Credit Systems for Lifelong Learning
Final Country Report for Scotland

by

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INTRODUCTION

This is the final report of the study of the credit system in Scotland carried out as part of a comparative study of Credit Systems for Lifelong Learning. The study involved four countries - Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands and Scotland - and was co-ordinated by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) in Germany. We produced a background report as part of the first phase of the study describing the VET system in Scotland and outlining the development of arrangements for credit (Raffe, Howieson and Hart 2010 [add web link]). This report draws on the background report and extends it by considering the further development, impact and operation of credit transfer in practice based on a programme of interviews with key actors in Scotland.

We would like to thank the individuals and organisations who participated in the interviews for their time and for the information and insights they gave us; the views and conclusions expressed in the report, are of course, our own. We are also grateful to our colleagues John Hart and Abigail Kinsella for their contributions to the study.

1. FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS

The VET system

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Scotland stands in a state of semi-independence from the rest of the UK. Scotland has always had a distinct education system; before 1999 this was administered separately by the Scottish Office, a department of the UK government, and many distinctive features of Scottish VET are the result of policy decisions that were specific to Scotland but taken by the pre-devolution UK government. Since 1999 VET has been the responsibility of the Scottish Government and Parliament whose devolved powers include education and training. It falls under two departments of the Scottish Government, the Employability, Skills and Lifelong Learning Directorate (whose policy areas include colleges, universities, training programmes and skills development) and the Learning Directorate (whose policy areas include schools, qualifications and the 3-18 curriculum). Both are under the minister (called 'Cabinet Secretary') for Education and Lifelong Learning. Other bodies with a national remit include Skills Development Scotland (SDS: responsible for public training programmes and careers guidance), the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA: responsible for most non-university qualifications), Scotland's Colleges (the representative body whose activities include curriculum development and support), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC: responsible for funding teaching and learning provision, research and other activities in Scotland's 41 colleges and 19 universities and higher education institutions), Education Scotland (a body created in 2011 which incorporates the main quality assurance body for non-university education, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education), the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils in Scotland and the Scottish Modern Apprenticeships Group.

However, the UK dimension is still important. Industrial training policy was a UK-wide responsibility in the 1970s and 1980s when it was led by the tripartite Manpower Services Commission. VET, as a field embracing both education and training, therefore incorporates elements with a long Scottish pedigree (such as the key VET institutions, - the colleges and the former vocational higher education institutions which became universities after 1992) and elements that draw on its UK heritage (such as national occupational standards and qualifications based on these, including Scottish Vocational Qualifications, SVQs). VET is affected by certain policy areas reserved to the UK government, including public finance, professional regulation and aspects of employment and skills policy. The Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), which develop national occupational standards, cover the whole UK, although their detailed responsibilities vary significantly between Scotland and England. The UK Commission on Employment and Skills (UKCES), although primarily an advisory body, is distinctive because it offers advice both to the UK government and to the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Perhaps more importantly, the dependence of Scottish VET on an integrated UK labour market, and the influence of closely connected UK higher education systems, put a limit to its divergence from the rest of the UK. The relative autonomy of Scottish VET within the UK has been compared by some commentators to that of Member States within the European Union.

VET is not a clearly defined sector of Scottish education and the term 'vocational' is applied to a wide range of types of learning. Work-based programmes, including Modern Apprenticeships, which aim to develop competence in specific occupational roles, are generally regarded as vocational. So are many programmes offered by Scotland's Colleges

(see below), including those at higher education (sub-degree) level, which offer a broader preparation typically based on wider occupational areas. However, the term 'vocational' may also be applied to a number of courses for secondary-school pupils and to programmes which target disengaged or unemployed young people, although these might also be termed 'pre-vocational'. The term 'vocational' may also be applied to provision offered by a variety of training providers including private and voluntary-sector organisations, and to programmes delivered or controlled by professional associations.

Qualifications

VET is not based on a regulated system of occupations, and there is seldom a single qualification which gives entry to an occupation, although a growing number of occupations are subject to some degree of regulation and in some occupations a body has been identified or established to make judgements about which qualifications are acceptable for entry or for specific roles (eg counselling, accountancy). The variety of vocational learning in Scotland is reflected in the range of qualifications:

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are unitised, competence-based qualifications available at five levels, based on National Occupational Standards for specific occupations. They are intended to be delivered in the workplace and/or in partnership with a college or training provider. They are awarded by a range of bodies, including the SQA and professional and industry organisations, and they are formally accredited by a special division of the SQA. In principle they cover most occupations but they tend to be used most frequently at lower or intermediate levels and in particular sectors such as business administration, care, construction, hairdressing and hospitality. SVQs are similar in conception and design to the NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) formerly offered in the rest of the UK; NVQs are now being replaced by qualifications in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) which has no direct equivalent in Scotland.

National Qualifications and *Higher National Qualifications* are unit-based qualifications awarded by the SQA. Units may be taken separately or as part of group awards or National Courses. Larger group awards include National Certificates, available at lower and intermediate levels, Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs); they typically represent one or two years' full-time study (or its part-time equivalent) and are usually delivered in colleges. Smaller but flexible group awards include National Progression Awards (NPAs), which certificate skills in a specialist vocational area, and Professional Development Awards (PDAs) which allow those already in a vocation to extend or broaden their skills. National Qualifications also include National Courses, subject-specific courses at a range of levels which are the main certificates awarded in secondary schools. These include Highers and Advanced Highers which are the main currency for entry to university. Most National Courses are in general or 'academic' subjects but some offer introductions to occupational areas such as administration, business management, care or computing, and they include Skills for Work courses in areas such as care, construction crafts, hairdressing and rural skills.

Four factors give SQA qualifications a great deal of flexibility and distinguish them from many other European systems. First, individual units are intended to have value in their own right and are given a relatively high status in the certification system; second, apart from individual units many qualifications are small in size, so that transfer may take the form of movement from one completed qualification to another rather than transfer of credit between qualifications; third, all qualifications can be delivered by any institution or

organisation which meets the relevant requirements of the SQA; and fourth, certification is carried out centrally by the SQA, which maintains a cumulative record of the achievements of individual learners. This means that credit transfer and accumulation are built into the SQA system, so that an individual achieving one or more SQA units in one or more institutions can automatically count it/them towards any full SQA qualification of which it is a component if s/he goes on to complete that qualification in another institution.

Other qualifications include:

University degrees. The main degrees awarded by Scottish universities are Bachelors (awarded at Ordinary or Honours level, typically on the basis of three or four years' study respectively), Masters (typically one year) and Doctor (typically three or more years). Other qualifications include Certificates and Diplomas of HE, which may be awarded to students who complete the first one or two years of a degree programme, and may provide credit towards further degree study. There is no formal distinction between academic and vocational (or professional) higher education, although in fields such as education and medicine the content of qualifications and the programmes that lead to them are regulated by professional bodies.

Qualifications of other awarding bodies. The SQA is sponsored by the Schools Directorate of the Scottish Government, and it is the national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than university degrees. When qualifications are introduced or re-designed in pursuit of national policy, the SQA is usually given responsibility for this task. However, schools and (especially) colleges are able to choose qualifications awarded by other bodies, especially those based elsewhere in the UK. Vocational qualifications awarded by the City and Guilds of London Institute continue to occupy a niche in some occupational areas. The European Computer Driving Licence is also widely used in Scotland as are IC3 certification and Microsoft and Cisco vendor awards[1]. Pre-vocational qualifications or those which recognise personal development or achievement, such as ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network), are also widely used.[2] Qualifications intended for use in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are also offered in Scotland: this may happen when, for example, an employer operating across the UK is unwilling to work with both SVQs and their English counterparts.

Employer and professional awards. These include awards by professional bodies in fields such as accountancy, banking and engineering, as well as awards by employers ranging from the police and fire services to hoteliers and whisky distillers. Some are jointly awarded with the SQA.

All SVQs, National and Higher National qualifications and university degrees, and a growing proportion of other qualifications, are placed in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). This is described further below.

The main providers of VET
Scotland's Colleges, 41 publicly-funded institutions, are, with the universities, the main providers of post-school learning. They provide full- and part-time courses and programmes in a variety of vocational and non-vocational subjects, and leading to nearly all the

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[1] SQA has credit transfer arrangements in place for all of these awards.
[2] Both ECDL and ASDAN awards have been credit-rated by SQA for inclusion in the SCQF.

qualification types reviewed above. They have a strong tradition of access and responsiveness: of promoting access to education among all learners, including the socially disadvantaged and those at risk of exclusion, and of responding flexibly to the demands of learners, employers and local communities.

Higher Education Institutions, 16 universities and three other institutions, provide degree-level programmes in a range of (vocational and non-vocational) areas. Seven universities acquired their current status after 1992 when the higher education sector was unified and the former Central Institutions, vocational institutions under more direct government control, became universities. These 'post-1992' universities tend to have higher proportions of mature and part-time students, and they have been most active in credit developments (Gallacher 2006).

Secondary schools cater for young people between the ages of 12 and 18, although attendance is compulsory only up to age 16. About two-thirds of each year group continues in school to age 17 and nearly a half to age 18. Except for a small independent sector, which caters for about 4% of the age group, all secondary schools are comprehensive, co-educational and administered by elected local authorities. The curriculum of Scottish secondary schools is predominantly academic or general, although there have been attempts to increase its vocational (or more typically pre-vocational) content.

Other institutions include *training providers*, a wide variety of private organisations which provide training courses for employers and often manage public training programmes, *employers* (or groups of employers) who provide training for their own workers, possibly in collaboration with colleges or training providers, and *voluntary organisations* which are increasingly involved in delivering programmes for the least advantaged young people. The term *community learning and development* (CLD) refers to informal learning and social development work with individuals and groups within their communities. It includes youth work, community-based adult learning and support for community capacity-building. It is provided by local authorities and partner agencies in the public and voluntary sectors.

'Work-based' programmes

The *Modern Apprenticeship* programme is managed and delivered by Skills Development Scotland. Modern Apprenticeships are based on frameworks developed by the Sector Skills Councils and lead to occupational SVQs (or NVQs) together with relevant core skills; most are at craft level but there are a few higher-level Modern Apprenticeships and Modern Apprenticeships are currently being extended to lower-level SVQs, replacing the former programme (*Skillseekers*) at that level. Modern Apprenticeships are open to employed trainees of all ages but young people receive priority for public funding. Other programmes are aimed at young people or adults who need support in developing basic skills or accessing employment. These include *Get Ready for Work* for 16-19 year-olds and *Training for Work* programmes for unemployed adults. The UK government's *Work Programme*, which replaced a range of *New Deal* programmes in 2011, is also available to unemployed people in Scotland.

Access and transition

Access to VET programmes, and transition between programmes, is usually at the discretion of the provider, and there are few formal entry requirements. Although the SCQF, and in particular the portfolio of qualifications awarded by the SQA, are designed to provide progression sequences, typically connecting qualifications at different levels in the same field, many learners are likely to join at different points in the sequence. One implication is that selection decisions for some types of VET (such as college courses) may be more concerned with the level at which a learner joins this sequence rather than with whether or not they join it at all. Prior qualifications, other learning and experience, and the core skills demonstrated by the learner, are all likely to be taken into account.

Political framework

Credit arrangements in Scotland, and their underlying concepts of credit, have developed over the course of several reforms since the 1980s. These include:

Action Plan. Initially called the 16-18 Action Plan, this 1983 document introduced a national framework of modules which replaced most non-advanced vocational courses in colleges, were used to certificate young people and some older workers on training programmes, and came to supplement more traditional academic courses in schools. The Action Plan aimed to aimed to modernise the vocational curriculum and to stimulate participation in learning by increasing opportunities for 'less academic' learners, by making the system more flexible and by encouraging more learner-centred pedagogies. Although it was not formally a credit system, the modular framework had many credit-like features. In the first place, it was based on modules, each of notional 40-hour design length (with half- and double-modules); in formal VET the 40 hours tended to be interpreted as contact time or scheduled learning time. Funding for colleges was based on the 40 hours which became known as a SUM (Student Unit of Measurement) and in other contexts as a 'credit'. Second, each module was defined by learning outcomes and associated performance criteria, and was intended to be 'institutionally versatile' - that is, capable of delivery in a range of institutional settings. Third, all modules were placed in a single national catalogue and awarded by a single body, which later merger with the main academic qualifications body to become the SQA. It was expected that colleges would devise programmes based on modules from the catalogue and give credit for modules already completed elsewhere. Young people who had taken a few modules at school, it was hoped, would thus have an incentive to continue learning in a college where they could use their accumulated credit. Fourth, it was intended that more generic modules such as communication and numeracy would be included in different programmes, facilitating horizontal transfer. Finally, although modules were individually certificated they could contribute to some group awards, including some SVQs and, from 1993, new awards, intended mainly for delivery in colleges, known as General SVQs. These qualifications helped to establish a pattern of national qualifications based on the accumulation of units or credits.

Unitisation of Higher National awards. In 1988 SCOTVEC launched a programme which unitised HNCs and HNDs, with a rationale and objectives similar to the Action Plan, but with the additional aim of developing clearer pathways from the Action Plan modules to HN awards. In contrast to the Action Plan modules, the new HN units were designed primarily as components of group awards, that is HNCs and HNDs, although they could also be individually certificated. HNCs and HNDs had previously been distinct awards for part-time and full-time study respectively. They were re-designed as new qualifications linked by credit transfer: in many subjects, all or most of the 12 unit credits that comprised an HNC

could count towards the 30 credits required for an HND. The new qualifications were similarly intended to provide credit towards degree courses, where articulation agreements between colleges and universities made this possible. In such cases an HND might give exemption for up to the first two years of a four-year Honours degree course.

The introduction of SVQs. SVQs were introduced in the early 1990s. They are unitised, competence-based occupational qualifications at five job-related levels, based on national occupational standards. They were mainly delivered as whole qualifications but employers sometimes selected the units that they perceived to be most relevant. Some SVQs were based on Action Plan modules, with a possibility of credit transfer from other types of programmes, but most were based on specially designed units intended to facilitate workplace assessment. This, and the fact that SVQs were not included within the 'unified system' introduced by Higher Still (see below), may have marginalised them from the main arenas wherein credit transfer may occur. In principle, different SVQs may have units in common, making credit transfer possible, but this is not common.

The Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SCOTCAT) Scheme. SCOTCAT was launched in 1991 as the credit system for higher education. It established a currency of one credit equal to ten hours' study time (later re-defined as the notional learning time for the average student to achieve the outcomes). Each year of a full-time programme was assumed to comprise 1200 hours' learning time or 120 credit points. The scheme defined five levels of higher education study, four corresponding to the different years of a four-year Honours degree and a fifth for Masters. It thus not only introduced a concept of credit that was to be the basis for the current framework; it also established the idea that credit points had to be awarded at a specific level and that a qualification or programme could be based on credits achieved through working up through a series of levels. By 1992 all universities and other higher education institutions had signed up to SCOTCAT and agreed to modify their provision to fit with it, although it had most impact on 'new' universities and in the context of local credit accumulation and transfer arrangements.

