and training systems operating in segregated settings. Most learners have some fragmentised competences acquired in different systems but they are unable to transfer them from the education system to the training system and vice versa.
- to link sectors (e.g. vocational school education, workplace-based vocational education and others) within the educational system. ECVET offers an opportunity to build flexible learning paths, more appropriate to the real starting point of the learner.” (EUNEC, 2007:2)

### 2.5 Listening to learners

The current coalition government’s policy discourse positions credit transfer as a solution to both wastage and dropout – a means of retaining students within the system – and enabling lifelong learning. However, this assumption, as Di Paolo & Pegg (2013) note: “is based upon assumptions about student learning as linear, progressive and motivated by rational decision making.”

Whilst there is a significant body of literature on learner voice (Czerniawski, Garlick, Hudson & Peters, 2009; and Fielding, 2001) much of which focuses on primary and secondary phases of education, there is evidence that both further education colleges (Katsifli and Green, 2010) and higher education institutions (Campbell, Beasley, Eland and Rumpus, 2007;) have developed policies and put in place structures which facilitate student engagement.

Whilst students are undertaking education and training they are more likely to be concerned with immediate issues such as course content and assessment than issues which may or may not be a concern in the future such as credit accumulation and transfer. If there are concerns regarding these
issues then they are likely to arise in the space between institutions and providers and consequently are less likely to be captured and consequently acted on by mechanisms designed to capture student voice. However, if students are to be co-creators of the curriculum, issues of credit accumulation and credit transfer need to be considered. In particular, institutions and providers need to understand what motivates students to return to study, why some return to study sooner than others and how to support students who may wish to take a break from their studies. A recent HEFCE-sponsored project, ‘Back on Course’, noted that 23% of non-completers reapplied for university-level study within a three-year period, a significant proportion of whom returned to a different institution (Graham, 2010).

As Di Paolo & Pegg (2013) note, the (limited) research on credit transfer and student mobility does not provide details on the students who transfer credit and the volume of credit transferred. Clearly an understanding of what motivates learners to return to education and training coupled with data on volumes of credit transfer will facilitate the development of systems and practices which make credit transfer more accessible and transparent.

In the following section we identify the benefits of an effective credit-based modular system to all stakeholders.
**Project name:** Integrated Retail Sector Progression Ladders

**Lead institution:** Southampton Solent University

**Project aims**

The project aimed: “to develop an integrated set of progression ladders that provide clear pathways via credit accumulation and transfer from Level 1 through to Level 7 with highly flexible provision, allowing for professional development to progress in line with employer and learner need, including small single unit professional development units that can be accumulated for progression to higher levels”

Intended for learners in work, the project utilised the Foundation Degree (FD) in Retail held on behalf of the Retail Consortium by Manchester Metropolitan University, which was designed for online delivery but can be delivered flexibly.

**Key partners and roles**

The key partners in the project were Manchester Metropolitan University, who developed the FD Retail, Skill Smart - Sector Skills Council (prior to being disbanded) then National Skills Academy for Retail, acting as a pivot for developing “professionalisation of retail” and brokering training between employers and education providers; the Retail Steering Group (Southampton) as a source of employers willing to support training and progression amongst their staff and B&Q as the key employer; and Brockenhurst College as a delivery partner.

**Description of CATS model**

Whilst the project focused on work-based learners with regional employers and national employers headquartered in the Solent region, given that the provision is available online it can be delivered at a time and place to suit the needs of the learner and their employer.

Provision between Brockenhurst College and Southampton Solent University starts at pre-employment training and progresses through Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships on the QCF. Completion of a Level 3 qualification or appropriate APEL allows learners to accumulate HE credit via 20 credit professional development units to build to a full Foundation degree with a pathway up to degree (Level 6) and master’s (Level 7).

**Key learning outcomes**

Whilst there were some challenging academic issues, such as delivery of provision developed by other providers and administrative issues such as access to e-learning systems, one of the key learning outcomes was recognising the different timescales and speeds at which partners worked and managing them accordingly.

**Future plans**

The project team will continue to work with National Skills Academy as a member of the newly formed Retail Sector Higher Level Skills working group that has a remit aimed at ‘Developing the existing fit-for-purpose Higher Education offer to reach new markets’.

Regionally a proposal has been put to the Solent LEP promoting the Visitor Economy as an area for skills development within the Southampton and Portsmouth area. In addition, there are two models for a Professional Awards Framework which utilise the units at Levels 4, 5 and 6 from the Retail degree which are currently out for employer consultation.
3.0 Benefits of credit-based modular systems

As a number of commentators have noted, the benefits of credit-based modular systems appear to accrue to a wide range of stakeholders (Tait, 2003 and Johnson, 2004). The benefits which accrue can be grouped into three categories: learning effectiveness, flexibility and responsiveness and resource effectiveness. We focus on the potential benefits to three key stakeholders: learners, providers and employers.

“...credit-based approaches can play a crucial role in adding value, not only for learners, but for a range of stakeholders including providers, employers, community, policy-makers, planners, funders, regulators and awarding bodies” (Tait, 2003:15)

3.1 Learners

Modular-based credit systems have the potential to benefit learners by giving them the opportunity to negotiate and plan learning programmes appropriate to their needs, based on their preferred mode of learning, at a time and place that fits in with their working lives as well as other social and domestic commitments.

Learners at different stages in their learning or educational career, different stages in their life course and in different social and domestic circumstances can benefit in a variety of ways. For some learners mobility through credit transfer will be a significant benefit. The composite case studies below illustrate how credit accumulation and transfer schemes can benefit learners whose educational trajectory is not continuous and linear.

Case study - The mature returner

Molly is a mature learner who returned to work and then back into education after a lengthy period as a homemaker, supporting her partner and bringing up her children. For learners like Molly, a credit-based modular system and the ability to transfer credits enabled her to progress to higher education. “I was nervous about returning to education and being able to study in bite-sized chunks was appealing. I didn’t have to take on a whole course.”

Tell me about your early experiences of education
“I didn’t enjoy school and left as soon as I could. Without any qualifications I could only find employment as an office junior. I was going to train at work, but left when I started a family and didn’t get the chance after that.”

What was it like when you tried to get a job and return to work?
“It was hard; not having any qualifications I couldn’t even get a job as an office assistant. I didn’t have any computer skills and that really made it harder. I eventually got a job working as a school dinner supervisor and it was then that I found out about courses at a local college.”

What did you decide to study?
“I was unsure. At first; I only wanted to study something for a short amount of time – just to see if I could cope. I began with a twelve-week course that covered a range of skills, including Maths and English. I carried on building up credit, just like saving, really, until I had accumulated enough to get a certificate. At the time I needed to work for the money, so studying part-time was the only option.

What did you do after that?
“Taking the short courses really boosted my confidence and I had a certificate to prove what I had achieved after a short while. I’ve just finished an Access course and have been offered a place at my local university. I’ve been told that some of my work experience might even count towards my degree which is a real bonus.”
Case study – Changing directions

Debbie is currently studying part-time for a Master's Degree in Computing at a local college of further education. She used the mobility that credit accumulation and transfer affords to change courses as well as institutions.

Debbie looked set to follow a traditional educational trajectory and following her A-levels she started a full-time Business Studies degree in Wales. A change of circumstances meant that after her second year she had to return home to the north of England and take up full-time employment.

How did you feel about leaving university and moving into employment?

“At first I was disappointed because I was doing well on my course. But after a while when things settled down. I enjoyed the work I was doing, working in IT, but found it difficult to progress without a degree.”

Frustrated at limited opportunities without a qualification Debbie found out about courses at her local further education college. She enrolled on a Business and Computing degree course and was able to transfer credits from her business studies course. After completing the course she progressed to a part-time Master's programme in Computing and has been able to gain credit on this programme based on her work experience.

For Debbie, credit accumulation and transfer has been invaluable in terms of mobility. It not only enabled her to move geographically and between institutions but also to change her career direction and minimise the time to qualification by maximising her previous study and work experience.

As these two case studies demonstrate, learners, at different stages in the life course and in different circumstances, can benefit from credit accumulation and transfer in a variety of ways.

3.2 Institutions

While there seem to be clear and numerous potential benefits for learners, there are also benefits from the adoption of CATS for institutions. Trowler (1998) notes that credit frameworks are attractive for ‘managerialists’. For senior managers faced with an ever-declining unit of resource, credit frameworks can enable providers to deliver the curriculum in a more economic and efficient way as well as being more market responsive and opening up the potential to generate additional income.

In terms of economy and efficiency the credit-based system has the potential to deliver over and above more traditional models. As Watson (1989:5) commented: “By offering subject-based units to students on a wide variety of potential programmes modular courses can achieve significant economies, especially through common teaching...”