Higher Still/National Qualifications. Starting in 1999, the Higher Still reform replaced Action Plan modules and post-16 school courses with a single 'unified system' of units and unit-based courses. The new National Qualifications combined elements of both systems, and covered most academic courses below higher education level and a substantial proportion of vocational courses apart from SVQs. They thus brought academic and vocational courses, and school and college courses, into a single framework. The new framework retained the concept of a 40-hour unit introduced by the Action Plan; schools typically delivered single-subject courses each comprising four units (with around five courses in an annual programme), whereas college courses were more often constructed from stand-alone units. Over-arching Scottish Group Awards, based on combinations of courses or units, were designed to recognise coherent programmes but had low take-up and were eventually withdrawn. Courses and units were developed at seven levels, ranging from a level appropriate for those with severe learning difficulties to the highest level of pre-university study. The curriculum introduced by Higher Still has been described as a 'climbing frame' model because it allowed flexible choices of courses with movement in all directions.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. The SCQF was formally launched in 2001 on the basis of a consultation in 1999. It is a comprehensive framework intended to accommodate all qualifications and assessed learning in Scotland. Each qualification in the framework, and each separate unit or component of a qualification, is given a number of

credit points representing the volume of study and allocated to one of the twelve levels of the framework. The SCQF started as a merger of three 'sub-frameworks' that had been created by earlier reforms: the SCOTCAT scheme, the National Qualifications 'climbing frame' introduced by Higher Still and SVQs. The SCQF's twelve levels were based on the five SCOTCAT levels (with an extra level added for Doctorates) and the seven levels of National Qualifications, the top one of which was deemed to be the same as the bottom SCOTCAT level. Level descriptors were adapted from the existing frameworks and the concept and measure of credit were taken from SCOTCAT. They describe the characteristics of learning and of expected performance at each level in relation to five types of learning outcomes:

- knowledge and understanding;
- practice (applied knowledge and understanding);
- generic cognitive skills, such as evaluation and critical analysis;
- communication, ICT and numeracy skills;
- autonomy, accountability and working with others.

The SCQF's launch document described its 'general aims' as to:
- help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential;
- enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how the qualifications relate to each other, and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce (SCQF 2001, p.vii).

Note that the second aim in particular was about more than credit transfer. Credit became an important tool for designing and describing qualifications, and for planning their interrelationships; it was part of the 'national language' of learning that the SCQF aimed to provide. According to the SCQF Handbook: 'The SCQF provides a vocabulary for describing learning and helps to:
- make the relationships between qualifications and learning programmes clear;
- clarify entry and exit points, and routes for progression;
- maximise the opportunities for credit transfer;
- assist learners to plan their progress and learning;
- minimise the duplication of learning (SCQF 2009, p.11).

The SCQF was led by a partnership of HE bodies, the SQA and the government. In 2007 this arrangement was strengthened by the establishment of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, a company limited by guarantee (that is, a 'not for profit' charity). The Partnership has an Executive Board which consists of members from the partner organisations plus an independent chair. The partners are Universities Scotland (representing higher education institutions), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Scotland's Colleges and the Scottish Government.

The SCQF Partnership has a small executive, with a staff of around ten people led by a Chief Executive. A Quality Committee is responsible for maintaining the SCQF guidelines, ensuring consistency in the process and criteria for admitting qualifications to the framework (credit-rating - see below) and aligning the SCQF with other national and international frameworks. An SCQF Forum represents the main stakeholder interests, promotes the use of the framework and provides feedback on its design and implementation.

The process by which qualifications are accepted into the SCQF is called 'credit-rating'. The SQA and the universities, whose qualifications formed the nucleus of the original SCQF, have always had the powers to credit-rate their qualifications and place them in the SCQF. The colleges were accepted as credit-rating bodies after a pilot in 2005-06, at around the same time as they became partners in the SCQF. A further pilot and consultation in 2007-08 led to new criteria and procedures being established under which other organisations could gain credit-rating powers. In 2009 it was announced that these powers would be given to City and Guilds (a UK awarding body), the Scottish Police College and two professional bodies representing banking and management respectively. In order to become a credit-rating body an organisation must:

- be a body of good standing, demonstrating a track record in the design and delivery of learning provision in Scotland;
- have in place a documented quality assurance system for programme design, approval, validation, accreditation, assessment or other related activities, with evidence of reliability and validity; and
- have the necessary capacity and commitment and ensure that its credit-rating processes link to, and function within, the quality assurance system described above.

When approved as an SCQF credit-rating body, an organisation can credit-rate its own qualifications and learning programmes, and those of partners covered by the same quality assurance system. An organisation may be approved to credit-rate other organisations' qualifications and programmes if it meets further requirements that demonstrate its capacity, commitment and experience to do so and that it has appropriate structures and systems in place.

Qualifications in the SCQF are registered on a national database (www.scqf.org.uk/ SCQF_CourseSearch.aspx?)

The SCQF has no regulatory function; it is an enabling framework and participation is voluntary. This, and the fact that the main awarding bodies are represented among the partners, help to explain its small bureaucracy: many of the functions of regulatory agencies in other systems are carried out by the SCQF Partners in Scotland. The SCQF has been represented as an instrument of change rather than a driver or agent of change (Gallacher et al. 2005). Its increasing use as the language of learning in Scotland may push it towards a more 'regulatory' role, because the language of learning necessarily becomes the language by which learning is regulated, but this is unlikely to make the recognition or transfer of credit mandatory.

The process of creating the SCQF was thus incremental and pragmatic. It proceeded through a series of reforms, which successively established the main building blocks of a credit system - units, levels and measures of credit volume - in what became the different sub-frameworks of the SCQF (Raffe 2007, 2011). Definitions based on the existing system were used to rationalise the system. It was pragmatic: it went with the grain of existing educational arrangements; it offered a basis for reviewing and reforming them but it did not try to impose a new blueprint. For instance, the process whereby credits and levels were assigned to university courses initially reflected existing conventions and assumptions much more than it reflected a rigorous analysis of the learning outcomes; but over time the framework was used as a tool in routine processes of review and redevelopment, so that the framework and educational practice tended to converge over time. Other aspects of pragmatism were the simplifying assumptions to prevent the system becoming too complex.

For example, National Courses at the same level received the same number of credit points although they might take up varying amounts of time in school timetables.

Unusually among National Qualifications Frameworks the SCQF is led by a voluntary partnership of educational institutions and awarding bodies. However, it would be misleading to characterise it simply as a bottom-up reform. In the first place, the partnership does not include all institutions; initially only higher education institutions were actively involved and the colleges (the sector with the most to gain or lose from a credit framework) were not admitted to the leadership of the SCQF until 2006. Other VET or education providers are still not directly represented. This is a further example of the pragmatism of the SCQF, in that it recognised political realities. Second, the SCQF built on a series of reforms, most of which (Action Plan, SVQs, Higher Still) were government-led. Third, the direct influence of learners on the process was rarely visible, despite the rhetoric of the learner-centred system that the framework was intended to create.

Drivers

The policy drivers have varied across the different stages of the historical process outlined above, but they have included the desire or perceived need to:
- raise participation and enhance progression, especially among young people, by providing more opportunities particularly for those with middle or lower levels of attainment in compulsory school;
- make VET more attractive by developing pathways within VET and from VET to general/higher education, by integrating vocational and general learning; to promote parity of esteem;
- reduce exclusion by enhancing opportunities for those at risk and recognising existing skills and prior learning on which to build;
- update VET, enhance its relevance and promote pedagogical change;
- rationalise provision and enhance the coherence and coordination of the learning system.

Not all of these aims related specifically to credit, and where credit was a central feature of reform its role was often to support the management of learning as much as to provide opportunities for transfer. There have been changes in emphasis over time. For example, efforts to raise participation and progression focus primarily on under-represented groups (the 'widening access' agenda) and young people at risk of becoming not in education employment or training (the 'more choices, more chances', agenda). Parity of esteem has increasingly become seen as an inappropriate or unrealistic goal; pathways between VET and HE are seen as means to increase or widen participation in HE rather than as ways to raise the status of VET. Above all, and especially in the context of the economic downturn, economic aims have become dominant. The Scottish Government's 'core purpose' is 'to create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth'.

Current developments in credit are influenced by four main policy drivers:

Developing skills for economic growth and competitiveness. The government's skills strategy published in 2007 (Scottish Government 2007) saw skills as a means both to individual development and economic success. It departed from earlier policies, and those pursued elsewhere in the UK, by emphasising the need to boost the demand for skills and the utilisation of skills as well as their supply. One implication is that skills need to be recognised

if they are to be utilised effectively. The document asked the SCQF Partnership to 'move quickly to ensure that the SCQF embraces more learning opportunities by increasing the number of credit rating bodies; facilitating the inclusion of work based learning programmes and encouraging the recognition of informal learning' (Scottish Government 2007, p.49). Its emphasis on 'cohesive structures' for lifelong learning was echoed in two documents published in 2011. The *Review of Post-16 Education and Vocational Training in Scotland* (Scottish Government 2011a) and the subsequent *Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education* (Scottish Government 2011b) both emphasised the need for a more coherent, flexible, easily navigable and learner-centred learning system. The current reform of the school and college curriculum for 3-18, *Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive 2004), aims to develop 'four capacities' of young people – as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors – and to promote cultural change and school- and teacher-led innovation. The years from 15-18 will form 'a senior phase which provides opportunities for study for qualifications and other planned opportunities for developing the four capacities' and support for moving into 'positive sustained destinations' (Scottish Government 2008, 13). The first cohort will enter the senior phase 2013; new qualifications at SCQF levels 4 and 5 and revised qualifications at other levels will be introduced at this time. Schools have latitude in how they organise the senior phase, which potentially could involve greater flexibility in the accumulation of credit (Raffe, Howieson and Hart 2010a).

Post-16 participation. Scotland has one of the highest proportions of young people not in education, employment or training in the OECD (Scottish Executive 2006, OECD 2007). This is aggravated in the current recession, and the decline in job opportunities for young people. Young people have recently had priority in the allocation of funding to colleges. In contrast to the UK government's policy for England, the Scottish Government does not plan to extend compulsory education beyond 16. However, the senior phase of *Curriculum for Excellence* is committed to providing support for moving into 'positive sustained destinations (Scottish Government 2008). Following local pilots *16+ Learning Choices* was introduced across Scotland in December 2010, as part of *Curriculum for Excellence*. It entitles all young people to an offer of suitable post-16 learning when they leave compulsory education or any subsequent learning episode during the senior phase (Scottish Government 2010). This entitlement is to be delivered by local partnerships, led by local authorities, through a model designed to ensure that the right learning opportunities, the right support (including information advice and guidance) and the right financial support are available. A range of providers, including the voluntary sector, contribute to this provision, potentially creating a need both for credit transfer opportunities and for measures to recognise the learning that may take place in non-formal or informal settings.

Widening access. There is a commitment to widening participation in learning of all kinds, and especially in higher education, and increasing participation among social groups that are currently under-represented (SFC 2005). Progress in enhancing participation among socially disadvantaged groups is monitored using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) ranking of students' home addresses. The SIMD ranks 6505 small areas in Scotland on the basis of six dimensions, which are aggregated to produce an overall dimension of social deprivation. Current policies aim to enhance the proportion of learners from the most deprived quintile (or sometimes two quintiles) of areas.

Efficient, flexible learner journeys. *Putting Learners at the Centre* (Scottish Government 2011b) reiterated the Scottish Government's desire to enhance the flexibility, and where

appropriate shortening the length, of journeys into and through higher education. Credit, and the full implementation of the SCQF, have a potential role in this policy aim, which partly reflects a desire to save costs in view of a perceived funding crisis affecting higher education. School leavers have traditionally entered university on the basis of their Highers results (at SCQF level 6), and progress to first-year programmes at SCQF 7, but many will have one or more Advanced Higher passes at level 7. Few currently receive credit for this learning (eg in the form of entry with 'advanced standing to second-year courses); it is suggested that more universities might offer this, although there is relatively little demand from students. More credit transfer takes place between HNC and HND courses, which respectively offer credit equivalent to the first year or two of a university degree. Universities vary in their willingness to recognise this credit, but in many subject areas 'articulation routes' have been developed by colleges and universities, who design HN and degree programmes in order to facilitate transfer with full credit. Such articulation arrangements have been supported by the government and the Scottish Funding Council, especially as a contribution to widening access but also, increasingly, as part of the government's skill strategy (Raffe and Howieson forthcoming).

The increased focus on the recognition of prior learning (RPL) reflects all of these policy drivers, and in particular the increased importance of skills. RPLY is seen as a way to recognise the skills of the existing workforce and thereby to promote a skills utilisation and workforce development agenda in addition to a lifelong learning and social inclusion one. The concern (for instance) to facilitate RPL for migrant workers and refugee groups not only aimed to promote social cohesion but was also part of government strategy to raise the skill levels of the Scottish labour force (Scottish Government 2004, 2007). RPL is also a strand within policies to promote faster, more efficient learner journeys. Within certain sectors such as social care, early education and childcare, developments in, and use of, RPL have been prompted by the need to enable workers to meet certain mandatory qualification requirements. In relation to HE, the renewed attention to RPL is related to European policies including the 2009 Leuven Communiqué which identified RPL as a significant area for consolidation and development in HE in Europe as part of the Bologna process (Whittaker 2011). The use and value of RPL is now also being investigated in the career guidance sector.

Significance of 'crediting'
Level and credit are the two conceptual pillars of the SCQF. In contrast with many other NQFs, credit is built in to the SCQF, a fact which has significant implications for its architecture as well as for its uses.

Learning outcomes in most qualifications are grouped into units, although it is possible to have single-outcome units. A unit is understood to be a coherent collection of learning outcomes and may therefore be assessed separately; a module, on the other hand, is generally understood to be a component of a learning/teaching programme, that is, a unit of delivery. An outcomes-based qualification system therefore prefers the language of units to modules. Within the SQA system, all units are accredited in the sense that individuals who successfully complete even a single unit are given a Scottish Qualifications Certificate. The notion of 'part qualifications' does not have the same significance in the Scottish system as in some other countries, although most candidates take whole qualifications which may take anything from a few weeks to several years to complete. In some cases a smaller qualification can be considered a part of a larger qualification – for example an HNC may be the first half of an HND.