Used effectively, the modular system can produce significant resource savings, whilst enabling institutions and providers to maintain a broad range of course provision as well as providing a strong basis for the efficient use of human and physical resources. Effective modular systems seek to transfer resources from the development process to the learning process by making use of existing modules in the development of new programmes or shared between programmes.

The per capita cost of training, especially for learners with vocational experience, can be reduced through the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) as well as for learners seeking accreditation for prior learning (APL).
Credit accumulation and transfer schemes can also enable institutions to be more market responsive and consequently increase opportunities for income generation. Theodosia (1986) described credit accumulation and transfer schemes as: “a market mechanism to promote consumer control” with students acting as consumers. In vocational areas of study employers will be consumers and therefore will be doing the choosing. Through such schemes, institutions can make their existing offer available to employers either through flexible delivery of existing programmes, including work-based learning, or the development of bespoke modules for specific industry/business sectors or individual organisations. Institutions can map, review and plan their curriculum offer internally as well as in collaboration with local partner institutions. This is essential for progression routes into employment or further education and training.

3.3 Employers

The benefits of credit accumulation and transfer systems also accrue to employers in terms of both retention and development of existing staff as well as recruitment of new staff. With the potential for greater consumer control over the curriculum, credit accumulation and transfer schemes, as noted by Raban (1990:27): “attack the blockages and restrictive practices that, in the past, have caused ‘inelasticities’ on the supply of appropriately trained social workers [and others]...”

A credit-based modular system enables employers to develop customised programmes, composed of one or more modules or units, which may be delivered through work-based learning or other methods of flexible delivery to meet the needs of employees as well as the operational needs of the business. Such an approach can be an efficient and cost effective means of up-skilling the workforce. Employers have a clear understanding of the skills base of their organisation and of individual employees.
Project name: A collaborative curriculum project, using a common approach to credit accumulation and transfer in management provision to increase progression

Lead institution: Linking London

Key aims

- Work with partners to ensure a more flexible, coherent and progressive management offer.
- The development of IAG resources to improve the quality and clarity of information on HE management opportunities.
- Detailed credit articulation analysis and development, supported by articulation agreements, which will ensure progression opportunities to and from HE and professional qualifications.
- Develop and embed systems to recognise and accredit mature learners’ prior learning and experience through the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).
- Supported by two professional bodies, CMI and IAM, to remove barriers and improve opportunities to progress onto management level qualifications to improve access to the professions.
- Production of five to eight case studies, one from each partner.
- Production of a staff handbook, to ensure the transferability and sustainability.

Key partners and roles

The project had eleven partners drawn from universities, colleges and awarding/professional bodies. The main decision-making work of the project has been achieved through the Project Steering Group, of which all institutions were members.

Description of CATS model

Both Middlesex University and Birkbeck have existing systems in operation for credit transfer that could not realistically be incorporated into a single framework. Rather than a CATS model as such, this potential activity is underpinned by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland against which all HE awards are judged and credit awarded, and the QCF. In particular, at Middlesex, use of its work-based learning framework to integrate the requirements of professional body membership into its modules in the context of Higher Apprenticeships, has enabled the University to articulate a transferable model that will be applicable to other subject areas.

Key learning outcomes

- The project has highlighted the value of working collaboratively to kick-start processes such as APEL and dual accreditation of professional qualifications and integrating such work with the development of ongoing college/university policy increases the likelihood of these developments being sustained beyond the life of the project.
- Important that staff working with credit are clear about the specific processes involved.
- Developing a community of practice is time consuming. Establishing a register of expertise of credit practitioners for issues of professional support and development is a first step towards this and will further sustain activity.
- There is demand for developing understanding and practice in such areas as the integration of professional qualifications and APEL.

Future plans

The project has kick-started a number of developments in partner colleges and universities which will continue after the end of the project. Next steps include building a professional network of staff interested in developing and working with CATS, as a way of consolidating and building on current developments. This will be taken forward through Birkbeck and the on-going work of Linking London.
4.0 Weaknesses of the credit-based system

Credit-based modular systems are not without their critics. As early as the 1930s in the USA, Flexner asserted that whilst information could be measured in credits, education could not. He described the credit system operating in US colleges and universities at the time as: “an abominable system, destructive of disinterested and protracted intellectual effort…” (Flexner, 1930:64) He went on to remark that: “I have intimated a doubt as to the extent to which the rage for ‘credits’ in American education really represents a desire on the part of persons to be educated or an unworthy effort on the part of colleges and universities to ‘sell education’ at a profit, whenever possible.” (Flexner, 1930:150). Despite such vociferous criticism, the credit-based modular system in the USA developed in both scope and scale.

From another small-scale study on the capacity for credit in East London, one respondent commented:

“If it's such a good idea, why haven't we done it so far?” (FE manager)
Andreshak-Behrman & Storan (2004:38)

The various weaknesses and criticisms of the credit-based modular system can be categorised as: firstly, the fragmentation of knowledge; secondly that it distorts learners’ (and staff members’) motivation; thirdly, that transferability is not guaranteed; and fourthly, that it actually reduces choice. Finally, it may not be seen in an institution’s interest to encourage learners to take their learning credit elsewhere.

4.1 Fragmentation of knowledge

Credit-based modular schemes, some would argue, fragment knowledge and that far from assisting learners it is to their detriment. Small blocks of learning which are delivered over short periods of time do not allow learners sufficient time to engage and reflect on the material being covered before they are assessed. Learners are over-assessed and teaching is focused on the test or assignment rather than encouraging learners to read around their subject.

4.2 Transferability

Credit is often likened to currency (Bekhradnia, 2004), albeit a ‘knowledge currency’ which students accumulate from successfully completing a unit of learning. For the majority of learners their aim is to accumulate this currency and convert it into a credential at the end of their studies. A full-time undergraduate studying in the HE system in England would normally expect to graduate after 3 years have accumulated 360 credits and being awarded an honours degree. When learners seek to transfer credits between institutions and sometimes even within institutions they can come up against credit transfer barriers. The first barrier is getting institutions to recognise credits awarded elsewhere and the second is the recognition of pre-requisite courses.

As a number of commentators have noted (such as Schuller & Watson, 2009), in the UK there is a significant divide between the vocational and the academic, which in part is a function of early specialisation at secondary level. The consequence of this for learners is that once they are on one track it is difficult to switch and if they do switch, they may find it difficult to transfer their credit. This is also the case for adults and older learners in the workplace who may gain a variety of skills both formally and informally but whose experience and sometimes credit is not recognised by a higher education institution.
4.3 Credit-based modular schemes

A number of leading experts (Bridges 2010) have identified issues around credit schemes. The extent to which these issues give cause for concern will depend on the policies and practices of individual institutions and their modular or academic frameworks. The issues include: condonement and compensation of module failure, setting aside or discounting poor performance in specific modules; and finally, the reuse and currency of credit.

It could be argued that lack of consistency across the sector is a weakness and that students may be either advantaged or disadvantaged depending on the policy of their institution or the institution to which they are seeking admission.
**Project name: FE to HE:** Black Country University Technical College (BCUTC) Higher Level Engineering Skills Credit Transfer Pilot

**Lead institution:** Walsall College

**Key aims**

- Focussing partners’ attention on the potential of the QCF and CATS for work that would ensure that more UTC learners are able to enter HE.
- Developing a qualification that can potentially provide assurance to HE institutions of ex-UTC learners’ capabilities, provide confidence to those learners and allow for accelerated learning in HE.
- Establishing a wider group of engineering UTC partners to focus on the specific nature of the UTC engineering curriculum.
- Engaging with engineering bodies concerned with employability and, in particular, technician level competencies and how these relate to progression (HE) paths.
- Exploration of institutional themes of approach to CATS and to curricula changes that will now grow in significance to the learner offer – for example, cost/value analyses in HE, public performance measure considerations at Key Stages 4 and 5, productivity in the engineering sector.

**Key partners and roles**

Walsall College is the key education sponsor to the BCUTC and also accommodates the Awarding Organisation Accredited Skills for Industry (ASFI). The college continues to provide substantial governance support to both ASFI and BCUTC, plus a fully supported operating infrastructure to ASFI, plus curriculum expertise on the development of the qualification. The University of Wolverhampton (UoW) is the BCUTC’s main HE sponsor and has representation on the BCUTC Governing Body. The UoW engineering lead provided input to the design of the qualification. BCUTC provided the frontline UTC experience and advice of their engineering leads on what the qualification should potentially contain and how it might be deployed. Accredited Skills for Industry’s (ASFI’s) role continues to be to consult with partners, to draft the qualification, to steer the investment through the changing environment and to try to maximise the return by adapting the CATS theme to its emerging audience and market.

**CATS model**

The pilot proposed a model that would take some existing units of learning at Level 3, either already being delivered at the BCUTC or easily delivered as additions, explore how these related to the undergraduate engineering curriculum, add in some Level 4 learning as identified by UoW and then agree this as a recognised pathway between the BCUTC and UoW and/or accredit this combination of units as a formal qualification in the QCF. The principle was that this route/qualification would provide assurance to UoW (and other HE institutions) of the learner’s clear practical competence in certain elements of the engineering undergraduate year and thereby provide opportunities in that year for accelerated or complementary learning. Ultimately, this would produce stronger graduates, but in the shorter term would provide confidence for more BCUTC learners to take the HE route.

**Future plans**

In addition to providing a workable qualification/pathway that will support the work of the engineering UTCs, the project will also demonstrate the real potential for interested parties to directly influence qualification design; this is a key issue for vocational qualifications and particularly for Apprenticeships.
5.0 Overcoming barriers and addressing weaknesses

5.1 Introduction
Most of the barriers or challenges that learners encounter relate to credit transfer rather than credit accumulation. In educational systems where credit systems are in place there may be varying degrees of institutional resistance; however, the mere adoption of a credit accumulation and transfer system cannot of itself ensure change. At its very simplest all the credit system can do is assign a value to blocks of learning so that progress to a qualification can be measured. We consider the other necessary preconditions to implement a successful credit accumulation and transfer scheme.

5.2 Information advice and guidance
The provision of accessible information advice and guidance is essential for learners not only at points of transition, when they may transfer between sectors or institutions, but also within institutions when they may, for example, be faced with module choices on degree level programmes. Given the complexities of credit accumulation and transfer it is important that academic and professional staff themselves have a clear understanding of credit accumulation and transfer within their own context and setting. Clarity of communication is vital and therefore any materials produced for learners need to be jargon free and accessible.

5.3 Support at ‘home’ and ‘host’ institution
As we have noted, some learners may use the credit accumulation and transfer scheme to enable them to take one or more modules, perhaps over the period of a semester or academic year, at another ‘host’ institution, with the intention of returning to their ‘home’ institution to complete their programme of study. In Europe this type of mobility is facilitated by the Erasmus scheme. However, if learners are to derive the maximum benefit from such mobility they need to be adequately supported and prepared at their ‘home’ institution as well as being supported and received at the ‘host’ institution. One of the most significant barriers to this type of mobility is the ability of students to undertake their study in a foreign language.

5.4 Academic resistance and concerns
Despite the widespread implementation of credit-based modular systems a recent study reported on the concerns raised by academic and to a lesser extent professional support staff. Whilst only a small minority believed that modularisation, credit accumulation and transfer should be resisted, a number did express concerns about operational aspects of the system. For faculties and departments facing a reduction in resources and or encountering difficulties recruiting learners, modularisation is much welcomed.

Academic staff who adopted a traditionalist educational ideology saw themselves as custodians of a cultural and disciplinary heritage. Their concerns over modularisation were that knowledge was fragmented and that consequently programmes lack coherence. Academic concerns centred on the fragmentation of knowledge and the lack of coherence that a modular system allows, viewing APL and similar developments as a threat to intellectual pursuits. However this was countered by the majority of ‘progressive’ staff who saw the role of education as being to provide learners with transferable skills which were vocationally relevant. Such academics saw the value of experiential learning and the importance of learners engaging and planning their own learning.

In most cases to obtain a qualification students must take a certain number of credits in a number of designated subjects or areas and there is a great deal of choice of what can ‘count’ towards each requirement; however, this choice is not limitless. Similarly, within the area of student’s specialisation there is also usually a choice of electives, and these are linked to a set of core requirements where
students have some choice but within limits that retain programmatic coherence. The notion that programmes lack coherence because they are formed from a ‘pick-a-mix’ of classes and credits is quite simply a fallacy.

We would argue that the modular system provides curriculum flexibility and the potential for students to make choices about their subject studies within a framework of rules and regulations which are more or less restrictive. Short-term assessment goals, combined with regular feedback and re-sit opportunities are important in terms of building confidence and motivating learners. On the issue of free choice or elective modules or units, this is not antithetical to academic standards; neither does it undermine disciplinary integrity when appropriate levels of information, advice, guidance and regulatory activity are in place.

5.5 Academic calendars
Whilst there may be a degree of synchronisation of academic calendars within Europe and North America, this is not necessarily the case in other educational jurisdictions. However, this may only be problematic when learners undertake a full year of academic study and even the host institutions may operate a second (semester 2 or semester B entry). Whilst in some cases this may extend or lengthen the time to qualification there will be other cases where time to qualification can be reduced.

5.6 Developing a learning relationship
As noted previously, one potential concern to institutions is the ability of learners to leave the institution, such as after completing the first year of a two-year course, take their credit and complete their study elsewhere. As Walsh & Johnson (2001:2) note, it is not in the interests of an institution to promote learner mobility. Where there is a clear progression pathway within the institution the provider will, as Pine et al (2000:53) note, need to develop:

“a learning relationship...collaborating to meet the consumer’s needs over time.”

As a mechanism, a credit-based system can contribute to retention, by allowing learners who take a break from their studies to return to their former institution and complete their course.
Project name: Simplifying Leadership & Management Progression and Development

Lead institution: HEART Partnership

Key aims

- Develop clear and transparent progression agreements detailing pathways through the leadership and management award portfolios from L3-7 of at least ILM and CMI into a range of HE providers.
- Identify, agree and articulate credit transfer arrangements from QCF awards to HEQF awards.
- Information on progression and credit transfer options communicated to all ILM and CMI providers in West Yorkshire.

Key partners and roles

Key partners involved in the development of the progression and credit transfer agreements are:

Bradford College, Chartered Management Institute (CMI), Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM), Kirklees College, Leeds City College, Leeds College of Building, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds Trinity University, University of Huddersfield, University of Leeds (Lifelong Learning Centre), Wakefield College. A steering group was established comprising representatives from CMI, ILM and HEART partners.

CATS model

Seven of the nine partners approved the model in principle subject to approval from internal quality and curriculum committees. The two partners not entering into the common baseline credit agreement remained outside for two different reasons. One was not permitted to transfer credit by the awarding body for the receiving qualification whilst the other advised that the mapping process had been thorough and that this suggested volumes of credit proposed could not be justified.

For the seven partners agreeing to the common credit agreement, the model allows no credit transfer for CMI/ILM ‘awards’, the small volume of credit required to obtain an award (7 credits) being insufficient to justify transfer. CMI/ILM certificates typically comprise 13 credits. However the common baseline credit model agreed guarantees 20 credits transfer, whilst CMI/ILM Diplomas attract a minimum of 40 credits transfer. All partners can, if their mapping process assures higher levels of credit match, offer higher volumes. In the case of two partners this has resulted in 60 credit transfer for CMI L7 Diplomas onto masters courses; the same volume could not be assured for ILM due to the lack of core units.

Key learning outcomes

- Complexity of mapping units of learning from qualifications on the QCF against the more substantial modules on the HEQF.
- Flexibility in approaches to and communications with each individual institution is required.
- Recognise that agreements are reached between people and not between businesses/institutions. The need to discover the ‘gatekeepers’ early is essential to achieving successful progression and credit transfer.
- Progression from professional qualifications and offering credit transfer may not always be seen as a priority for most institutions in the HE system.
- There are genuine practical reasons, such as loss of income, for institutions to resist offering credit transfer.
- It is essential to devise a system for presenting the progression available when dealing with a large number of sending and receiving awards.

Future plans

Key to all future plans is the need to ensure that the database is maintained in an accurate state, paying regular attention to changes in curriculum by CMI/ILM and ensuring partners are still able to offer the progression and credit transfer agreed. The key contacts within CMI and ILM are in place, such that all developments will be communicated to HEART for dissemination to partners.

Steps are already being taken by some partners to explore expansion of the progression routes available, e.g. two partners currently offering progression to L7 are looking to adjust their L4-6 provision to enable part-time progression at these levels. One of these two is also intending to explore the Edexcel management awards to offer progression and potentially credit transfer from these qualifications.
Lead institution: North East Surrey College of Technology (NESCOT)

Key aims

- Develop a sustainable and flexible vocational progression route for learners from a successful and expanding programme onto a higher level HE programme underpinned by a robust credit transfer arrangement.
- Test the principle and viability of the recognition and transfer of units from an externally-validated professional body onto an HE programme.
- Develop flexible and embedded FE to HE progression routes for learners who are in employment or who own small enterprises.
- Enhance the employability of AAT graduates.
- Provide multiple pathways into HE and multiple exit points that reflect the needs of employers.