According to the SCQF Handbook 'SCQF credit points give learners, employers and learning providers a means of describing and comparing the amount of learning that has been achieved, or is required to complete a qualification or learning programme' (SCQF 2009, p.35). Credit points relate to the time required to achieve a qualification, with one credit representing a notional ten hours of learning. 'This is notional because it is based on the time judged to be required for an 'average' learner at a specified SCQF level to achieve the learning outcomes and does not measure the time actually taken by any individual learner' (SCQF 2009, p.36). Credit is specific to a level and is based only on the volume of learning at that level, as expressed by the notional learning hours required to achieve the outcomes. It is distinct from other indicators of the quality of learning such as the grade awarded within the level. This is a possible source of confusion as other measures of learning may take account of grades.

The SCQF makes a key distinction between general and specific credit, which respectively relate to credit accumulation and to credit transfer. General credit refers to a fixed volume of credit which is allocated to a qualification or unit in the SCQF. It is the basis of credit accumulation and the design of programmes or qualifications defined in terms of credit volume (see below). Specific credit refers to the credit points that can be transferred into a new programme or qualification - typically one offered by a different organisation or awarding body to that which awarded the general credits. It is the responsibility of the receiving organisation - or the home institution in ECVET terminology - to decide how many of the general points are recognised as specific credit with value in the new programme or qualification.

The SCQF Partnership publishes advisory guidelines for credit transfer, the main burden of which is that processes should be transparent and consistent and 'embedded in general good practice in assuring quality and standards' (SCQF 2009, p.97).

Credit values are used to define types of qualifications within the SCQF. For example, a National Progression Award must have a minimum of 12 points. The definitions of larger qualifications typically refer to minimum number of credit points at each of a range of levels. For example, an HND must have 240 credit points, of which at least 64, including the units for which grades are awarded, must be at level 8 and the remainder at level 7 or above. A Bachelors degree at Honours must have at least 480 credit points of which at least 90 must be at level 10 and at least 90 at level 9. Since a full HND is defined as level 8 and an Honours degree as level 10, this shows that in a credit-based framework only a small proportion of credit points need be at the level of the full qualification. These credit points typically refer to the final year of study and reflect an expectation that the level of learning will rise during a programme. The proportion of credit points at the level of the qualification is likely to be smaller, the larger the number of levels in the framework. The unusually large number of levels (twelve) in the SCQF partly reflects the way that it developed in the course of attempts to develop smoothly graduated progression pathways (notably in the 'climbing frame' of Higher Still), although it also reflects the relatively large number of 'access' levels which incorporate standards associated with the outcomes of education and training for those with learning difficulties.

The SCQF also publishes guidelines on the Recognition of Prior Learning. These state the following principles:
- recognition is given for learning, not for experience alone;
- the learning that is recognised should be transferable;

- SCQF credit points awarded as a result of RPL are of the same value as credit gained through other formal learning (SCQF 2009, p.98).

The SCQF distinguishes different types of outcomes of RPL, not all of which result in the award of SCQF credit points. Where credit points are awarded they may be used to:
- gain entry to the first level of a programme at a college or HEI;
- enable advanced entry to a programme of study at a college, HEI or other learning and training provider (SCQF 2009, p.72).

To summarise: In Scottish VET, and in the Scottish education and training system more broadly, credit is a tool in the management of learning and in the design and planning of programmes. This is probably more important than its use as a tool for the recognition of learning or for credit transfer. The system is based on credit accumulation more than it is based on credit transfer. We elaborate this distinction, which we made in our background report and which informed the design of the Scottish study, in the following section.

2. THE STUDY

Introduction

This research was conducted as part of a four-country study of Credit Systems in Lifelong learning. The study was coordinated by the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) and covered developments in credit in relation to VET in Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands and Scotland. The study focused on specific interfaces over which credit transfer might take place. The precise definition of interfaces has varied across countries and over the course of the project. In this report we focus on three interfaces, respectively: between prior learning (including general education and pre-vocational programmes) and 'mainstream' VET; within mainstream ET; and from VET to higher education (which we have defined to include the interface between college-based HNC/HNDs and university degrees).

In the first phase of the project each national team prepared a Background Report, based on a common template which had been discussed and agreed by project members. This was followed by a meeting of team members, which compared the reports and identified issues to be explored in the second phase, through interviews with key informants from different parts of the system. A further meeting was held among members of all country teams in order to compare findings from the interviews and agree a strategy for reporting. It was agreed that each country would prepare a report which synthesised the findings of the interviews as well as the contextual material, and further research evidence, that had been presented in the Background Report. A common template for country reports was adopted, and this report has been prepared according to that format.

Background Report

The Background Report for Scotland (Raffe, Howieson and Hart 2010b) described the VET system in Scotland and outlined the development of arrangements for credit, most importantly in the form of the SCQF. We have drawn extensively on it in the previous section. It identified key interfaces and reviewed the evidence on progression and transfer across them, and the role of credit in this process. It also discussed conceptual issues as well as some of the practical challenges and issues facing the system. It identified themes to be explored in the interview phase and suggested how they might be pursued.

The Background Report identified issues which we summarise as the paradox of Scottish education and training, although we did not use this term in the Report. The paradox may be stated as follows. On paper, Scotland has a credit-based lifelong learning system which is widely seen to be one of the most flexible in the world; but there is relatively little credit transfer to be observed, in practice, in Scotland.

The Report offered two explanations for this paradox:

1. The first explanation concerns the nature of programmes and qualifications within the system. Much of it is based on relatively short (mainly one-year) programmes, with progression between programmes 'built in' to their design. Entry to programmes and movement between them is flexible, at least with respect to formal requirements. Many programmes can be taken at a faster or slower pace, so learners with relevant prior experience can cover the programme more quickly. In other words, many of the benefits of flexibility are achieved by the way in which learners enter and move between programmes, or progress within them, without the need for more formal processes of credit recognition and transfer. Modern Apprenticeships and university degrees are longer than most other programmes (typically three or four years, although some Modern Apprenticeships are much shorter) but they are designed in a way that should permit credit transfer. They are therefore the exceptions, where we might expect to find most credit transfer in practice, and we pay particular attention to them in this report.

2. The second explanation is that the system provides opportunities for credit transfer, and structures and a language to facilitate it, but it does not mandate their use. The SCQF is voluntary, and education providers vary in their willingness to recognise and transfer credit at the interfaces which they control. Early research on the Action Plan distinguished between the 'intrinsic logic' of a qualifications system, which may favour credit accumulation and transfer, and the 'institutional logic' of its context. The institutional logic includes the factors which shape individuals' choices and opportunities for moving through learning and the labour market, institutional practices and the broader processes of educational and occupational selection which may inhibit the demand for credit transfer or the recognition of credit in practice. Not only may institutional logics provide barriers to credit transfer, but they may vary across sectors of education and training and thereby make it hard to design a comprehensive framework which is sensitive to these multiple logics. The tension between intrinsic and institutional logics has been a leitmotiv of the development of credit arrangements in Scotland.

Focus of interviews
We therefore proposed that the interviews in phase 2 should focus in particular on two themes:
- The use of credit transfer in practice, in relation to the three interfaces; the factors which facilitate or inhibit this use; issues that arise;
- Initiatives to promote the use of the credit framework and to develop new uses, in particular by changing the institutional logics of the relevant sectors of ET. These initiatives include schemes for the recognition of prior learning, the development of collaboration between institutions on either side of a relevant interface, and the construction of new pathways based on the accumulation of credit and its possible transfer between institutional settings.

Criteria for selecting interviewees
We aimed to select interviewees who, individually or taken as a group:
- had the ability to cover these two themes. Typically, this required us to interview individuals who had an overview of part of the system (eg those with policy responsibilities, with a role in qualifications provision, or representing providers or stakeholders in a particular field or sector) or who were themselves providers or who were at the 'cutting edge' of new initiatives;
- would cover all three interfaces; in practice most individual interviewees could comment on at least two interfaces.
- would cover a range of types of VET (eg college- and work-based) across a number of occupational sectors with a focus on construction, engineering and childcare, health and social care as sectors that appeared to be active in relation to credit-related initiatives.

The interview process
We carried out 24 interviews involving 27 individuals between September 2010 and August 2011. Fourteen of the interviews were conducted face-to face (mainly in the interviewee's office/premises) and the other 10 by telephone. It was agreed with individuals that the name of their organisation would appear in the project report but that they would not be named. Annex 1 lists the organisations involved; in several cases more than one member of staff form the organisation was interviewed.

At the beginning of the interview, after an introduction about the project, interviewees were given the following definition of credit and credit transfer that was being used in the project:

"procedures enabling the recognition and crediting of evidenced / proven learning outcomes in order to ease access and transition within the qualification system and / or to shorten the duration of training".

The interviews were semi-structured based on a common interview guide that allowed sufficient scope to tailor the interview to the relevant interfaces(s) and remit of the individual concerned (see Annex 2).

The duration of the interviews ranged from 35 minutes to three hours but more commonly lasted between one and one and a half hours. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the individual(s) concerned and shortly afterwards written up: the intention at this stage was to produce a comprehensive account (including verbatim extracts from the recording) of the interview rather than an analysis. Subsequently each interview report was analysed and a thematic summary produced.

3. TERMINOLOGY

In this section we consider definitions and understanding of the main terms used in connection with credit and credit transfer. We did not ask interviewees directly about their understanding of the different terms but report on their understanding and use (or not) of the terms during the course of the interview; where relevant we outline official definitions and comment on interviewees' understanding of them.

Credit transfer and recognition

In the Background Report for Scotland, we noted that arriving at a definition of the term 'credit transfer' that would be meaningful in the Scottish context as well as the other countries would be critical to the success of the interview phase of the project. However, as we have noted above, the Scottish system is largely credit-based, unitised and built around a combination of shorter and longer programmes that normally have credit accumulation and progression routes built into them. In this system a form of credit accumulation tends to be a normal or automatic process which requires no special arrangements and therefore has little visibility; a stronger notion of credit transfer would be seen as unnecessary or irrelevant in many contexts and would therefore have even less visibility. This was reflected in the interviews where we found that many interviewees, especially those not working at a policy level or in higher education, did not readily relate to or use the term 'credit transfer'; they were more likely to talk in terms of `progression' which might or might not include an element of credit transfer.

The terms 'recognise' and 'taking account of' were also used by interviewees in a non-technical way to refer to the process of gaining a picture of an individual's previous education, training and experience to help make decisions about level of entry to a programme or about the content of a training programme. This use of the term 'recognise' was different from how the term 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) was employed. As we noted above, the SCQF guidelines on the Recognition of Prior Learning set out the principles and the different types of outcomes of RPL, in particular, the difference between its use for a variety of formative purposes and its use in a summative way to achieve the award of SCQF Credit Points. While the SCQF guidance does refer to previous formal learning, the emphasis is on the recognition of informal or non-formal learning. SQA are developing their policy on RPL and this gives more attention to formal learning, including the recognition of formal qualifications (both old SQA qualifications and those of other awarding bodies) as well as informal and non-formal learning, reflecting SQA's needs as an awarding body.

For some interviewees, their focus was on the formative function of RPL in relation to individuals' prior experience at work and elsewhere; this seems to be where most of the development of RPL is happening, as we describe later in this report. For others, the summative function of RPL was more important. It was notable that several interviewees from the labour market side referred not to 'RPL' but to 'APL' that is the Accreditation of Prior Learning. APL or APEL (the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) was the term generally used from the late 1980s until the mid 2000s when the main outcome of the process was expected to be either entry to, or credit within formal programmes or qualifications. Following an SCQF consultation and review, the developmental role of RPL was given greater focus with the use of the term 'RPL' adopted to reflect its formative as well as summative role (Whittaker 2011). In using 'APL' rather then 'RPL' these interviewees were indicating their interest in RPL was in respect of the award of a formal qualification or credit.

Permeability and flexibility

The term 'permeability' was simply not used by interviewees. 'Flexibility', on the other hand, was used extensively: the term has been part of the education and training discourse in Scotland for many years and the concept of flexibility (while often left undefined) is regarded as integral to, and as one of the most positive features, of the Scottish system. No-one in Scotland would wish to be seen as inflexible or for their provision to be viewed as such. Interviewees used the term in a variety of ways: in discussing the way in which the

Scottish education and training system enables individuals to move flexibly up, down and across different sub-systems within it; to refer to the flexibility of entry points depending on an individuals' previous experience; in relation to the flexibility of programme delivery eg the increasing emphasis on e-learning and workplace delivery or the flexible timing of assessment at college or in the workplace; and in respect of the flexibility to combine different types of provision (such as PDAs with HNs, or for school pupils to take HN units alongside Highers).

Learning outcomes

We described earlier how all qualifications or learning programmes in the SCQF must be based on learning outcomes. The SCQF, like the EQF, defines learning outcomes as 'statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences' (SCQF 2009, p.8). Its concept of learning outcome is 'loose' in at least three respects: it embraces a wide range of types of learning outcomes; it does not treat learning outcomes as a sufficient basis for describing learning or the qualification based on it, instead, other types of information (such as 'professional judgement' or familiarity with learning programmes) are required to interpret statements of learning outcomes; and relatedly, the SCQF accommodates a variety of different concepts of learning outcome within its sub-frameworks.

SQA uses learning outcomes of all kinds in its National and Higher National qualifications. Depending on the area and level of learning outcomes may refer to demonstrations of knowledge and understanding, the ability to use generic cognitive skills, the ability to use occupationally specific practical skills, or the capability to demonstrate a range of what are sometimes called *behaviours* or *personal competences* such as leadership and initiative.

SVQs are based on relatively a 'tight' concept of learning outcome, called elements of competence, which define national occupational standards. Since 1996 the bodies which develop these standards and those which award SVQs have had freedom to use a variety of formats, although most retain the broad outline of the original format which consists of:
* units of competence, expressed as outcomes and which describe a substantial work role;
* elements of competence within each unit, which describe, in outcomes, the sub activities of the work role;
* performance criteria attached to each element of competence, which describe the successful outcomes of performance;
* a range statement, setting out variations to be covered by the element (there is considerable variation in the adoption of this component); and
* the essential knowledge and understanding required to meet the standard.

The interviewees were familiar with the concept of learning outcomes, how this differed across the sub-systems in the SCQF and the consequences for credit and credit transfer. For example, interviewees in FE referred to the role of professional judgment when assessing how much credit it would be appropriate to allocate to a candidate for his/her previous education or training, recognising the need to go beyond simply the specified outcomes of the previous learning. In discussing the difficulty of credit transfer between SVQs and NCs or HNs, interviewees referred to the differences between the SVQ and NC and HN concepts of learning outcomes and how these impacted on the possibility of credit. In discussions with interviewees from the labour market side, it was apparent that while they recognised that the minimum timescales set out for some Modern Apprenticeships might be seen as at odds

with the outcomes based nature of SVQs, that at least a partial justification for this related to their understanding that the concept of learning outcomes includes the essential knowledge and understanding to meet the required standard and that this can take time to acquire. (It should also be acknowledged that fears about dilution and traditional attitudes were among other factors.)