Key partners and roles

AAT (Awarding Body and Member of the Steering Group); SAP - (accounting/enterprise software company and input into course design/certifications); eResourcing (specialist recruitment company - SAP for the industry); members of Industrial Forum: University of Surrey (validating partner); Infuseit Ltd (employer and member of the Employer Forum); Williams-McKinley Ltd (recruitment specialist to the accounting industry, labour market analyst and member of the Employer Forum); Mak Sharma (BCU and Partner – SAP University Alliance)

CATS model

Pathway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AAT</th>
<th>FDSc</th>
<th>BSc</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>SAP</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDSc</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDSc</td>
<td>AAT</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAT</td>
<td>Cert HE</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Key learning outcomes

- Vendors are willing to work closely with education providers to embed industry qualifications into HE programmes.
- Industry willing to engage in curriculum work if they believe that programme development is relevant to their needs.
- Professional bodies will work collaboratively and imaginatively with FE providers of HE in order to support student progression and employability.
- There is a model of higher education progression that works with professional bodies, industry and employers that makes imaginative and flexible use of credit accumulation and transfer principles.

Future plans

The key legacy of this programme will be an attractive, industry-led programme that increases the flexibility of the HE offer for students who may access higher education via a wide range of different pathways.
6.0 Evaluation of the pilot projects

As noted in the introduction the rationale for funding of this suite of pilot projects came from the consultation on *New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills Reform Plan* (BIS: 2011), which emphasised the need to establish clearer progression routes in to higher education for learners undertaking apprenticeships, vocational and professional qualifications. The call for proposals sought to establish a number of pilot projects which would act as policy demonstrators to accomplish this via a common approach to credit.

The call sought to fund between 6 and 10 projects up to £80,000 per project for the 2012/2013 financial year. Initially seven project strands were funded; however, one strand did not receive the second round of funding. Therefore, only the six completed strands of activity are covered in this evaluation.

As this is a programme evaluation, the report takes a high level approach and therefore does not seek to provide an evaluative stance on any individual project. Rather, the collective outcomes from the pilots are examined to provide the evaluation with recommendations coming from the whole programme of activity. Recommendations from the evaluation are reported below and where appropriate incorporated into the proposals section at the end of the report.

The evaluation criteria were initially developed from the original call for proposal document, along with discussions with the Association of Colleges. These themes were to provide the basis of the evaluation judgement criteria and were as follows:

- Scalability and/or transferability
- Communities of practice
- Partnership working
- New pathway development (good practice)
- Innovation
- Sustainability and/or embedded-ness
- Ongoing capture of quantitative and learner data
- Ongoing capture of tacit learning and learning outcomes

6.1 Methodology

The evaluation adopted a qualitative approach and drew on primary data: eight key informant interviews and a focus group; and secondary data in the form of reports and documents produced by the pilot projects.

This has included a large number of documents from each pilot strand, as well as eight key expert interviews, and a one-and-a-half-hour-long focus group. In total, 93 documents from the pilot projects were used in the evaluation analysis. The interviews were conducted over the phone, and were recorded. The documentary evidence and interview transcriptions were analysed with the aid of the computer software programme NVivo. The codes used reflected the evaluation matrix themes developed in conjunction with consultation with AoC early on in the evaluation phase. The main aim of these themes was not only to capture data relevant for the programme evaluation, but to also capture ongoing and tacit knowledge coming from the projects.

It must also be noted that all interviewees and participants were given the opportunity to go ‘off the record’ during the interviews if they wanted to discuss sensitive or confidential matters. None chose to do this. To preserve anonymity, the interviewees were also given a code and individual comments appear in this report according to these codes.
6.2 Evaluation criteria

The evaluation criteria were initially developed from the original call for proposal document, along with discussions with AoC. These themes were to provide the basis of the evaluation judgement criteria and were as follows:

- Scalability, and/or transferability
- Communities of practice
- Partnership working
- New Pathway Development (good practice)
- Innovation
- Sustainability and/or embedded-ness
- Ongoing capture of quantitative and learner data
- Ongoing Capture of tacit learning and learning outcomes

However, when analysing the data it was clear that a number of other issues emerged, which necessitated further themes to be discussed. These were:

- Timescales and work plans
- Achievements and benefits realisation

6.3 Timescales and work plans

The pilot projects were provided with clearly defined objectives and timescales at the outset and were well managed and supported throughout by the Association of Colleges. Overall, the programme was delivered to the initial timescales and work plans, with the exception of one of the projects. There were some issues, however, with the project start dates of July 2012, as this falls between term times and many personnel in the education sector are away during August. This caused delays in the start time for some projects, and one interviewee suggested that an earlier or a later start date would have been more appropriate for these reasons.

Although there were challenges faced by all projects, and one pilot did not finalise delivery until some months after they intended, the amount of time was not seen to be the cause of these difficulties.

Recommendation:

- Future funding streams need to consider the rigidity of FE and HE term times to maximise the timescales set for projects.

6.2 Partnership working and collaborative relationships

Partnership working and building collaborative relationships was a key part of all the pilot projects, and these partnerships were multifaceted as they bridged FE, HE, professional bodies and employers. The pilot projects drew on existing, well established partnerships. However, all projects contained a strong element of new-partner establishment. All the projects required intensive partnership working, which, for the most part, was extremely successful. All the projects drew on existing partnerships which were strengthened throughout the project life span; however, alongside this many new partnerships were made. Through the expert interviews, it was suggested by all the projects that a level of partnership working will continue to exist beyond the projects’ funded life spans.
In total the programme involved:

- 12 higher education institutions
- 17 further education colleges
- Over 20 professional bodies, employers and other partners

Despite the overall success of this element of all the pilot projects, there were some challenges to the partnership work. One project had their validating HEI partner withdraw from the work very late in the day; another project suffered from the Government’s decision to axe the Sector Skills Councils. Both managed these mishaps appropriately – although in one case this caused significant delays in the project’s delivery.

### 6.3 Development of a community of practice

“I think that this approach was very good and AoC managed this aspect very well.”

*Interviewee E*

All pilot projects had this element embedded within them at the instigation of the funders, and each project was required to complete four Community of Practice (CoP) forms over the project’s lifespan (one less than the original five which were planned).

The project leads came together for regular meetings during the projects and used these to report problems/challenges, and successes/good practice. All projects found this to be an extremely useful element to the work. In fact, more than one interviewee suggested that more face-to-face meetings would have been useful. Having helped to foster these communities of practice across the pilot projects, it is hoped that some of these relationships will be maintained and the community that was created will continue in some form.

### 6.4 Peer evaluation

Two of the pilot projects further strengthened their relationship and the community of practice by undertaking a formative peer evaluation process. They started a Dropbox area online for each project, which all parties found extremely useful and helped to manage and clarify particular issues and final outcomes. The peer evaluation was aided by the fact that the organisations are geographically close; however, given the importance of the online work here, geography should not be a barrier to this type of evaluation.

**Recommendations:**

- This community of practice, now established, should be maintained, as there is genuine interest from those who were involved. This could be done via online social media, and Linking London has set up a [Linking London Credit Directory and Register of Expertise](#) with a LinkedIn group, which could be used as a template for a national group.
- The Community of Practice element should be mobilised in future funded projects.
- Peer-to-peer evaluations should be considered in future funded projects.

### 6.5 New Pathways Development (Good Practice)

The rationale behind all the pilot projects was the establishment of new CATS pathways in various subject areas. Here, all pilots were successful (pending NESCOT’s delivery of their pathway in September 2014), and when taken as a whole, the new activity in this area represents a significant step forward for CAT schemes and progression opportunities.
Greenwich New Pathways for people in work – Building on Competence
This project developed CATS procedures to promote progression between part-time Level 3 and non-prescribed HE and the Applied Professional Studies programme to develop a more unified and navigable higher vocational education offer for people in work clearly articulated with progression to honour’s and master’s degrees and higher professional qualifications.

Heart New Pathways in Leadership and Management
This project developed clear and transparent progression agreements detailing pathways through the leadership and management award portfolios from Level 3 to Level 7. In total 220 progression options with 123 carrying credit transfers have been developed, utilising the HEART progression agreement framework.

Linking London New Pathways in Leadership and Management
This project developed new pathways by the creation of a number of Articulation Agreements, which have opened up the management curriculum at Middlesex University and Birkbeck, University of London to courses at City and Islington College and Hillcroft College, in particular, and courses in Information Technology at Westminster Kingsway College to relevant courses in Information Technology and Management at Birkbeck.

NESCOT New Pathway for Accountancy and Business Enterprise Technology
This project developed a viable and attractive programme underpinned by the recognition and transfer of credit that has progressed through internal validation with input from employers. However, because of the decision of the University of Surrey to withdraw from all partnership work at a very late stage, the programme has yet to be validated. However, validation is likely to occur – potentially by the University of Kingston and will be running with the first cohort in September 2014.

Southampton Solent New Pathways in Retail
This project developed an integrated set of progression ladders that provide clear pathways via credit accumulation and transfer from Level 1 through to Level 7 with highly flexible provision, allowing for professional development to progress in line with employer and learner need, including small single unit professional development units that can be accumulated for progression to higher levels. Intended for learners in work, we utilised the Foundation Degree in Retail held on behalf of the Retail Consortium by Manchester Metropolitan University as the basis, which is designed for on online delivery but can be delivered flexibly – fully online or blended or anything in-between.

Walsall College New Pathways in Engineering Skills
This project proposed that in order to ensure true portability of credit, a number of Level 3 projects that have been developed specifically for the University Technical College be accredited through Walsall College’s Awarding Organisation – Accredited Skills for Industry (ASFI) at Level 4. However, the project’s lifespan has coincided with an unprecedented period of education policy changes that are continuing to have a dynamic impact on the curricula at all Key Stages as well as in FE and HE. It has been necessary to steer work through these upheavals and to be prepared to adapt and change in order to gain, as far as possible, useful returns on the investment. Given this evolving landscape, the project’s key achievements to date against its aims have been:

- The focussing of partners’ attention on the potential of the QCF and CATS for work that would ensure that more UTC learners are able to enter HE.
- The drafting of a qualification that can potentially provide assurance to HE institutions of ex-UTC learners’ capabilities, provide confidence to those learners (since it would prove capacity to work...
at Level 4), and allow for accelerated learning in HE.

- The beginnings of the drawing in of a wider group of engineering UTC partners to focus on the specific nature of the UTC engineering curriculum, which has become important because as the broad education offer diversifies (UTCs, Studio Schools, FE providers recruiting Key Stage 3 learners) the risk remains inconsistency of skills in the sector.

- The drawing in of engineering bodies concerned with employability and, in particular, technician level competencies and how these relate to progression (HE) paths.

6.8 Achievements and benefits realisation

6.8.1 Co-operation between natural competitors

More than one pilot spoke of how the external funding enabled a spirit of co-operation where there was normally competition between college partners. As college catchment areas were alongside each other (and sometimes overlapped), this could have resulted in competition; however, interviewees reported that they worked well together and looked at market segmentation, rather than competition. It was suggested that it takes projects like these with outside funding to encourage these working practices.

8.8.2 Institutional cultural changes

Some of the interviewees commented on how the CATS pilots helped their institutions to enact necessary and useful culture changes in the way that they work. These cultural changes within the institutions range from a better understanding of CATS, systems for faster validation of courses, a better understanding of APEL processes, and an increased sharing of knowledge within institutions.

6.9 Scalability and/or transferability

While all projects said that they could easily be scalable and or transferable to other sectors, only a few instances of more concrete plans to do so were found. As the pilot projects are only recently completed (with one still to deliver in September 2014), it may well be too early for an evaluation into this criteria. However, the potential for scalability and transferability for each of the projects is mapped out below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Pilot offer</th>
<th>Scalable</th>
<th>Transferable</th>
<th>Likelihood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solent</td>
<td>Retail, local/regional</td>
<td>National retail with MMU – talks happening. Follow-up work with the National Skills Academy underway.</td>
<td>To hospitality and cruise industry.</td>
<td>National rollout has great potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESCOT</td>
<td>AAT, regional/local</td>
<td>National with AAT.</td>
<td>To Business Studies and IT</td>
<td>National establishment with AAT has potential, but may be reliant on additional resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking London</td>
<td>5 smaller projects in partner colleges centred on management pathways and academic recognition of professional qualifications.</td>
<td>Strong intention to build a professional network of those interested in developing CATS – this would become national.</td>
<td>Transferable to other regions – this will be championed post-project. Could be transferred to other sectors – but no indication from the project.</td>
<td>Linkedin group will be established, and a continued relationship with the HEART project has been established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenwich</td>
<td>Prospectus developed for SE London and NW Kent which includes clear outline of agreed CATS procedures.</td>
<td>Prospectus easily scalable nationally.</td>
<td>Championing the prospectus to other regions underway. Could be transferred to other sectors - but no indication from the project.</td>
<td>Already plans to champion the prospectus to roll out in other regions. Research paper planned to help FE and HE engage with employers (additional funding may be required).</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEART</td>
<td>Progression agreements in Leadership and Management with ILM and CMI in West Yorkshire and across the North of England.</td>
<td>Model scalable nationally.</td>
<td>Interest and enquiries made from the North West, the North East and Buckinghamshire. Date for a colloquium on CATS established to examine potential in other curriculum areas.</td>
<td>Working with CMI and ILM to review national potential (additional funding may be required).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walsall</td>
<td>Establishing CATS models for Engineering to HE progression and working with UTC learners.</td>
<td>With the opening of more Engineering UTCs (through September 2015) this will be scalable nationally.</td>
<td>Model of working with UTCs could be useful for other regions and/or sectors.</td>
<td>Working with the New Engineering Foundation (NEF) increases the possibility of scalability.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendations:**

- Follow-up conversations with projects in 6, 12 and 18 months' time to further assess if these plans for scalability and transferability have been achieved.

- The required documentation from the pilot projects often conflated scalability, transferability (and even sustainability and embeddedness). For future funded projects these should be more clearly defined and treated separately to enable adequate assessment of each of these.

### 6.10 Innovation

This element of the evaluation takes innovation in its broadest sense. While there have been previous historical examples of CATS agreements, at an institutional level, regional level and even subject area level, the introduction of many of these new pathways represent a significant innovation in the offer to learners. In addition to this, the projects often forced a challenge to institutional thinking and status quo.

### 6.11 Sustainability and/or embedded-ness

Overall, it is clear that all pilots have good intentions in terms of the sustainability of the new programmes and pathways set-up – with one pilot pointing out that new (permanent) staff posts have been created to deliver the new courses, surely a strong sign of embedded-ness within the institution and a clear indicator that this activity will be sustained post-project.

**Recommendations:**

- Follow-up conversations with projects in 6, 12 and 18 months' time to further assess if these plans for sustainability have been achieved.

- The required documentation from the pilot projects often conflated sustainability, expansion...
and future opportunities, (and even scalability and transferability). For future funded projects these should be more clearly defined and treated separately to separate out these potential impacts and outcomes.

6.12 Learner outcomes (tracking systems)

While it may well be too early in the life cycle of these pilot projects to gather any learner data aside from the initial cohorts, we asked each project about their plans to track these learners and to collect learner data with an aim to examine the numbers, demographics and destination of these learners. While all the interviewees understood the importance of this element of data gathering, none of the projects specifically instituted any learner data tracking mechanisms. Instead they are relying on the routine collection of learner data in the HEIs and partner FECs.

**Recommendation:**

- Future funded projects should develop more robust criteria for the tracking of learner data coming from the pilots. Ultimately the success of these kinds of projects can only be measured via learner data.

6.13 Conclusions

Overall, this suite of pilot projects has firmly established a number of new pathways and goes a long way to the addressing the call in *New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills Reform Plan* (BIS: 2011), which emphasised the need to establish clearer progression routes in to higher education (HE) from apprenticeships, vocational and professional qualifications.

The ambitions for these pilot projects – that they assist the stimulation of innovative, robust and scalable models of credit transfer and progression; build on sectoral, geographical or other appropriate collaborative relationships; create new pathways and/or developing, extending and improving existing good practice in the FE and HE sectors; improve the portability of credits and creation of smoother, more easily comprehensible progression routes; and stimulate innovation in qualification design and learning delivery – has clearly been achieved across the programme of activity.

Breaking this down – the innovations in the establishment of the new pathways across subject area and across the country is clear, with collaborative relationships and partnership working being a key component of all the pilots. All pilots created new pathways thereby extending the good practice in this area found in HE and FE, and certainly all pilots have led to the creation of smoother progression routes. In addition, the database and prospectus developed by two of the project, alongside the marketing materials of the others have contributed to progression routes becoming more transparent and east to comprehend by learners and deliverers alike.

It is clear then that the aims set out in the initial call for funding have been achieved, and that these pilots have been successful. As such, more investment should be made into the transferability and sustainability of these new pathways, as well as investment in further CATS projects. The learning developed through the delivery of these pilots could easily be harnessed – with the existing projects acting as mentors to a new suite of activity.
Unlocking learning and developing evidence-informed policy and practice

In this section we set out some considerations on unlocking learning from the pilot projects and developing or contributing to evidence-informed policy and practice. Whilst policy transfer and policy borrowing can be seductive, there is a growing body of evidence to demonstrate that such transfers often fail or fail to deliver the intended outcomes.

The past two decades have seen a significant increase in the volume of policy transfer or lesson learning. Whilst the process of policy transfer is not new, the occurrence of transfer or lesson-learning has increased over the past two decades. This in part may be due to technological advances which make it easier and faster for policy makers, especially from different educational jurisdictions, to communicate.