Vocational learning, skills and occupational competence

Vocational education and training (VET) provision in Scotland is very varied and there is no clear boundary between what is defined as VET and general education. The Scottish Government's skills strategy document identifies several overlapping clusters of skills, including core skills, employability skills, essential skills and vocational skills which it defines as skills 'that are specific to a particular occupation or sector' (Scottish Government 2007, p8). However, there is no agreed or consistent understanding of the term 'vocational' and it is applied to a wider range of types of learning. In the Background Report we suggested that it may be helpful to think of Scottish VET as a continuum including:

- provision to develop full workplace *competence* in specific occupational roles (eg Modern Apprenticeships and training leading to SVQs) ;
- provision to develop *capability*, but not full workplace competence, in occupational areas (eg many college-based programmes leading to National Qualifications); and
- *pre-vocational* learning - this includes learning that is not related to a particular occupational area (such as enterprise education) and learning that may take place in an occupational context but whose main outcomes are defined in generic terms (such as the 'employability skills' developed by Skills for Work courses for school-age pupils).

The perceptions and views expressed by the interviewees about different courses and programmes could, in fact, largely be understood in relation to this continuum. Interviewees saw the outcomes of courses or programmes taken by school pupils such as Skills for Work as being about the development of employability skills and pupils' understanding of the demands of the particular occupational sector as well as demonstrating their interest in the occupational sector. It was clear that none of the interviewees perceived full-time provision in either FE or HE as delivering full workplace competence; even where students completed work placements these were not viewed as enabling students to achieve vocational competencies. This was reflected in comments that HN and degree graduates were not 'job ready' when they completed their course and would not be fully competent until they had been in the workplace for some time. Indeed, the statements of several interviewees from the labour market side suggest that they did not think that some full-time NC courses at college could really be considered fully vocational and, if asked, might have been more likely to locate them towards the pre-vocational end of the continuum than to the opposite end. For interviewees, Modern Apprenticeships were clearly located at the end of the continuum relating to provision that develops full workplace competence in specific occupational roles. The term 'occupational competence' was very commonly used in discussing MAs. SVQs were also thought of in this way by interviewees.

Core skills are the five generic skills of communication, numeracy, information and communications technology, working with others and problem-solving. They may be delivered in discrete units or 'embedded' in learning with a more specific focus. They are a required component of many vocational programmes including Modern Apprenticeships, although the particular core skills level and the level at which they are required may vary. The concept of core skills was widely recognised among our interviewees, and perceived to be important in relation to access and progression.

4. PROCEDURES

Political context

In Section 1 we outlined the series of reforms which led to the SCQF and to a qualifications system which, at least on paper, provides considerable scope for learners to move flexibly through the system and in doing so to accumulate and, where appropriate, transfer credit. The structures and language of credit are embedded in the mainstream system, although their use in practice is often at the discretion of providers or other stakeholders. Current policy efforts therefore focus on promoting their use, and on extending them to non-mainstream learning. This focus is reflected in the sections that follow, which describe, in relation to each interface, the current practical use of credit transfer and current 'initiatives' to extend this use or to create new structures within which transfer might take place.

Our discussion is based largely on our interview data since, as we noted in the Background Report, there is a relative lack of data on the topic. While the SCQF Partnership has created a central database of opportunities registered on the SCQF, there is still no central record of learners and the use that they make of these opportunities. This reflects the voluntary nature of the SCQF and its character as a meta-framework. Most data are collected and held by individual awarding bodies, who do not routinely report the number or proportion of awards that involve recognition of credit from elsewhere, or that give credit for prior learning in admitting students. Relatively few studies of credit transfer have been carried out, and these have tended to look at *opportunities* for credit transfer, or the way these opportunities are designed and implemented, rather than *their use* by learners. Other studies have focused on the impact of specific policies or measures rather than the overall impact and use of credit arrangements. Moreover, studies to date have focused on the interface between Higher National qualifications and university degrees with little, if any, attention to credit transfer from general education into vocational education and training or credit transfer within mainstream vocational education and training. In addition, as we have already highlighted, discussion of the practical use of credit transfer in the Scottish system is problematic because of the way credit is used within the Scottish system - the type of flexibility that may be achieved by credit *transfer* in other systems may be achieved in Scotland through credit *accumulation* and more generally through the interconnectedness of qualifications in the SQA portfolio and in the SCQF. Credit in Scotland serves multiple uses, of which credit transfer is arguably not the most important.

Drivers. In section 1 we noted that current developments in credit were influenced by four main policy drivers, which we summarised under the headings:
-   developing skills for economic growth and competitiveness;
-   post-16 participation;
-   widening access; and
-   efficient, flexible learner journeys.

Our interviewees broadly endorsed this judgement, although they tended to mention cost-effectiveness and lifelong learning (making the system more learner-centred) as additional drivers, and fewer mentioned post-16 participation. Most perceived the skills agenda to be increasingly dominant. Some drew attention to negative consequences of current policies, in particular the cuts in public funding and the changed priorities that these reflected. This included, for example, a reduction in the funding for colleges' work with schools.

Interface 1: from prior learning into mainstream VET

This interface relates to transitions into mainstream VET at college (mainly NC and HN programmes) and into work-based training in the form of Modern Apprenticeships (which are usually based on SVQs, sometimes with the addition of NCs or HNs). These transitions include transitions from general education in secondary schools, although we would most expect to see credit to be transferred from pre-vocational courses for school pupils such as the Skills for Work which are certificated as National Qualifications by the SQA; they also include transitions from pre-apprenticeship programmes and from training programmes for young people at risk of exclusion such as Get Ready for Work.

The qualifications reforms which led to the SCQF (especially the Action Plan and Higher Still) introduced a common architecture for qualifications for general, prevocational and vocational learning in schools and colleges. This is now embodied in the National Qualifications framework of units, courses and group awards. In principle it is possible to transfer credit from units or courses taken at school to college programmes, and from smaller awards such as Skills for Work courses or National Progression Awards to larger National Certificate awards. Not only does the qualifications structure thus provide opportunities for credit transfer, but this is potentially becoming more important with current attempts to expand pre-vocational learning in schools, to promote collaboration between schools and colleges, to expand the role of informal and non-formal learning in catering for the post-16 age group and to ensure that the range of opportunities is better coordinated so that it meets the needs of the client group and provides clearer progression routes. The OECD (2007) report which advocated broader curricular provision, including more prevocational learning, drew heavily on the Australian experience. The attractiveness of Australian VET-in-school courses is claimed to rest on the way they are based on occupational standards and offer 'authentic' vocational learning with the potential for credit transfer into the mainstream VET (TAFE) sector.

This interface also includes transitions of potentially at-risk adults on training programmes as well as transitions from Community Learning and Development and other types of non-formal and informal learning. We have considered these other transitions primarily in relation to the recognition of prior learning (RPL). Those currently in work and with considerable employment experience but who have not previously undertaken formal VET are also included in this interface in relation to RPL. However, as we see below, RPL as practised in Scotland is often only loosely associated with credit transfer. We therefore discuss the interface between pre-vocational or general education separately from RPL; we discuss each first in relation to current practice and then in relation to new initiatives.

Credit transfer between general/pre-vocational education and mainstream VET: current practice
There is little credit transfer across this interface. The potential for credit transfer from pre-vocational education into mainstream VET was generally seen as very limited since pre-vocational provision centres on the development of employability skills rather than on vocational skills; even in programmes where participants covered a range of craft skills, the focus was on doing so as a vehicle for employability skills rather than the craft skills as such. The main benefit of pre-vocational provision was perceived as improved access to initial VET; this was the common view across all the interviews that covered this interface. Participation in pre-vocational provision was seen as improving participants' knowledge of the sector which they could then demonstrate in their applications and at interview; as indicating to the recruiter that the applicant had a genuine interest in the sector and had

good employability skills: *'it's an indication that they're interested and that having experienced the area they've decided it's what they want to do… they actually know what's involved.'* Most interviewees also thought that the experience gained in a pre-vocational programme would enable participants to perform better in the selection tests that were generally used as part of the Modern Apprenticeship recruitment process.

Credit transfer from pre-vocational education into Modern Apprenticeships, which mainly offer SVQs, or onto college provision that deliver SVQs, was seen as especially unlikely since SVQs are based on National Occupational Standards while pre-vocational provision is not. Moreover, interviewees emphasised that candidates for SVQs must demonstrate competence in the workplace over a substantial period of time but most pre-vocational programmes only offer short periods of work experience. One interviewee did think that there might be some possibility of more recognition of Skills for Work courses since they are linked to National Occupational Standards (although the qualifications awarded are National Qualifications) but discussions about this are at a very early stage and no other interviewee saw any significant credit transfer from pre-vocational provision as a possibility. It was noted that, for example, in the Construction sector about 20% of apprentices starting a Modern Apprenticeship had been on a Modern Apprenticeships Construction course but that they would not have received any credit for this.

A recent study of programmes to provide opportunities for young people at risk of becoming NEET noted that some of these programmes provided articulation to Modern Apprenticeships, training and employment programmes, but the report made no mention of credit transfer (Lowden *et al*. 2009). It concluded that effective provision offered 'appropriate assessment to recognise learners' achievements and provide nationally recognised qualifications to provide credible accreditation for young people', and that promoting progression and positive transitions and destinations was 'extremely important', along with other features of the process, content and organisation of learning and the relevant support. However, there is no suggestion in the report either that credit transfer is a necessary component of effective practice or that it was available in the programmes studied.

Core skills. The one aspect where an element of credit transfer occurred was in respect of transfer of core skills both to full-time courses and to Modern Apprenticeships. Interviewees noted that if someone can show evidence that they already have any of the core skills they would not be expected to take it again, for example, in the case of Modern Apprenticeships, one interviewee described the process whereby the SVQ Assessor would go through the core skill profile on the SQA website to see which core skills the candidate had achieved at school and cross-match it to the core skills in the Modern Apprenticeship Framework. But this interviewee also made the point that in her experience, the core skills that school leavers are credited with will usually have been achieved in their general subjects at school not in a pre-vocational programme. From the evidence of the interviewees, the outcome of such credit is that it enables the person to enhance his/her course or Modern Apprenticeship rather than to shorten it since s/he would be expected to take the core skill at a higher level or replace it with some other element relevant to his/her training.

Level of entry. Another benefit, in some cases, is that pre-vocational learning can enable an individual to enter a college course at a higher level than would otherwise have been the case, effectively saving up to a year. This seemed most likely in college courses which had no formal entry qualifications but where the decision about the level at which an applicant

should enter (eg SVQ2 rather than SVQ1 Hospitality) depended on a judgement about their motivation, focus and level of commitment to a career in the particular industry.

Faster progression. Many Scottish VET programmes offer the flexibility to undertake assessment when the candidate and assessor think it is appropriate. A number of interviewees suggested that the knowledge base that learners gained from pre-vocational courses could therefore enable them to progress through their training more quickly. However, it should be noted that some Modern Apprenticeships have a specified a minimum timescale for completion which limits the extent to which they can be taken more quickly. Several interviewees did not share the view that pre- vocational learning enabled faster progress: in their experience the learner's academic level at school was the best predictor of the speed at which they would complete their training. Part of the explanation for these different experiences and opinions may relate to the occupational sector in question.

Repetition of learning. In their review of unitisation, Hart and Howieson (2004) note that the recognition of prior certificated learning was an issue within the unitised system; particularly in the early days of National Certificate modules, it was common for college students to have to repeat units they had already covered at school. More recently, a report on Modern Apprenticeship and Skillseekers noted that core skills taken at school were sometimes not being recognised so that some learners had to repeat this as part of their Modern Apprenticeship (Cambridge Consultants 2007). There was some evidence of such repetition from the interviews conducted as part of this study. Several interviewees recounted instances where individuals had been required to repeat NC units they had already successfully taken at school on their subsequent college course. This appeared to be related to timetabling and resource considerations; the college found it too difficult or too expensive to provide alternative options. Other interviewees gave examples of training providers who did not accept SVQ units taken as part of a school-college pre-apprenticeship programme but required apprentices to undergo some training and to re-take the assessment.   In this case the issue was one of trust: the training providers did not trust the training and assessment that had been carried out at college. The consequence of this lack of trust is somewhat ironic. If training providers recruited young people who had been on the pre- apprenticeship programme then government funding for them would be reduced on the basis that they already had some of the necessary SVQ units, but the training providers still incurred the costs since they believed that they had to provide the re-training and re-assessment.

Credit transfer between general/pre-vocational education and mainstream VET: initiatives
Several school-college partnerships have been created to deliver HN units to school pupils with progression to full-time HN programmes at college afterwards. These initiatives have been stimulated by the Regional Articulation Hub, but its funding to support colleges' work with schools has been cut, so one of the projects will not continue. One initiative that is continuing involves a college and a local school which have developed two clusters of HN units (a Social Science Cluster and a Digital Media cluster). Successful completion will count towards the entry requirements for the full HNC/D at the college; students will not repeat these units and will instead either undertake a research project or an industrial placement. Completion of the HN units will not shorten the full-time HN course but will give students the opportunity to enhance it as well as improving their chances of being accepted onto it.

Recognition of prior learning: current practice

A review of RPL in Scotland in 2008 identified examples of good practice but found that it was not consistently accessible or delivered across areas, industry sectors or sectors of education and training (Inspire Scotland 2008). Similarly, a scoping exercise on RPL for refugee groups and migrant workers found a considerable level of activity by different organisations but identified a need for better signposting and greater accessibility, and put forward options for a Recognition Centre to the Scottish Government (Guest and Vecchia 2010).

This study suggests that RPL in Scotland is used more as a formative tool (including as a step in the process of gaining formal certification) than as a means of formal accreditation. However, the SQA is developing its policy and guidance on RPL with an emphasis on its summative purposes and on the accreditation of formal learning (including certification from other awarding bodies) which may in the future increase its use for formal accreditation.

Interviewees identified a number of barriers or disincentives for using RPL for formal certification: cost issues; the perceived complexity of the process including quality assurance demands; uncertainty about its value and currency; and the alternative offered by SVQs. In terms of cost, for example, colleges make a charge for undertaking RPL for the experience or units in question and mapping them to SQA units. SQA also charge a fee to award and certificate the units that have been recognised in this way. Consequently RPL might not save the individual any money although it might save him/her time.

In VET that offers SVQs, the SVQ design based on learning outcomes with the possibility for candidates to take the assessment without having to undertake any training diminishes the need to go through a formal RPL process for certification purposes: '*why do RPL when you've got the VQ there*?'. College staff described how if someone came in with relevant prior experience they would look at the assessment for each SVQ unit and establish, in discussion with the student, where they could '*go straight to the assessment*' and where they might need to take relevant classes.

Recognition of prior learning: initiatives

The Social Services sector, led by the Scottish Social Services Sector Council (SSSC), has been at the forefront of the development of RPL processes within the context of the SCQF to support workforce development: '*the Social Services RPL has led the way in the post SCQF world of RPL*'. The SSSC in partnership with the SCQF Partnership supported the development and piloting of an *SCQF RPL pack and profiling tool*. This initiative was prompted by the need to enable unqualified care workers to gain the qualifications (SVQ 3) that are now required for registration purposes. It was recognised that many of the care workers lacked confidence and were reluctant to undertake the SVQ so the focus of the RPL pilot was on the formative process: building staff's confidence and helping to develop the reflective skills they would need to be able to provide the evidence for their SVQs. The aim was not to shorten the time to achieve the SVQ3 but about '*smoothing the process*' and '*getting [the care worker]to the stage that they're up and running, ready to 'really 'go' for the SVQ'.* The evaluation of the project with learners and mentors/assessors was largely positive and the model has been extended to other SVQ levels. Several interviewees reported that the model and resource pack have been taken up and used by employers for different aspects of workforce development including recruitment and induction as well as continuous professional development although not under the banner of RPL.

While some interviewees were extremely positive about the SSSC model, they also thought that most employers were still to be convinced of the benefits of RPL as a cost effective way to build a trained workforce although at the level of sector skills councils there is support for it. Moreover, not all interviewees were positive about the SSSC model. One college-based interviewee noted that while the SSSC had '*done a good job… RPL is inherently complex*'. Students still found the process complicated and it demanded a high level of reflection, critical thinking and communication - the very abilities that many of those who wanted recognition for their practical experience did not have. It is also a demanding process for the college. Nevertheless, there has been much interest in the SSSC RPL model and resources and the SCQF Partnership has subsequently developed a generic RPL Toolkit heavily based on it for other organisations or sectors to adapt and contextualise for their own use.

Another initiative is the development of an *RPL Profiling Tool and SCQF benchmarking guide* piloted in 2008-09 for Skills Development Scotland. This was designed for school pupils, especially those at risk of not achieving a positive post-school destination. The intention was to help them map and benchmark their learning and skills from their wider out-of-school activities against the SCQF; this would enable them to recognise and articulate their skills and experience to support applications and help them assess the type and level of further education and training to which they might progress. The pilot evaluations highlighted the challenges of producing accessible materials that pupils as well as careers advisers could understand and use; this required simplification of the SCQF level descriptors and greater exemplification of the levels. The pilot also demonstrated the time-intensive nature of the process. Another issue, perhaps especially relevant to this target group, was that where some pupils could not identify an experience to use in the benchmarking element of the process this could result in a negative rather than a positive outcome. Careers Advisers were concerned about the currency of the outcomes especially since the process was being undertaken without a specific end-user in mind. A parallel project was undertaken to develop another version of the RPL profiling tool and guidelines for use with redundant workers. It is not clear whether these pilots will be further developed for mainstream use.

Interface 2: within mainstream VET
In this interface we focus on transitions between full-time VET typically delivered in colleges (often leading to NC group awards) and work-based VET that is often delivered in Modern Apprenticeships, based on national occupational standards and certificated at least partly by competence-based SVQs. We also consider transitions between different Modern Apprenticeships and between different qualifications, especially those awarded by different bodies.

Credit transfer within mainstream VET: current practice
Limited credit transfer. While all those interviewed about credit transfer within this interface were clear that in principle no-one should have to repeat learning already completed and of which they could provide evidence, it was apparent that credit transfer across this interface is limited. This applies to credit transfer between full-time VET programmes at college to work-based Modern Apprenticeships and also between Modern Apprenticeships. Indeed, the majority of interviewees who commented on this interface did not perceive a significant level of credit transfer as possible because of the need to develop skill sets within a specific occupational context and the competence based nature of SVQs, the main qualification undertaken in work-based training. While the funding arrangements for Modern Apprenticeships are an incentive in principle for credit transfer (Skills

Development Scotland will not fund training already completed), the possibility of doing so is limited by a number of factors.

Transfer between full-time college-based provision and Modern Apprenticeships is limited in particular by the content and assessment of the SVQ element of the Modern Apprenticeship. One interviewee summed this up: *'The key to credit is being able to demonstrate occupational competence'* and this requires *'capturing the evidence against occupational standards, in a real job in a real workplace and demonstrating the competence over a period of time not just on one occasion'*. These requirements therefore rule out credit from college-based qualifications for the SVQ element of Modern Apprenticeships. The fact that it is not possible to give credit for part of a unit further limits the possibility of credit; *'they may have touched on parts of the unit [in their NC] but not sufficiently so that it can be signed off'*.

Modern Apprenticeships vary in the extent to which their Framework specification offers the potential for credit transfer. If the Framework specifies an education (college-based) component, as for example in Engineering and Construction, then the apprentice may be able to gain credit for this component if they already have an appropriate award. In this case it may save the individual some time, perhaps around 2-3 months of the Modern Apprenticeships but it appears that instead of shortening the Modern Apprenticeship, more commonly they take the education component at a higher level. In Modern Apprenticeships without an education component the potential for credit transfer is more limited. Moreover, the duration of Modern Apprenticeships vary so that in the shorter one lasting perhaps six months or so, then there is less incentive to seek or to award credit.

The other aspect of Modern Apprenticeships where credit transfer from college-based provision may be possible is the core skills component and other generic units in areas such as health and safety. Nevertheless, even for these types of skills it seems that the issue of occupational context can still limit transfer. One interviewee suggested that in the development of core skill units, awarding bodies have given too much weight to context rather than focus on the core skills themselves. Several interviewees, however, pointed out that the transfer of credit for a generic unit between different Modern Apprenticeships cannot be assumed, that the occupational standards for generic units such as health and safety or customer service can differ between Modern Apprenticeships in terms of the work environment and the industry specifics: *'you can't take these generic units at face value'*. For example, although Health and Safety is a generic unit, it will need to be covered in greater depth in Hospitality than in Retail but in even more depth in Childcare than in Hospitality.

The completion of a full-time college course in a relevant area was perceived to improve individuals' chances of gaining an apprenticeship; it might also enable them to complete certain aspects of the Modern Apprenticeship more quickly and/or be 'fast-tracked' to the SVQ assessment. This also applies to those entering a Modern Apprenticeship with relevant industrial experience: interviewees generally thought that while it was difficult to allocate formal credit for this to an SVQ because the experience was unlikely to map over *fully* to the complete SVQ unit, such apprentices would generally require less formal training and would undertake the assessments more quickly. The possibility of fast-tracking to the assessment seemed to undercut the alternative approach of undertaking RPL to credit industrial experience. RPL or APL (as more usually referred to in mainstream VET interviews) was regarded by those who commented on it at this interface as difficult, costly and possibly

lacking real currency. Furthermore, the awarding bodies were perceived as lacking the industrial knowledge to make an appropriate judgement and as being reluctant to accept RPL evidence towards unit achievement in a context of nervousness about standards.

The currency of the skills and experience was identified as another issue that could limit transfer: '*how up to date is someone's skills when they're looking for credit transfer?*' This was reported to be an increasing problem with regard to redundant workers but also applies more generally. Job roles change, occupational standards have a limited 'shelf-life' and Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks are revised with additional units being added constantly. Given this fast rate of change, it can be easier for employers to assess the person against the full and *current* occupational standards than seek to give them credit for the previous learning and they may be advised by Skills Development Scotland to do so.

There appeared to be less movement from work-based Modern Apprenticeships to full-time college based VET. In the few examples we encountered in this study, it seemed to the case that where there was an appropriate SVQ (eg in child development) then the FE staff would credit this to the corresponding NC or HNC unit, exercising their professional discretion and perhaps requiring the student to undertake some additional work.

Credit transfer between Modern Apprenticeships. The interviews indicate that movement and thus the demand for credit transfer between different Modern Apprenticeships is not common. If someone does comes in from a different Modern Apprenticeship, then any unit that has been fully completed and signed off and which maps over *completely* to all the standards of the relevant unit will be given credit. But only small numbers move from one Framework to another; instead the interviewees noted that movement is usually within a Framework, for example to a different pathway within Engineering, often because the person has changed employers. Transfer to a different pathway within a Modern Apprenticeship Framework is most likely to happen at the end of the first year before the more specialised training takes place; at this Foundation level stage (SVQ level 2) there are likely to be some common units and apprentices would be exempted from any units they have already completed. While it is still possible to transfer after first year, this is more difficult but we were told there is very little demand for this. Redundant apprentices generally stay within their craft area and start from the point they left off without any repetition.

Where apprentices change pathways within a Modern Apprenticeship Framework, the procedure is usually for the new training provider to examine the apprentice's portfolio and check with the previous training provider and /or SQA that it has been properly assessed, verified and signed off and then the individual will be credited with the unit. Since SDS will not pay for training already funded in the same occupational area, it is clearly in the training provider's interest to ensure credit is given for completed units.

But the extent to which credit transfer is possible within a Modern Apprenticeship Framework appears to vary across occupational areas' For example, it seems that there is less credit transfer across the different Construction trades, that while there are some transferable units between some of the main crafts, the design of the Modern Apprenticeship means that in practice apprentices who transfer pathways within Construction have to start again at the beginning.

Minimum time requirements. There is a limit to the extent to which some Modern Apprenticeships can be shortened through credit and exemptions because the particular Framework includes a minimum time scale for completion. While VET in Scotland has moved from a time-serving basis to a competence-based system, in some of the traditional Modern Apprenticeships, achieving occupational competence is seen as requiring a certain length of training. In Engineering, for example, the SSC sets minimum timescales for completion of the various Modern Apprenticeships within the sector (typically 3-3.5 years) although it stresses that this is only a guide and that some apprentices may be able to complete their Modern Apprenticeship faster. They would, however, look closely at applications for completion of the Modern Apprenticeship that were significantly outside the normal duration.

The Construction industry, in particular, appears to give considerable weight to the time element (at least at craft level) and apprentices must also take a separate Skills Test at the end of the Modern Apprenticeship; this was seen by several interviewees as an anachronism and that greater flexibility to vary the duration of the Modern Apprenticeship is required. In the non-traditional Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks apprentices can go through at a different pace and length of time depending on their job role and ability but even here some Sector Skills Councils have recently started to specify minimum times (6-9 months) because of concerns and criticisms of low standards.

Since the beginning of 2010, all new or revised Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks submitted to the Modern Apprenticeship Group (MAG) for approval must have all components, where possible, credit-rated and levelled against the SCQF. The aim is that in the longer term this will increase the portability of Modern Apprenticeships and make the SCQF and the idea of transferability real for employers and workers. Clearly this development is at an early stage but opinion among those interviewed varied, several referred to it as a 'paper exercise' but another spoke of its positive impact on the apprentices he supervised: '*it lets them see where they can go on to, how they can drop in and out of the system and go on to degree if they want to … some are coming in thinking their career is limited, that doing an apprenticeship they're at quite a low level but then when they see where the MA is placed on SCQF they can see that they're actually at a reasonable level with VQ3 and that they can move across to other qualifications'.*

A related development is the recognition by MAG of a wider range of competence based qualifications in addition to SVQs within Modern Apprenticeships. This is part of the efforts to introduce greater flexibility into Modern Apprenticeships and improve their transferability, all of which may increase the amount of credit transfer in the future although the interviewees did not expect this to be extensive.

Credit transfer within mainstream VET: initiatives
A pilot accelerated apprenticeship for existing staff with relevant industrial experience has been developed by the engineering Sector Skills Council (Semta) in collaboration with two major employers and their respective colleges and with trade union consultation. This initiative arose from research that identified a need for the industry to train its existing unskilled and semi-skilled employees to meet future demand for skilled workers in a context of a decline in the number of school leavers.

The approach is to combine the relevant SVQ (Performing Engineering Operations) with the NC in Engineering against which it has been benchmarked. Rather than give exemptions for the candidates' industrial experience, they are accelerated through the SVQ assessment

(since they do not need much training due to this experience) and the evidence that they generate for the SVQ is then used to gain the NC award in addition to the SVQ. The mapping of the SVQ to the NC is not a complete perfect match; candidates still have to do some NC units because there are some units for which the SVQ does not provide evidence but with this approach the Modern Apprenticeship can be gained in around 18 months (around half of the usual time). RPL was considered but rejected on the grounds of cost, difficulty and doubt about the currency of the end award.

This is not an accelerated apprenticeship for adults generally; candidates must have relevant industrial experience and have the capacity to complete the apprenticeship.

Interface 3: from VET to higher education
In this interface we consider transitions between colleges' sub-degree provision (HNCs and HNDs) and degree-level provision (largely at university) although we would note that the implied labelling of college as 'vocational' and university degrees as 'non-vocational' is questionable. HNCs and HNDs (or HNs) are short-cycle HE programmes, one and two years respectively if studied full-time, which traditionally provided access to technician-level and lower-managerial occupations. They are placed at levels 7 and 8 of the SCQF and are equivalent to the first one or two years of a (four-year) Honours degree. This interface also includes transitions between Modern Apprenticeships/SVQs and degrees. SVQs at level 3 are assigned at SCQF level 6 or 7; and SVQs at level 4 are assigned at SCQF level 8 or 9, so in principle they are equivalent to the first or second year of an Honours degree.

In Scotland, this is the most important interface for credit transfer, it is where credit transfer is most visible and understood and where most credit transfer takes place, largely between HN programmes and university degrees. Attention is now, however, beginning to be directed to other possible credit transfer routes such as SVQs/MAs to degree and using school qualifications not only for entry to degree but also for credit with advanced entry to perhaps the second year of a degree. These developments are part of creating the '*flexible, efficient learner journeys'* that government policy envisages.

Credit transfer from HNs to degrees: current practice
In the academic year 2009-10 a total of 5,456 HN students went on to degree study. In terms of credit transfer, or articulation as it is more generally referred to in this interface, just under half of them articulated (2,595; 48%) entering second year if they had an HNC and third year if their qualification was an HND.

Articulation agreements. This use of HN qualifications to gain entry to, and frequently credit towards, degree study takes place largely in the context of partnerships between colleges and universities often in the form of articulation agreements of varying degrees of formality. In effect, such partnerships provide the basis whereby general credit may be guaranteed to become specific credit.