In the field of education, proponents of credit accumulation and transfer systems often cite the experience of educational systems with mature and developed credit-based provision to justify implementation in the English context. The credit system in the United States is often cited as an example where learners are able to transfer credit within the higher education system to enable progression from a community college to a university. However, as in England and the rest of the UK, other educational jurisdictions do not routinely collect robust data on credit transfer. Whilst in the United States there is certainly a greater degree of articulation and transfer between community colleges and four year degree institutions, much of the transfer is at a local or regional level, and based on agreements between institutions. This reality was recognised by the funders when drawing up the specification for the pilot projects that developments should be local, based on local needs and local partnerships. Even where sector or professional bodies, with the potential for national coverage were involved it was recognised that for credit transfer arrangements to be successful they would need to be developed between ‘local’ providers.

There are a number of reasons why policy transfer fails. Drawing on Dolowich and Marsh (2000) these can be categorised as:

- Uninformed transfer – where there is insufficient information and understanding about policy or institution and how it operates.
- Incomplete transfer – some elements that made policy/structure success originating country/region have not been transferred.
- Inappropriate transfer – insufficient information of context, social political and economic ideology.

There is often an assumption, implicit or explicit, that the policy being transferred will be implemented successfully. However there is evidence that this is not necessarily the case and that such transfers often result in policy failure.

Not surprisingly they observe that: “if a government searches hurriedly for a solution to an urgent problem, it is more likely that there will be transfer, because the need for a “solution” is imperative, but less likely that the transfer will be successful, because limited time will inevitably lead to a limited search for models, and thus probably to flawed transfer.”

Similarly, if the search for a policy involves not only politicians and bureaucrats but also interest groups that represent those people whom a policy would affect, then there may well be fewer implementation problems once the policy is transferred.
Dolowich and Marsh (2000) go on to identify four varying degrees of transfer which can be characterised as:

- **Copying** – where there is a direct and complete transfer.
- **Emulating** – where the ideas behind the programme or initiative are transferred.
- **Combination** – a mixture of both ideas behind the policy as well as varying degrees of the policy and practice itself.
- **Inspiration** – where existing policy or policy demonstrators are a catalyst for policy change but the end result does not draw upon original policy and practice.

What is clear from the pilot projects is that each one of them was rooted in local needs and built on an existing partnership with staff that had a detailed knowledge and appreciation of credit accumulation and transfer systems and an understanding of the local context and culture of the providers and organisations with whom they were working. Clearly scaling up within the existing partnership of the pilot projects or transferring to a new partnership will need to recognise the potential for incomplete policy transfer and that simply copying may not be the most effective form of transfer in their context. We would suggest that where there is successful transfer it is likely to be a combination of both ideas behind the policy as well as varying degrees of the policy and practice itself.
8.0 Sustainability and embedding

“Too many promising innovations disappear when project funding ends. As a result, interest in the problem of sustainability has increased markedly in recent years.” (Adelman and Taylor, 2003:1)

Moving from the margins to the mainstream is often a long and complex process. Embedding and sustaining activities beyond the project-funded phase requires institutional support to develop appropriate systems and structures.

8.1 Sustainability

Sustainability is a complex multi-dimensional phenomenon with different and contested definitions, according to the domain. In this section we consider organisational sustainability in a constantly changing policy landscape and a challenging economic environment. As Putnik (2009) has commented, since older “classic” strategies such as productivity, leaness, agility and intelligence are now considered ineffective in such environments, research, management and policymaking communities have embraced sustainability as a possible solution.

Moving from the margins to the mainstream is often a long and complex process. It frequently goes through a cycle, starting with enthusiasts (often involved in project work), followed by limited adoption and then by the development of institutional systems that aim to mainstream good practice. Thus without effective institutional support and monitoring, many development activities are unlikely to have the intended impact.

Institutions and partnerships do not operate in isolation; they are subject to numerous interactions both within and across their boundaries. The CATS pilot projects, drawing on the typology developed by Emery and Trist (1965), are now in a “turbulent field.” The turbulent field is one of high complexity and high dynamism where changes and variations in the external environment lead to significant organisational uncertainty. The Black Country UTC is one example where such uncertainty has impacted on the ability to meet project objectives within the original timescales. In some cases this turbulent external environment can become the impetus for more visionary organising and planning (Edwards, 2009).

Institutions and individuals working within them are faced with the challenge of retaining a coherent identity and stability whilst simultaneously embracing radical change and transforming in response to changes in the external environment (Emery, 2000). Based on experience with other funded projects, the programme evaluation and engagement with CATS pilot project staff, we suggest that a twin-track approach to sustainability should be considered by both individual pilot sites and the funder.

Firstly, alternative and additional sources of continuity funding should be sought by both the individual pilot sites to sustain and embed their own work and by the commissioning funder to encourage transfer and further system wide adoption and development. In some circumstances, if this work is seen as contributing to widening participation and fair access to the professions, there may be a case for including such activity in an institution’s Access Agreement with the possibility of unlocking funding.
8.2 Embedding

Based on the findings from the evaluation and recent reports (February, 2014) from three of the six pilot projects, embedding project activities within host and partner institutions has yet to be realised.

Some of the activities undertaken by the pilot projects, such as information advice and guidance (IAG), could be embedded within other activities or service areas of host and partner institutions. Embedding within another activity may be more appropriate and easier than mainstreaming which more often than not entails a change in working practices and, consequently, resources, both human and financial.

Mainstreaming activities is more challenging, particularly when working with academic schools and faculties in HE, since it entails a change in working practices and ultimately some cost, which could, as noted above, be met from Access Agreement funding. If such services are not organised and provided centrally then staff in academic departments should be given recognition in terms of workload for undertaking such activity.

The contribution of learned and professional societies or professional bodies was key to the success of some of the pilot projects. Whilst such bodies may not be a source of large scale funding, they will have an interest in promoting their profession and serving their members. In developing CAT schemes, practitioners should be mindful of the importance of professional accreditation to degree programmes and the role that professional bodies may play in supporting and promoting such schemes within an institution.

One of the pilot projects worked closely with the Association of Accounting Technicians and reported that as a professional body the AAT were supportive of the pilot project and the opportunity for AAT members to use their professional qualification to transfer credit towards a degree at Kingston University. Whilst the aim of the pilot projects was to open up progression pathways this particular scheme also demonstrated the importance of professional bodies in CAT schemes.

8.3 Scalability and transferability

Whilst the potential for scalability and transferability was recognised by the evaluation and reported by the projects themselves, to date there has not been any such activity and to date only two of the pilot projects (Linking London and Greenwich) have recorded student throughput from their projects. The appetite for transfer has been demonstrated by one of the pilot project, Linking London. One of the partner institutions, Westminster Kingsway College, has already begun to discuss opportunities for developing articulation agreements with Middlesex University in courses other than management. Birkbeck have also indicated a desire to widen their range of articulation agreements to include Information Technology with Management courses. Scalability and transferability within this particular partnership will be facilitated by resources produced during the pilot-funded phase such as the staff handbook, A Guide to Understanding and Using Credit and Credit Directory and Register of Expertise. However, in order for such transfer to be realised, appropriate human and financial resources will need to be identified.

Whilst such issues such as scalability and transferability need to be considered and attended to, in the absence of progression and transfer it will be more challenging to convince institutions who have not participated in the pilot projects to adopt the model in their own context.
Partnership working

In considering partnership working we found it helpful to draw on the five principles identified by Billett, Ovens, Clemans and Seddon (2007) guiding partnership working:

- Shared purpose and goals
- Relations with partners
- Capacities for partnership work
- Partnership governance and leadership
- Trust and trustworthiness

9.1 Shared purpose and goals

The success of the pilot projects as outlined in Section 6 is due in no small part to the clear articulation of the project aims, but also that this purpose and goals were communicated and shared by all of the individual project staff and project partners. Having a shared purpose and shared goals results in practical benefits for the partners in terms of cost, quality, impact and innovation. Practical benefits, for example, might include the use of common or shared training or stakeholder guides, evaluation and monitoring (as demonstrated by two pilot projects) and, in the future, the opportunity for shared development and training sessions.

Training and staff development is critical to sustaining and embedding such activity. Given the small number of staff likely to be engaged in such activity at individual institutions, the need for joint training or training across a partnership becomes paramount. Whilst many of the staff engaged in such activity may be graduates with professional qualifications, there may be some value in exploring CPD accreditation for staff development and training courses.

The partnerships developed by the demonstrator sites for the pilot project may also lead to collaboration in other areas of mutual interest, thereby extending their reach beyond what they might be able to do alone.

9.2 Relations with partners

As noted previously, many of the lead partners built on existing partnerships to deliver the demonstrator projects. From both the evaluation and project meetings it was apparent that many of the individual projects were based on existing and mature partnerships. However, there were instances of conflict and tension within individual partnerships. The sign of a healthy and mature partnership is one where such conflicts and tensions are recognised and managed. One of the challenges of managing such a partnership – and a CAT scheme – is the financial impact of learners moving between institutions. A state of equilibrium is unlikely and consequently some institutions will be net losers whilst others will make a net gain.