Such articulation agreements between colleges and universities have been in existence for a number of years and pre-date the SCQF but more recently, the SFC has sought not only to encourage the creation of more articulation routes but also to promote a greater degree of formality in the existing articulation agreements and to encourage institutions to provide more support for articulating students to ensure their transition from HN to degree study is successful. As part of this strategy, the SFC has funded five Regional Articulation Hubs, each based on a regional partnership of universities and colleges whose role is to work with these

partners to develop articulation routes and support activities. It appears that the Articulation Hubs have helped to raise the profile of articulation, encouraged a more formal and structured approach and stimulated initiatives (see below).

Credit transfer from HN to degree is an accepted part of the landscape in Scotland but a number of studies have identified issues or barriers in practice (Maclennan *et al*. 2000; Knox and Massie 2007), many of which were echoed by our interviewees.

Credit is discretionary. In the first instance, recognition and the award of credit for HN qualifications is at the discretion of the receiving institution and in practice the more traditional universities have been reluctant to do so. The reasons include their position as 'selector' universities with their courses already heavily over-subscribed, lack of acceptance in principle of the equivalence of levels, and comparisons with traditional entry students. One interviewee summed up the view of some academic staff thus: *'why bother with articulating students…they struggle anyhow and don't want to do honours''*. In 2009-10, 80% of the HN students who articulated into second or third year were concentrated in four universities in Scotland, all of them 'new' universities.

Nevertheless, it should also be remembered that while government is strongly in favour of HN students articulating, that is entering the second or third year of a degree, some students chose not to do so for social and/or academic reasons (Howieson and Croxford 2011). Interviewees thought that this should continue to be possible although it may not be regarded as an 'efficient learner journey'.

Guaranteed places. University practice in relation to guaranteeing a certain number of places for articulating students appears to vary. For example, one university uses formal agreements which include a guarantee of the number of articulating students it will accept as an '*admissions device'* to enable them to specify conditions of entry and manage scarce places; another university has decided not to specify numbers being concerned that it would have to honour the stated number and thereby lose flexibility to take students from other routes. But the interviews also revealed that it is relatively common for colleges not to provide the university with the agreed number of articulating students even in high demand subject areas. This clearly causes considerable difficulty for the university that has planned on the basis of these numbers. The main reason for such a shortfall is that not enough of the HN students meet the necessary criteria to articulate by the end of their course reflecting, in part, the colleges' recruitment practices.

However, the increased demand for university places, and caps or cuts in the number of available places, have had an adverse effect on HN students wishing to articulate. Interviewees posed the question: '*what happens to widening access and articulation in a climate of limited resources?'* Many students who had entered their HNC/D two years previously in the expectation that they could later move into degree study were not able to do so. While universities struggled to maintain the number of articulating students because of the increased demand for places, they were under pressure from the SFC which believed that there was scope for them to improve their management of their different recruitment streams and to provide better protection for the articulation route. The SFC has recently adopted a set of core principles, which state that it is a condition of SFC funding for articulation that the university operates a system of guaranteed places. The preferred model involves guarantees to individual students, conditional on their HN outcomes, but other options include guarantees at the level of the course, the college or the university.

It was suggested in the interviews that the current difficult economic climate might see greater emphasis in articulation on degrees in which all students spend the first and second years taking HNDs delivered in college before progressing to years 3 and 4 in the university. *Not a standardised process*. It was evident from the interviews that articulation activity across Scotland is not a standardised process following a common template. Articulation agreements are negotiated between an individual university and their partner colleges; within the university responsibility for articulation and articulation agreements lies with academic staff within Faculties/Schools which have a high level of autonomy in deciding on the articulation agreements they want (or not) and the nature and conditions set out in the articulation agreement although there may be some oversight at a university level and the agreement officially signed at a higher level. Thus articulation is dependent on the preferences and enthusiasm of individual Faculties, sometimes departments or even individuals within them so that practice is variable across Scotland and issues remain as to whether articulation is embedded in colleges' and universities' normal practice and processes. The code of practice introduced by the SFC may establish more uniformity although it only covers articulation agreements directly funded by the SFC. The Scottish Government's (2011) consultation on post-16 education notes that the lack of a 'consistent process adopted across further and higher education' is a barrier to articulation. It raises the possibility of legislation to create a statutory framework to guarantee articulation from college to university where there is a clear curricular fit.

Other issues highlighted in the interviews concerned the need to go beyond creating the formal agreement to establish close working relationships between academic staff in the university and colleges in the partnership for the agreement to succeed in practice. For example, when one institution reviews its provision, the implications for any articulation agreement should be automatically considered and staff in the other institution(s) involved. *Curricular and pedagogical differences between HN and degree*. The need to address curricular and pedagogical differences between HN and degree provision is an acknowledged challenge in articulation. As interviewees noted, while the SCQF shows equivalences in the levels of HNC/Ds and degrees, this does not mean that programmes at the same level will automatically map: 'you can't leave it to chance that they will map across'. As part of developing articulation agreements interviewees described the process of checking the HNC/D specification against the degree in question to check the curricular match and decide the credit to be given. It was thought that curricular mismatch could be largely dealt with through HN optional units and/or by requiring students to undertake some additional element such as academic writing skills. It could also on occasion be necessary to develop alternative degree provision where there was a known mismatch between existing degrees and HNs. It was pointed out that curricular (mis)match was not only an issue in terms of whether and how much credit an HN student may be awarded but it could also have a critical impact on his/her chances of success.

There is an underlying tension in relation to the issue of curricular fit because HNs have a dual role as entry qualifications to degree study and for employment. The question arises as to the extent to which it is possible to vary the content to achieve a better match with a degree programme without compromising the value of the HN in the labour market. The extent of this problem varies across HNs depending on where the HN the proportion of students aiming for each destination, what one interviewee referred to as 'the degree – employment destination continuum' (an allusion to a recent research study: Ingram and Gallacher 2011). Colleges' poor record in following-up students' destinations was a problem: '*when a new HN is being developed or an existing one revised…. [colleges] should be asking*

where do the majority of students go - is it mainly an HE or employment focused one or a real hybrid? - and should design in preparation for the next step'.

The SFC's interest lies in the HNs that are primarily used for entry to degree rather than employment and it is now expecting to see greater planned curriculum in these HN subjects. It remains to be seen what impact a greater alignment of certain HNs with degree programmes might have on the value of these specific HNs when they are used in the labour market or on HNs in general. It is notable that most research on HNs has been concerned with their use in education. The question of whether HNs can maintain their integrity as dual qualification as the Articulation Hubs and institutions are encouraged to develop closer curricular fit with degrees was acknowledged in interviews as very much part of the agenda and questions for the next few years.

A recurring issue in relation to articulation and reflected in the interviews, is that while SCQF shows the formal level, in practice HN students are frequently not well prepared for degree study, especially in relation to their academic/study skills. This concern is reflected in the decision of universities, notably the older ones, not to recognise credit from many HN programmes because their methods of teaching and learning are not considered to prepare students adequately for continued degree study. There is a tension here between the different pedagogies in colleges and universities, especially given colleges mission to provide 'second chance' education, a related issue concerning how much colleges can, and should, alter their pedagogy to prepare only some students for degree study. One response has been for colleges and universities to develop additional preparatory resources and activities for articulating students to use (with varying levels of take-up).

In interview it was suggested that to make articulation work in practice, there is a need to go beyond the current formal articulation agreements and to recognise that a much stronger relationship between the respective course leaders in the college and university and more regular interaction of college and university staff is required. It was pointed out, for example, that staff in some colleges do not routinely receive information about the progress of their former students in their degree studies. Examples given of greater collaboration to overcome pedagogical difference included joint planning of HN students' project work and involvement of university staff in the HN assessment team to ensure students are introduced to university style assessment.

Credit transfer from other VET to degrees: current practice
At an early stage. There is much less credit transfer from other VET programmes into degrees, in particular from Modern Apprenticeships using the SVQ qualifications gained. It is, however, an articulation route that the Articulation Hubs are now beginning to explore as we describe below under 'initiatives'. This is seen as a response to declining school populations and the need to look towards older potential entrants, as part of developing the 'efficient learner journeys' desired by government and as pursuing the logic of SCQF. The mapping and crediting rating of SVQs to the SCQF and the creation of more SVQs at higher levels (SVQ levels 4 and 5) creates the context where credit transfer from SVQs to the second or third year of degree study has become a real possibility. A number of interviewees commented on the value of the SCQF in enabling and legitimising the concept of SVQ to degree articulation: '*it allows novel or contentious ideas to be tested in the framework*' and '*developing this programme would have been very, very difficult without SCQF…it provided legitimacy so that when I was arguing for equivalence of SVQ it wasn't simply me saying so, I could point to the SCQF framework… SCQF is a huge enabling factor*'.

But interviewees stressed that the idea of articulation from SVQs to degree is at a very early stage and the differences between the qualifications mean that universities cannot simply apply the model they use with HNs to create an SVQ articulation route. One interviewee contrasted his experience of trying to develop an SVQ to degree articulation route with that of creating an HN-degree route: *'with HNs the building blocks are there, it's just a case of tweaking it, but not with SVQs'* and the process was a much more difficult and time consuming exercise than expected.

Barriers to credit transfer. An important barrier, it was suggested, is people's understanding of SVQs, that they perceive credit transfer as difficult because SVQs are work-based; certainly universities were seen as reluctant to recognise candidates' industrial experience. Interviewees identified other difficulties relating to the composition of SVQs which were perceived as requiring universities to consider SVQs on an individual basis because of the different possible pathways through the same SVQ and that within an SVQ at a given level, individuals will have units at different levels, for example, individuals with an SVQ level 4 have units within it that when matched across to SCQF levels range from levels 7 to 10: this is difficult to map against a degree programme where students study at one level within each year of the degree. It was also noted that while there has been progress in credit-rating SVQs, the fact that SVQs at a given SVQ level may sit at either of two SCQF levels could cause confusion.

Where an SVQ-degree route was developed, it was common for the university to require candidates to undertake some additional element on top of their SVQ either to add some more credit or to cover some gaps in knowledge or skills: for example, eg to undertake bridging modules in study skills.

Current trends. The idea of SVQs becoming 'normal' entry qualifications for a degree was seen as *'a long, long way off, if ever'*. The current initiatives on articulation from SVQ to degree are mainly considering part-time provision and are exploring new models of credit transfer. Rather than articulation with a reduction in time into an existing degree they are exploring a 'top-up' model whereby a new degree is designed that builds on candidates' existing credits. The latter model is more likely to be designed to recognise their work experience and to be taken on the basis of part-time and possibly work-based study with extensive use of e-learning approaches. It was suggested that within the 'top-up' model, it is possible to adopt an approach whereby there is less prescribed content – referred as 'shell degrees' - to allow the maximum contextualisation for the individual in his/her particular industry and particular job role.

Credit transfer from other VET to degrees: initiatives
The focus on initiatives in this interface is on part-time and work-based provision in response to a recognised need to upskill and re-skill the workforce and to do so in ways that are attractive and cost-effective for both employees and employers.

Work based part-time Youth Work degree. This part-time work based degree was developed through a partnership involving Edinburgh City Council, Edinburgh's Telford College, Edinburgh Napier University with support and funding from ELRAH, the Articulation Hub covering the east of Scotland. The impetus was the requirement of the standards body for a qualified workforce and so Edinburgh City Council as a major employer of youth workers was interested in a flexible, work-based degree that would not require employees to be absent from their workplace for extended periods and would offer exit awards at different

levels to suit staff in different posts as well as providing incremental steps. There are exit awards at certificate, diploma, foundation degree and ordinary degree levels. The first students entered in 2011- 2012 across all the levels of the degree.

Entry requirements to year one include a Scottish Progression Award in Youth Work at level 6 as well as Highers and A levels. Relevant HNCs and HNDs give entry to years 2 and 3 respectively. But there are no SVQs at a sufficiently high level to give advanced standing; if SVQs are used as entry qualification to year 1, they are considered on an individual basis using an RPL process. More than half of the students entered the second year of the degree, either because they had relevant qualifications or had sufficient experience as assessed through RPL.

Partnership working was essential to the development of the degree; lessons include the need to be clear about each partner's remit and contribution from the beginning in a context where each had different priorities and the need to ensure communication and a common language and understanding. The delivery of the degree through 'blended learning' that makes extensive use of online approaches with very limited face-to-face teaching was a challenge, requiring university staff to adapt their thinking and practice.

SVQ to BA degree in Business Enterprise (BABE). This is a joint degree between Motherwell College and Edinburgh Napier University in which students enter the third year of the degree. The first students were recruited in 2008-09 following a five year development process and the degree is now part of the university's portfolio. It was described as '*a long struggle*' to achieve mainly because the concept was novel to both the college and university partners. In addition market research had to be conducted with past and current students as well as employers to gauge the feeling for such a new approach.

The initiative arose from an identified lack of progression opportunities to meet the expressed demand from students completing SVQs (levels 3 and 4) in management at Motherwell College. More generally it reflected the Scottish Government's skills strategy and the expectation that colleges and universities should make more use of the SCQF to contribute to this strategy (SG 2007). The project received funding from the SFC which not only helped enable development work but also provided legitimacy for it in other people's eyes.

The degree is aimed at staff working at supervisor or managerial level; entry requirements are an SVQ 4 in management with the addition of a non-credited weekend bridging course covering report writing, research skills etc. The degree is designed to give credit for workplace experience and to enable students to study flexibly in their daily employment so it uses blended learning approaches including e-learning; students only attend university one day per month. Half of the degree is written in an experiential methodology and comprises a workplace based learning project carried out on an e-learning basis: '*it's not a normal study degree*'. It was described as being modelled on how students had learned before in their SVQ with a combination of theory and workplace experience which meant that '*it wasn't a complete flip where it became an academic degree'.*

Issues that the project faced included finding staff in the university who were interested in the concept; initial approaches to academic staff in Business Management were unsuccessful whereas an academic in Business Enterprise was interested in being involved. Development was thus an individualised rather than an institutionally led process.

The project encountered the issue of where SVQs sit in SCQF as we outlined earlier. Level 3 was seen as insufficient so that an SVQ at level 4 was required with the addition of a study skills bridging course. The approach taken by Edinburgh Napier University in terms of candidates' credit points is interesting: 240 credits were required but rather than tally up the number of specific credits that a student had, the university accepted that the 'package' of an SVQ4 plus a study skills course was equivalent to 240 credits.

SCQF was seen as critical to the project, that it provided the legitimacy without which this sort of degree would be impossible to develop. Similarly e- learning was noted as vital, that *'the degree wouldn't work without it'.*

Edinburgh Napier University has evaluated the students' project work and concluded that it was better than that of many traditional-entry students because of their industrial experience. Some of the students have progressed from their ordinary degree into the MBA at Edinburgh Napier. The model was thought to be applicable to other subject areas for candidates in employment who have substantial workplace experience and sufficient maturity.

5. OPERATIONS

Project members agreed that to illustrate how credit transfer operates in practice we would each use a common set of fictional case studies and explain the process and procedures in terms of credit that would be followed in our respective country. This section reports on these 'scenarios'. They illustrate that in most cases there are multiple routes that might be taken depending, in part, on the purpose(s) for which the individual wants to have her/his qualifications and/or experiences recognized. It is clear from the scenarios that the process is an individual one with the outcome depending on the particular nature and circumstances of the individual's qualifications and experiences and the decisions of employers and learning providers who are generally free to make their own judgement on a case-by-case basis. In Scotland, the responsibility is very much on the individual to be proactive in initiating the process to gain credit and s/he may well have to fund the process and any award of credit. Help and support are available from, for example, career advisers or FE and HE institutions and employer bodies but this too has to be sought out by the individual. Such support, however, is critical for an individual to be successful in gaining credit. It is evident from the scenarios that credit transfer is not automatic and is limited in practice, it is more likely that previous experience and qualifications will improve an individual's chances of successful entry to education and training than lead to any exemptions or a shorter duration.

(a) Hassan is 22 years and has lived in the UK for three years. How can his learning abroad (his certificates or diplomas) be recognised?
Hassan could use the services of UK National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) which is the national agency, managed on behalf of the UK Government, which provides the official source of comparison information and advice on overseas skills and qualifications. If he holds hold technical or vocational qualifications and skills the UK National Reference Point for Vocational Qualifications (UK NRP) within NARIC would offer a more specialised service. He would have to meet the costs of using NARIC services; these can be accessed on- line and by mail. Skills Development Scotland advisers locally may able to support Hassan with the initial referral to UK NARIC and the next steps of how to use this information in future career plans.

NARIC would provide Hassan with a ***statement of comparability*** for the level and type of certificates or diplomas he has gained in his home country. This statement of comparability would be the springboard from which to negotiate his suitability for the most appropriate entry level for the work, training or education he is interested in. It is used by universities, colleges, employers and government departments and agencies, forming part of their decision making. There may be scope for some Recognition of Prior Learning if there are any gaps between Hassan's recognised qualifications and his preferred entry point. If Hassan has come to the UK from a non-EU country, the statement of comparability could also be used to help support applications made under Tiers 1 and 2 of the Points Based System for immigration to the UK[3].

Some professional bodies and chartered institutes would carry out a sector specific statement of comparability, especially if the qualifications exceed the recognised standard of a bachelor's or master's degree or a PhD in the UK (although UK NARIC is the only official body recognized by the different qualifications frameworks in the UK).

Employers and training providers may require further competency based evidence regarding Hassan's suitability, for example, it would be important that he could deal with competency based questions at interviews that would require him to describe specific situations from his previous experience that would illustrate his learning and skill levels. It is likely that further and higher education Institutions would ask for supporting personal statements regarding the relevance of Hassan's qualifications and skills for entry to any new course.

(b) Pia is 19 years old. For the past two years she has worked voluntarily in a zoo and now she wants to enter vocational training in order to become an animal keeper. Are there procedures implemented in the systems in order to shorten the training period?
Pia is aiming to entering a very competitive industry sector and occupation. Personal commitment is highly valued and relevant volunteering experience is a pre-requisite for candidates to be considered for entry into the job rather than enabling the training period to be shortened. Zoos give take great care in selecting the most suitable candidates from the large pool of potential recruits.

It is imperative that some of the skills and experience the obtained as part of her voluntary work with the zoo are taken into consideration when recruiting onto the training routes for a zookeeper. If Pia has any competency based evidence within her voluntary work that she can demonstrate on application forms and at selection interviews, this will help her compete more successfully for the trainee zookeeper opportunities; there are only six zoos in Scotland so employment opportunities are few. This also means that there are only a few courses available. There is no publicly funded Modern Apprenticeship in Zookeeping in Scotland.

The most popular method of training to be a zookeeper is on the job, with part time attendance/ distance learning with a college or training provider. There are some

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[3] In 2008, the UK implemented a points based system for non-European Union migrants wishing to come to the UK to work, study, and train. The new system comprises five tiers with each having different conditions, entitlements, and entry requirements for migrants wishing to work in the UK. http://www.workpermit.com/uk/uk-immigration-tier-system.htm

foundation level full time degrees at Universities in England. Some animal care courses, at SCQF Levels 3 and 4 are available, and although these do not qualify the candidate for specific zoo-keeping jobs, they do offer highly relevant transferable skills.

There are some distance learning and part time courses available in Zoo Animal Management, which employing organizations may use to offer distance or work based learning accreditation of qualifications. An individual's entry point into these courses is based on previous skills and qualifications and where Pia's voluntary work experience would be taken into account but it would not attract prior credit leading to exemption from any elements of course content, or acceleration into higher qualification levels: the entry requirements are often supplemented by additional relevant voluntary experience which negates the likelihood of any RPL activity being taken into consideration.

(c) John is 25 years and used to work as a hair dresser. Unfortunately and all of a sudden he became allergic to the chemical products and he can´t go on working in his job. Are there opportunities for getting the learning and experience credited towards the completion of another hair-dresser related VET?
If John is fully qualified as a hairdresser, he may be able to transfer his skills and experience towards another related occupation. He could use the relevant Sector Skills Council to support him through a discussion about other occupations which lie within its remit. Habia is the government appointed standards setting body for the hair and beauty sectors: as a central information point, Habia provides guidance on careers (among other matters) and could also give John advice on the cross referencing of National Occupational Standards within the occupations it covers.

If he was considering a move towards beauty therapy or other related areas, it would be crucial that the same allergy was not a continued risk and it would be John's responsibility to consult an occupational therapist for guidance on this.

If John wishes to undertake other learning, the method of training - work based, college accredited or through a combination of both - would not be relevant to any transferability of skills and competence. The critical factors are the level of award, the specialisms and core elements within the qualification and the awarding body. If John has hairdressing qualifications, he could go to the awarding body to understand the different elements of the qualification and how these could be mapped to any related course to see if any other discipline has a close match with his existing qualifications and enquire about accelerated entry, recognition of particular aspects of course content and potential exemption from any assessments or validation activity.

It would be at the discretion of any course leaders whether any RPL activity would be considered. This would also depend on any quality assurance systems in place by the learning institution. If exemptions or accelerated entry are allowed, this would normally have to be evidenced with an alternative statement of prior competency reached. This could be gathered through a recorded statement of professional practice by John's managers/ supervisors and /or by a written statement of observed tasks/duties from the assessor acting on behalf of the new learning provider.

However, there may be difficulties in funding any courses for John's change of career. The support required to complete any mapping activity may be difficult to access and involve coordination of services across different organizations. Awarding bodies, the Sector Skills

Council, careers guidance services and learning providers could all play a part in supporting John through his decision making. If he wishes to embark upon a career re-orientation, which is not being funded by his employer, he may have to fund new courses, with no financial support. The course providers may offer flexible input to full time courses, and could also offer bespoke personalized course interventions for John at reduced costs. This would require individual negotiation, which may take additional time and effort.

If John's employer is willing to redeploy him in management, training or other related work, there may be no requirement for him to have his skills formally assessed. He could embark on work based learning qualifications at the most appropriate level for his new job role.

If John has no formally recognized qualifications he could enter into negotiations with future employers and learning/ training providers about the most appropriate entry level for his new job. His portfolio of skills and experience would be taken onto consideration to decide upon the most appropriate role. There would be less likelihood of any formal recognition of his previous skills and experience.

(d) Maja is 29 years. For the last 9 years she has worked as a skilled chemical laboratory technician and now she wants to enter HE in order to study chemistry. Are the mechanisms in the systems helping her to get her learning and experience credited towards studies?

Maja can apply for advanced standing onto a chemistry/science based HE course, depending on the nature and extent of her previous qualifications and skills. Credit Transfer or Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning is the process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, if appropriate, recognised for academic purposes. It can enable a learner to transfer credit gained within one programme of study to another programme of study at the same or a different institution. The level of formal qualification which Maja holds will be the starting point to assess the most appropriate entry level within Higher Education. She can use the SCQF to explain where her existing qualification lies (likely to be SCQF 7 or 8) and see if there is any gap between this level and the entry requirements for her chosen HE course. She may be able to enter the second or third year of a degree programme.

The significant aspects here are the level of qualification and skills she has achieved and how these relate to the chosen course content. The closer the match of her most recent work experience to the course content, the more likely she is to be awarded credit. She must also demonstrate some recent learning activity for consideration, so this should also be factored in to any application processes.

She should make enquiries to the preferred Higher Education Institutions about procedures before she makes any formal application. Each individual HEI has different policies regarding this process. Different faculties and course leaders may also have some level of discretion regarding admission on to individual courses and have flexibility on selection criteria. The level of demand for the particular course that Maja is interested in is also likely to have an impact on the institution's response.

If Maja's current qualification is a Higher National Certificate or Higher National Diploma then the process is likely to be relatively straightforward but less so if her qualification is an SVQ. Some HEIs have formal Recognition of Prior Learning processes and it would be likely that they would use this to assess her SVQ qualification or other experiential/industrial

learning in terms of credit towards the degree, which may give exemption from some elements of the course and/or increase the possibility of advanced entry to year 2 or 3 of the degree. Some HEIs are more proactive than others in their acceptance and promotion of RPL activity. These tend to be the newer HEIs. Maja may have to pay for to undertake RPL, there no consistent pricing policy for this across HEIs, some pass on additional charges to the candidate for this more in-depth analysis of candidate information while others do not.

An alternative approach would be for Maja to apply to the Open University (OU). The OU provides higher education from certificate to doctorate level on a distance learning basis and students often study part-time while continuing to work. The OU explicitly aims to widen access to higher education and operates an open entry policy accepting applications from individuals with no formal qualifications. It also has a well established credit transfer service for students who have successfully completed courses/modules above Higher or equivalent level (ie above SCQF level 6) awarding them credit that can count towards the credit requirements of an OU qualification and reduce the number of modules that need to be taken. If Maja has an HNC/D then this should be relatively readily credited but the OU also recognizes vocational qualifications including N/SVQs so that if Maja has an SVQ then she may well be able to get credit from the OU for this depending on the level of the award: N/SVQ awards need to be at level 4. While no credit can be awarded for a partially completed NVQ4, the position is different with respect to SVQs: if Maja has completed individual units of an SVQ4 that have been assigned by SQA a credit value and level at SCQF 7 or above then, in principle, thes individual units would be credited by the OU. Depending on the requirements of the particular OU qualification Maja wishes to study she might gain either 'module exemption' or 'general credit exemption'. Module exemption would mean she would not have to take a particular OU module (s) while general credit would mean she was awarded a certain number of credits that towards her overall qualification.

 (e) Curth is 23 years. At the age of 16 he started training in order to become a mechanic. After 9 month of training he dropped out. Now he decided to continue with VET. He wants to start training as a mechatronic – a qualification which is quite close to the mechanic – qualification. Does he have to start from the very beginning?
Curth has had a gap in his training experience and therefore has to reapply to college and employers for further development. His previous experience will be taken into consideration for his career change, and will count positively towards his selection into a related occupation. It is very important for Curth to be able to articulate the exact learning experiences he has completed in the past and to be very clear about how these relate to the new training in mechatronics. If he has any course or training manuals or workbooks from his mechanics training, with examples or copies of any completed assessments or assignments, these would prove invaluable in helping him to make a case for the close relationship between the two training experiences. If this type of detail is missing or incomplete, it will be more difficult for him to work with his new learning provider to identify any overlaps and gaps in his overall training package.

If Curth's had previously been following a Modern Apprenticeship in mechanics, the details of his learning log will have been very well monitored by his training provider and employer since their funding from Skills Development Scotland is related to the successful achievement of milestones within the National Vocational Occupation. There are only a few training providers which operate the monitoring arrangements for mechanics and mechatronic apprenticeships and the electronic systems for recording candidates' data is very reliable. It would therefore be straightforward to determine which parts of a VQ Curth

had already achieved and for a mapping exercise to take place, identifying overlaps and gaps within earlier and new training options. This may prove more challenging if there were incomplete units or modules, which may not have been recorded on the system. The Sector Skills Council for the motor industry, the Institute for the Motor Industry, would be able to offer guidance and support about the possibility of mapping one qualification to another. The learning provider has the responsibility of helping Curth to review which aspects of his original qualifications may not have to be repeated with a different vocational qualification. If Curth were applying for a new Modern Apprenticeship in mechatronics, the earlier publicly funded aspects of his mechanics Modern Apprenticeship would be taken in to account for his new traineeship. He may not be entitled to the full funding for the whole VQ for mechatronics, so it is in the interest of the training provider, employer and Curth, to ensure that any relevant prior learning is credited to his new Modern Apprenticeship. The core skills elements and perhaps some other aspects, such as health and safety units, which are consistent across the Modern Apprenticeship Framework for the motor industry, are the elements most likely to be credited. An occupational expert from the training/ learning sector would give the most relevant support, here. Skills Development Scotland is the national organisation which would apply the regulations regarding eligibility for funding and could support Curth with relevant careers guidance to make sense of the technicalities of transfer between one Modern Apprenticeship and another.

The funding sources for full and part time college courses are different and Curth would have to liaise directly with the further education college to find out if his prior learning could be used to enable him to be exempted from any aspects of a mechatronics course or, more likely, a course in a related area: there may be some relationship between his mechatronics training and the different National Certificate or Higher National Certificate courses at college. A Personal Learning Adviser, working for the further education college could support Curth through this process. Nevertheless, it is unusual for students to do anything other than complete the full course. If he were to complete a full-time FE course it is unlikely that transfer from this on to an MA would result in exemption or acceleration through any parts of the SVQ within the MA programme.

(f) Susan is 17 years. She lives in a structurally weak region where training places are scarce. Therefore she started a vocational training preparation measure in the field of "services, health, care". Through placements in a youth centre and in a community centre she gained first experiences and now she wants to become a housekeeper (a person who is managing the service and the catering of big public or private centres – does she have to start from the very beginning with the training although she gained some experiences? It is likely that Susan has been on a Get Ready for Work Training programme; this is a national programme which aims to develop young people's employability and core skills rather than provide vocational training and lead to the award of formal vocational qualifications. Susan will have gained useful work based experience in local youth and community centres through the programme and at the end of it will have an individualized training record, and helpful references from her work placement employers.

It is likely that Susan's ambition to become a housekeeper will only be achieved over a period of time during which she would need to gain experience in other lower level jobs in the hospitality sector and/or undertake relevant qualifications. One route would be through work based learning and the achievement of relevant qualifications such as Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) Level 2 Housekeeping and Level 3 Hospitality Supervision. There may be strong links between her Get Ready for Work training provider and local

employers which might improve Susan's chances of being recruited. It is likely that an employer would expect Susan to start at a lower level job with more general duties before embarking on the housekeeping job with additional responsibilities.