9.3 Partnership governance and leadership

As noted in Section 6, the Association of Colleges provided effective and efficient project management support to the individual projects. Regular monitoring ensured that projects delivered against agreed objectives and when, in one instance they were unable to do so, it was agreed that the pilot project would not progress to the second phase. Flexibility and being open to trying different approaches were key to this success. In the case of another pilot project which was unable to deliver to the original timescales due to external factors beyond their control, the timeframe was adjusted
accordingly. In terms of reporting, pilot projects often confused and conflated transferability with scalability, embeddedness and sustainability. Developing agreed definitions for these concepts early on in the project may have helped clarify the situation.

9.4 Capacity for partnership working

The staff working on the pilot projects shared a passion and commitment to developing and delivering a system that would meet the needs of the stakeholder groups they were working with. Most of the staff had extensive experience of partnership work, such as through managing or taking a lead role in Aimhigher Partnerships or Lifelong Learning Networks.

One of the challenges which all project managers will face is how to retain and continue work with staff and partners at the end of the project-funded phase. A number of projects have reported that some momentum has been lost as staff leave at the end of this phase. Whilst lead institutions will undoubtedly work closely with their partners to consider how best to sustain and embed activities, these ideas and lessons could be usefully shared across the pilot projects in a post-funding environment.

9.5 Trust and trustworthiness

Whilst the evaluation did not specifically explore this aspect of partnership working it was evident from project meetings and project documentation that there was a high degree of trust between the individual projects and the central project management team at the Association of Colleges and between partners within individual pilot projects.

In terms of individual projects, whilst a number of projects reported on challenges they faced with partners these were often for business reasons in the case of employer partners or academic decisions in the case of HE partners. The projects affected managed to overcome these challenges by recognising that, in some instances, partners’ needs and expectations change.
10.0 Proposals

In this section, drawing on the evaluation of the pilot projects and associated research, we put forward a series of comments and proposals, some of which are general and others which are more specific, with the dual aim of: further developing, sustaining and embedding the pilot projects in providing a system of credit accumulation and transfer which operates effectively and efficiently for learners, employers and providers; and informing institutions, practitioners and policy makers in the implementation and development of CAT schemes in general and for higher vocational education (HVE) in particular.

As the development and waves of interest in credit accumulation and transfer systems demonstrate transnational and international schemes have not, as yet, realised their full potential. From the pilot projects the development of small scale local arrangements has the potential to benefit a wide range of learners, meet the needs of local employers and minimise unnecessary wastage within the system.

The pilot projects demonstrated to varying degrees the capacity to develop credit-based learning as well as identifying the challenges and barriers that need to be addressed and overcome. As we have noted in the review of the literature, there is a strong link between widening participation and the benefits of credit. However, these benefits which accrue to multiple stakeholders – learners, institutions and employers – are not being realised.

The pilot projects have contributed to the evidence base not least by raising awareness about the benefits of credit transfer and how they can be recognised and communicated. Communication is key and the facilitation of a purposeful dialogue with learners will contribute to identifying learner-led opportunities and moving forward the development of effective credit transfer.

We set out below comments and proposals around data collection and building the evidence base; building a community of practice and professional development; reuse and repurposing of resources developed for the pilot projects; and finally a series of proposals on future research and evaluation to maintain momentum.

10.1 Data collection and management information systems

As we have identified in various places throughout the report the paucity of data in relation to credit accumulation in general and credit transfer in particular is problematic. Simply put, in the absence of easily accessible data, it is not possible to comment on the scope and scale of credit accumulation and transfer into and within the HE system, and consequently whether such schemes are delivering the intended benefits to stakeholders.

At present there is no requirement for institutions in either the FE or HE system to report on credit transfer. As noted in the evaluation, the lack of robust criteria for tracking and recording learners transferring credit is in part due to the absence of such systems at an institutional level.

Making the recording and reporting of credit transfer a requirement and a part of institutions’ annual returns would provide data to measure the success of credit transfer schemes as well as individual learners. This would provide valuable quantitative data on both the number of learners using credit transfer, the volume of credit transfer and the programmes or qualifications for which the credit is being used.

At present the UK Credit Forum brings together expertise from regional credit consortia, including the Northern Universities Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (NUCCAT) and South
East England Consortium (SEEC). Whilst there have been a number of surveys on credit (Armstrong, Clarkson and Noble, 1998; Johnson, 2004), the last one undertaken by the UK Credit Forum in 2012 (Atlay, Bridges and Flinn et al 2012), none of them have gathered data on the scope and scale of credit transfer, rather the focus has been on practice, policies and processes.

Better tracking of students at local and national level will assist in promoting the possibility of credit transfer.

Proposal to pilot projects: To continue to work with staff at partner institutions with responsibility for student records and management information systems to develop processes for credit transfer to be recorded on the student record system and, consequently, have the ability to report on the number of learners using credit transfer, the volume of credit transfer and the programmes or qualifications for which the credit is being used. Whilst the ability to accumulate and transfer credit may be useful in specific circumstances such as transnational mobility it may also be attractive for learners from widening participation backgrounds. There may therefore be opportunities to explore how the implementation and recording of credit transfer as evidence that some institutions may wish to incorporate into their Access Agreement.

Proposal to the funder: In the short term to work with the UK Credit Forum to explore the possibility of including questions about the scale and scope of credit transfer in future surveys on credit practice administered to higher education institutions; and to explore the possibility of extending the survey to include college HE – higher education delivered in further education colleges.

Proposal to policy makers: In the medium term provision should be made for the collection, recording and reporting of credit transfer at institutional level with annual reporting at national level. HEFCE should be approached to advise on how such information could be collected without overburdening institutions leading to the development of guidance for tracking and recording mechanisms that would allow institutions to report on the transfer of credit within the HE system. At the same time, similar approaches should be made to appropriate bodies with responsibility for FE.

10.2 Building the evidence base – evidence-informed policy

The main thrust of the CATSproject has been to establish a small number of pilot or demonstrator projects to test out policy innovation and to find out what works in terms of both policy and practice. Policy, as Pollard and Oancea (2010:26) note, should be evidence informed rather than evidence based. This was supplemented by a programme level evaluation, summarised in Section 6 as well as individual project evaluations undertaken by the projects themselves.

The data gathered by the individual pilot projects and the evaluation will be a useful resource for policy makers and practitioners who wish to introduce similar schemes in either a geographically defined area and/or with a specific disciplinary, vocation or professional focus.

In the absence of a national educational repository researchers have the option to submit details of their research to a variety of repositories such as CERUK (Current Educational and Children's Services Research in the UK) for research in progress where findings have yet to be reported. Where research has been completed and findings reported researchers can submit details to the British Education Index (BEI) Educational Evidence Portal.

Proposal to funder: In the short term, provision should be made to promote the availability of data from the pilot projects in an easily accessible format for researchers, policy makers and practitioners.

The web pages developed for the pilot projects could be adapted and used for this purpose in the first instance.

In the medium term, there should be work with the UK Credit Forum and regional credit consortia
NUCCAT and SEEC to further unlock learning, share experience and disseminate findings from the pilot projects. This could be achieved through providing links to data and resources on the pilot project web pages or hosting copies of the resources on the UK Credit Forum, NUCCAT and SEEC websites.

In the longer term, data and other project resources (see below) could be migrated and hosted elsewhere. In addition, outputs and data could be submitted to the BEI (British Education Index) Educational Evidence Portal. For future projects the funder may wish to consider submitting details of research in progress to the CERUK database and to the BEI Educational Evidence Portal on completion.

Proposal to policy makers: As recommended in the Report of the UK Strategic Forum for Research in Education: “Those responsible for major UK-wide resources for the collection of evidence about education should be encouraged to explore consolidation to provide a sustainable, cost-effective, comprehensive and publicly accessible and user-orientated ‘UK Education Information Service.’” Pollard and Oancea (2010:36).

10.3 Building a community of practice

Working together, the project teams from each of the six pilot projects have developed as a community of practice, sharing ideas and information in real time. Through a project website, regular reporting and face-to-face meetings this approach has not only enhanced capacity, but has also improved delivery within and across the projects.

One of the pilot projects, Linking London Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) Management Project, has produced a register and directory of credit experts, (Linking London Credit Directory and Register of Expertise) to support staff working collaboratively within the area of credit transfer in FE/HE. This directory, together with other resources, such as a staff handbook, A Guide to Understanding and Using Credit, produced by the pilot project has contributed to developing and supporting a community of practice within the partnership. Endorsement of the staff handbook by SEEC will facilitate engagement with the wider community of practice at regional and national level.

Building on the success of the pilot projects' community of practice there is an opportunity to engage with a wider range of stakeholders in order to promote and develop effective credit accumulation and transfer schemes that meet local needs whilst being able to articulate within the wider higher education system. However, stakeholders cannot begin to engage with this if they do not fully understand and appreciate how credit transfer will work on a practical level. There is a need for clear information on credit accumulation and transfer and how it can add value to access and progression pathways for learners.

Proposal to pilot projects: Emulate the practice of establishing a local directory of credit experts and champions who are known and recognised for their expertise and ability to provide advice and guidance to colleagues seeking to develop articulation agreements, promote the use of APEL and realise the benefits of credit transfer.

Proposal to the funder: To work with the regional credit consortia to bring together existing networks of CATS experts, supporting the development of an active practitioner network focussed on delivering CAT systems to meet local or sector needs.

10.4 Professional development and information advice and guidance

The documentation associated with credit accumulation and transfer is often complex, using technical terms and jargon which is not readily or easily understood by stakeholders. As noted,
previously clarity of communication is paramount.

Academic and professional staff working in the higher education system need to have access to appropriate materials and training to ensure that they have a clear understanding of how credit accumulation and transfer systems operate in their context and setting. As noted above, one of the pilot projects has produced a handbook for staff: *A Guide to Understanding and Using Credit*.

Learners also need information which is presented in an accessible and easily understood format; this may, for example, be through the use of flow charts and diagrams. However, interactive materials could be produced for learners to access independently or with an adviser that illustrate various progression pathways based on their current level of learning and career choices.

Whilst these materials will go some way to supporting staff and learners, partner institutions of all pilot projects will require varying degrees of support. Varying degrees of support will be necessary for staff to embed these developments at their institution depending on the existing level of expertise and appetite for credit transfer.

**Proposal to pilot projects:** Where appropriate, other projects could consider adopting and adapting the staff handbook produced by Linking London for use within their own partnership. Similar materials, in an accessible format both in print and on the internet, could be produced for learners and employers.

**Proposal to the funder:** If resources are available, consider using them to provide a staff resource which could initially support all six pilot projects to successfully embed their work. Where there is a demand for transfer within the pilot projects or to other partnerships, staff and non-costs could be recouped for provision of this service.

10.5 Reusing and repurposing project resources

All of the projects produced a range of resources for various stakeholder groups. These resources, such as handbook, guides, directories and leaflets for learners, could be reused and repurposed within the pilot project group as well as by other partnerships and institutions wishing to promote and support credit transfer.

**Proposal to pilot projects:** Where practical make all resources available on partner web sites. Provide the funder with copies of all resources and materials. Following the example of one of the pilot projects, seek endorsement from regional credit consortia.

**Proposal to funder:** Work with individual pilot projects to collect and collate resources and materials and make them available. The detailed guides produced by a number of pilot projects should be made available to the wider community. Credit organisations, such as SEEC and NUCAT, should be approached in the first instance to make these documents available to colleagues working in the HE system with an interest in supporting credit accumulation and transfer.

10.6 Further research

10.6.1 Listening to learners

One voice that is noticeably absent or silent on the issue of credit accumulation and transfer is that of the learner. Whilst we would not argue that their voice should be privileged we note the importance of listening to learners in developing policy and practice.

Whilst we have noted that there is a significant body of literature on learner voice (Czerniawski, G., Garlick, S., Hudson, A., and Peters, P., 2009; Fielding, M., 2001) it is noticeably absent in relation to credit accumulation and transfer and little is known about the motivation and experience of the
relatively limited number of learners who transfer credit (Di Paolo and Pegg, 2013). This is due in part to limited engagement by policy makers and practitioners but also to researchers who have not directed their attention to this issue. In developing systems that support local credit accumulation and transfer, engaging with learners will provide practitioners with a better understanding of their needs.

Proposal to policy makers: Commission a small scale scoping study which would investigate the motivations, experience and needs of learners in relation to credit accumulation in general and transfer in particular.

10.6.2 Evaluation and peer review

In addition to the evaluation and review of all pilot projects commissioned by AoC, two of the projects commissioned a separate peer review. Noting the benefits of peer review in another context, Schuler and Watson (2009) recognize it as: “a form of systemic learning, to be encouraged within and across sectors.”

Proposal to pilot projects and funder: In the short term, make the peer reviews available to the wider community through the pilot project web pages. Undertake a further focussed evaluation of the pilot projects at the end of the next academic year when they will, if successful, be able to demonstrate evidence of learner progression. There would also be an opportunity to evaluate the degree of transfer within the partnership and gather evidence for any impact or initiatives that have developed as a result of the pilot projects.

10.7 Complexity, consistency and diversity

Whilst complexity and diversity may be seen as strength of the educational system, the lack of consistency and degrees of complexity and diversity present barriers that learners may find difficult to understand and challenging to overcome.

Whilst it would be difficult not to argue for greater consistency in matters of credit accumulation and transfer, as a number of commentators (Johnson, 2003; Atlay, M., Bridges, P., and Flinn, M., et al 2012) note there are significant variations in institutional policy and practice regarding such matters as condonation, compensation and the reuse of credit.

However, we need to be realistic and recognise the difficulties of adopting a centralised approach and the challenges of managing autonomous institutions. We need to take a more sophisticated approach, one that enables local initiatives and innovation to flourish, whilst still being able to articulate, albeit loosely, with the wider HE system.

Proposal to funder: As noted previously, to work with the UK Credit Council to provide support and guidance to institutions on credit transfer that serves the needs of learners, in particular those from widening participation backgrounds, who may benefit most from the ability to accumulate and transfer credit.

10.8 Maintaining momentum and further support for pilot projects

There is a strong case to be made for revisiting the project sites at least one full academic year after the end of the project-funded phase for a number of reasons. Firstly, as noted in the evaluation section, at the end of the project-funded phase it is simply not possible to comment on whether the policy and practice developed as a result of the pilot is sustainable and has become embedded within and across the project partners. Secondly, even one year after the project-funded phase there may well be some activity in terms of policy transfer – either in terms of transfer, scale or both – but it is unlikely that this could be evaluated.
Proposal to funder: Continue to provide logistic support, such as telephone conferences, to enable pilot projects to share progress and developments with one another. To provide opportunities for pilot projects and host institutions to disseminate their work at national level as a means of demonstrating transferability.

Proposal to pilot projects: Continue to share progress and developments with other pilot projects at events facilitated by the funder. Work with partners (institutions, employers and other relevant organisations) to develop and fund ongoing review, evaluation and reporting on progress and developments.

10.9 Project management

Whilst each of the pilot projects has faced and overcome various individual challenges, ranging from staffing, managing partners and the impact of policy changes, they have all faced a significant challenge related to project timescales. The main issue was the lack of lead time which meant that for many staff academic workloads had already been set and agreed; this was further compounded by commencing in July when many staff, not just academic staff, take annual leave. Finally, ending the project in July 2013 did not provide sufficient time to evaluate a project concerned with learner progression.

Extending the duration, but not necessarily the funding, of the pilot projects may have gone some way to alleviate and address these issues and enabled the pilot projects to have demonstrated learner progression and actual sustainability and embeddedness rather than potential.

Proposal to funder: In the event that continuation funding is available for some of the current pilot projects this may enable them to demonstrate proof of concept and for others the opportunity to demonstrate transferability and scalability. Consideration should be given to the constraints of the academic timetable and other institutional processes to achieve greater synergy.
References


Bridges, P.H. & Flinn, M. University of Derby: Derby.


### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>APEL</td>
<td>Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning</td>
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<td>APL</td>
<td>Accreditation for Prior Learning</td>
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<td>AoC</td>
<td>Association of Colleges</td>
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<td>BIS</td>
<td>Department for Business, Innovation and Skills</td>
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<td>CBMS</td>
<td>Credit-Based Modular Systems</td>
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<td>CMI</td>
<td>Chartered Management Institute</td>
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<td>CNAA</td>
<td>Council of National Academic Awards</td>
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<td>CoP</td>
<td>Community of Practice</td>
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<td>CAT</td>
<td>Credit Accumulation and Transfer</td>
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<td>Department for Education and Science</td>
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<td>ECTS</td>
<td>European Credit Transfer System</td>
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<td>Further Education College</td>
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<td>Framework for Higher Education Qualifications</td>
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<td>Higher Apprenticeship</td>
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<td>Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>HECIW</td>
<td>Higher Education Credit Initiative Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEFCE</td>
<td>Higher Education Funding Council for England</td>
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<td>HVE</td>
<td>Higher Vocational Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILM</td>
<td>Institute of Leadership and Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOCN</td>
<td>National Open College Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQF</td>
<td>National Qualification Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUCCAT</td>
<td>Northern Universities Consortia for Credit Accumulation and Transfer</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>QCF</td>
<td>Qualification and Credit Framework</td>
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<td>SEEC</td>
<td>Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer</td>
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<td>Skills Funding Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>UTC</td>
<td>University Technical College</td>
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<td>UUK</td>
<td>Universities UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
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