Another route to achieve her ambition would be for Susan to apply for a full time hospitality course at a further education college. She would most start with a National Certificate course before then advancing her learning through a one year Higher National Certificate and/or a two year Higher National Diploma. There would be scope on the National certificate Course for the core skills Susan gained on her Get Ready for Work programme to be evidenced through observation and reflective accounts of her work experience as well as being further assessed through more formal techniques. Credit for the core skills would might mean that she would then go on to take them at a higher level than be exempted from any core skill element of the course.

There may be a possibility of some work based learning aspects to be incorporated into these course, although these would probably supplement core course content rather than be used to replace or offer alternative methods of generating evidence towards the achievement of learning outcomes. This type of work experience is very enriching and would assist Susan in developing skills and how these can be used in the workplace.]

(g) Marita is 39 years. At the age of 21 she completed VET and became a nurse. She stopped working in her job in the age of 23 when the first child was born. Marita´s husband is a master carpenter. He runs a small company with three employees and an apprentice. For years Marita supports the company by doing the book keeping and the office work. Are there opportunities for Marita to get her experiences recognized?
A key question is the purpose for which Marita would like to have her experiences recognized. If she is now planning on working for another employer, her skills and experience may be enough to help her be recruited into an administrative or accounting technician job. If she is interested in obtaining formal qualifications within accounting there are professional bodies which accredit the training and awards. There are two main qualifications at technician level which can be taken and Marita could study by day or block release or evening class, by distance or open learning or by a combination of these to obtain these qualifications. There are clear, well established training routes which would allow Marita to progress from technician to professional level accountancy.

The length of training Marita would have to take would depend on how her skills and experience are assessed. The professional bodies for accountancy can give advice and guidance on exemptions and pre- screening of work based skills to ensure that Maria's previous experience can be taken into account. The work of accountants is regulated by statute and so the requirements of quality standards to be adhered to are particularly strict. These professional bodies would also give advice on what would be the most appropriate method for Maria to complete her studies.

The Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPiL), is the process of recognising and, if appropriate, assessing and then credit-rating learning an experience that has not been previously formally assessed and credit-rated. Informal learning is defined as knowledge and skills gained through life and work experiences as well as through non-formal and non-certificated learning, development and training activities or programmes. Any credit rating for Marita's work in her husband's company would require to be evidenced by documentary support. This process is very individual and depends on the particular personal

circumstances of each candidate. Marita would have to be able to put her experience and learning into context, explaining how it relates and contributes to the learning that she wants to undertake.

Alternatively Marita may wish to remain working in her husband's company. Scottish Government funds a service known as Business Gateway, to support small businesses in their initial start up and their subsequent growth. Maria could use its website to find out more about the ways in which her skills and experience could be formally recognized, in order to enhance the potential profitability of her husband's business. She could attend classes and workshops on the benefits of having her skills and experience developed further through her attainment of formal qualifications. The Business Gateway advisers could put her in touch with local learning providers and could give advice on any relevant funding which Maria may be able to access, depending on the nature of the business. For instance, if the business is in a priority or growth area, there may be subsidies towards development.

6. EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

SCQF and ECVET compared
The SCQF and the ECVET are based on a number of common principles. Both are based on learning outcomes (using the same definition) and both assume that outcomes will be grouped into units. Both are linked with a wider set of measures concerning qualification levels and quality assurance. Both are voluntary; the recognition of credit for transfer is a decision for the receiving organisation (in SCQF terminology) or the home institution (in the ECVET terminology). However, the SCQF's distinction between general and specific credit is not reflected in the ECVET.

Both the SCQF and the ECVET adopt a time-based metric for credit points, although this is less clearly articulated in the case of ECVET. ECVET's convention of 60 credit points per year of formal full-time VET suggests that an ECVET point is twice the value of an SCQF credit point, whose value is based on a convention of 120 credit points per year. (This principle is used to convert SCQF to ECTS credit points.) However, the two frameworks differ in their treatment of units which appear in more than one qualification. If the same unit is common to several qualifications the number of ECVET points attached to that unit may vary from one of these qualifications to another. In the SCQF the same unit has the same general credit value regardless of the qualification to which it contributes, although its specific credit value may differ. This difference reflects an underlying difference in approach. ECVET points are allocated first to a whole qualification (on the basis of the expected learning time in one chosen learning context) and then subdivided among the component units. In the SCQF the process works the other way round: points are allocated first to units and then to the qualifications built from those units, although the design of a unit may be influenced by assumptions about the qualification(s) of which it will be part. In this respect the SCQF is closer to the current ECTS than to ECVET; some Scottish experts on credit anticipate that the current ECVET arrangement will prove confusing or unworkable and eventually converge towards the ECTS/SCQF position.

Another possible difference arises from the fact that credit is built in to a levels framework in the case of SCQF but not the EQF. Both SCQF and ECVET credits should be understand in relation to a specific level of the respective framework, SCQF or EQF. But in the SCQF a whole qualification at a given level may include units at levels below (or above) that level,

whereas there is no clear guidance on this in relation to either ECVET or the EQF. It remains to be seen whether this causes difficulty in the cross-national transfer of credit.

The influence of European developments on policy and practice in Scotland

This is a brief section: European influences on Scottish policy and practice concerning credit in relation to VET were conspicuous by their absence. European issues were rarely mentioned by our interviewees except in response to direct questions, and the level of knowledge among respondents, especially those not involved in national-level policy developments, was low. Our notes on the interview with one otherwise well-informed respondent read: "*X is much more knowledgeable than most employers but had not heard of EQF and ECVET although he noted the need to have a way of assessing foreign applicants' qualifications*". One respondent did, however, suggest that EQAVET might be an important influence in future, and one respondent noted that within higher education Bologna had been an important impetus for the development of RPL, which had been interpreted broadly to embrace credit transfer.

Our interviews pointed to several reasons for the relatively marginal influence of European developments. The first and most important is timing. The EQF and ECVET are recent developments (significantly more recent than Bologna) and were introduced long after the main outlines of the current Scottish arrangements were established. Indeed, the main influences were in the opposite direction: Scottish experience informed the development of both the EQF and ECVET, although neither is the creature of anglophone hegemony that some critics have alleged. Several interviewees said that Scottish organisations, including the SQA, were (as of summer 2011) still working out how to engage with ECVET.

A second reason concerned organisational responsibilities. The SCQF Partnership had been heavily engaged with European developments but it had a small staff and was at arm's length from practice (the SCQF is an enabling and not a regulatory framework). ECVET was concerned with vocational qualifications and was seen as the responsibility of the SQA (the partner leading developments in that area) rather than the SCQF Partnership. The SFC has seen its role in relation to the EQF and ECVET as mainly to promote awareness and understanding.

A third reason was uncertainty over the scope and potential use of EQF and ECVET. One interviewee had been involved with an SSSC project to map foreign qualifications. The EQF and ECVET provided useful tools for this purpose but the project still needed to look at individual qualifications in detail. A second interviewee described a European project, led by the SCQF Partnership, which examined the role of the EQF in five sectors: construction, social care, health, travel and tourism and land-based industries. It concluded that the levels were useful as a starting point but they still needed to examine the content of qualifications. The scope of an occupation and the skills required to practise it varied from country to country. "*A baker in Scotland is not the same as a baker in France.*" The project focused on the EQF; ECVET would help but not remove the underlying issue. A third interviewee indicated that some people had unrealistic expectations for the potential role of the European tools: "*Going by queries from training providers and colleges, there's a lot of misunderstanding about the EQF; it's not appreciated that it's only a reference or mapping framework, it's not about giving credit.*" He added that ECVET was "*causing a lot of people a lot of headaches*".

Scotland and other UK developments

A fourth reason why European influences have been marginal is that these have been less pressing than those arising from developments in the rest of the UK. England is the elephant in the room of Scottish VET, which has to ensure that it is not suffocated by its giant neighbour before it can attend to its relations with more distant creatures. As one interviewee pointed out, employers have enough difficulty in understanding the different UK frameworks without having to consider the EQF and European frameworks as well. Scottish employers already have to deal with two sets of qualification levels, as SVQs are expressed in terms of English (former NVQ) levels although each SVQ is also given a level on the SCQF. The requirement also to report EQF levels on certificates could add further confusion.

The UK has an integrated labour market. There is substantial mobility across its internal borders and many employers operate in more than one country of the UK. The need to maintain alignment with developments elsewhere in the UK has significantly constrained the development of Scottish credit arrangements. It slowed down the process of credit-rating SVQs, and it continues to constrain this process because SCQF levels and credit values need to be compatible with those defined in England. The introduction of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) in England has imposed further constraints and delays-. In the early days uncertainties about the QCF requirements delayed the development of Scottish qualifications in sectors where the UK dimension was important. Since the QCF has been 'up and running' the need to meet its strict requirements has meant that many sectoral organisations and qualifications bodies with a UK-wide remit have largely abandoned their involvement in Scottish qualifications developments. And the differences between the SCQF and the QCF are a potential source of confusion. The SCQF is comprehensive; the QCF only covers vocational qualifications. The SCQF is a loose enabling framework; the QCF is a tight regulatory framework. Some QCF qualifications no longer match their Scottish 'equivalents' because they have been increased or reduced in size to meet the QCF specifications. Many qualifications within the SCQF use labels such as certificate and diploma to distinguish qualifications at different levels; the QCF uses these labels to distinguish different sizes of qualifications. The SCQF is primarily concerned with general credit; the QCF is primarily concerned with specific credit. In the words of one interviewee, "*It's an absolute nightmare to explain to the industry.*"

7. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

We return to the paradox of Scottish education and training which we outlined in section 2. We expressed this paradox as follows. On paper, Scotland has a credit-based lifelong learning system which is widely seen to be one of the most flexible in the world; but there is relatively little credit transfer to be observed, in practice, in Scotland.

This has been borne out by the research reported above. There is little credit transfer across the first of our interfaces, between prior learning (including general and prevocational education) and mainstream VET, with the main exception of core skills for which some VET programmes recognise credit. Relevant prior learning may help people to gain access to VET, it may enhance their learning within VET and it may even reduce the time they spend in their VET programmes, but by and large these contributions are achieved without any formal process of credit transfer. There is similarly little formal credit transfer across the second interface, within the VET system. The design of some programmes makes limited credit transfer possible in principle; we have found little evidence that this happens

very often in practice, but current changes may increase the scale of credit transfer in future. As with the first interface, prior learning may enhance the experience and sometimes the speed of learning but without formal credit transfer. Only across the third of our interfaces - between VET and higher education - is there evidence of credit transfer of a more traditional type. This largely took place in the transition from college-based sub-degree (HN) programmes to university degrees, and a large proportion of it was concentrated in a handful of institutions.

How do we explain this paradox? We elaborate our earlier explanations in terms of four broad conclusions.

The first is that *a system designed on the principle of credit accumulation may support flexibility and permeability through means other than formal credit transfer*. The design of many Scottish qualifications, and the architecture of much of the Scottish education and training system (especially VET), reflect a broad notion of credit accumulation. Programmes and qualifications tend to be relatively small. There are progression routes and connections between them, sustained by the leading role of a single awarding body for non-university qualifications and a comprehensive credit and qualifications framework. Entry to programmes and movement between them is flexible, at least with respect to formal requirements. There may be flexibility within the programme, for example to cover units at a higher or lower level. Many programmes can be taken at a faster or slower pace, and allow learners to take the assessment when they are considered to be ready rather than according to a fixed timetable. As a result many of the benefits of flexibility may be achieved by the way in which learners enter and move between programmes, or progress within them, without the need for more formal processes of credit recognition and transfer. However, we would not exaggerate the flexibility of the Scottish system. Our other propositions explain why, in practice, the Scottish system is far from 'seamless'.

Second, *a credit system on its own is weaker than the 'institutional logics' which impede permeability and flexible movement within the system*. Early research on the Action Plan distinguished between the 'intrinsic logic' of a qualifications system, which may favour credit accumulation and transfer, and the 'institutional logic' of its context. The institutional logic includes the factors which shape individuals' choices and opportunities for moving through learning and the labour market, institutional practices and the broader processes of educational and occupational selection which may inhibit the demand for credit transfer or the recognition of credit in practice. The tension between intrinsic and institutional logics has been a leitmotiv of the development of credit arrangements in Scotland. The SCQF is voluntary, and education providers vary in their willingness to recognise and transfer credit at the interfaces where they operate. They may fail to do so because of a number of reasons, including the increased cost of flexible provision, a lack of trust in the learning or assessments delivered elsewhere, funding disincentives (although SDS' policy of refusing to fund repeated units did not always have the effect of reducing duplication), the requirements of regulatory or professional bodies, the persistence of time-serving norms and expectations, and so on. In some cases the architecture of qualifications does not facilitate recognition or transfer of credit: for example, prior learning may not map neatly onto whole units.

Third, *there is insufficient agreement concerning the types of learning and the contexts between which transfer is appropriate*. There are several apparent epistemological boundaries across which transfer is difficult. For example, many interviewees felt that the

employability skills developed in much prevocational educational were qualitatively different from the vocational skills developed in mainstream VET, making credit transfer between the two inappropriate. There is an even stronger boundary between the (mainly work-based) provision which develops occupational competence and the (mainly college-based) provision which develops broader vocational capability. These are perceived to involve qualitatively different types of learning (and assessment) between which little credit transfer is possible. Indeed the strong emphasis on learning and assessment within a specific occupational context means that credit transfer is often considered inappropriate even within the same sphere of learning: learning about health and safety, for example, was considered by many interviewees not to be transferable between occupational contexts. And some interviewees with a labour-market focus complained that educationists were too unwilling to give credit for relevant industrial experience, even if this gave access to the kinds of learning outcomes that educational programmes aimed to develop. All these boundaries are contested. We referred to them above as *apparent* epistemological boundaries to reflect our observation in earlier research that political or institutional barriers may masquerade as epistemological ones (Raffe, Howieson and Tinklin 2007, Raffe 2009). Some of the boundaries described above may have been constructed, or at any rate exaggerated, in order to defend particular professional, institutional or subject interests, but that is beyond the scope of the present study.

Finally, and related to this, *the concept of credit, at least as it is interpreted and applied in Scotland, is still firmly anchored in the education system and especially in mainstream education*. Elsewhere we have contrasted the way that the SCQF has become embedded within the education system with its relative lack of impact on the labour market. The same contrast emerges from our interviews: several of those on the education side of the fence, especially those actively engaged in the initiatives reported above, praised the enabling role of the SCQF and noted that their work would be much harder, if not impossible, without it. By contrast, employers, or those speaking on their behalf, tended to see it as irrelevant. The increased use of RPL might help to narrow this gap, but so far its use is still too patchy and insufficiently associated with formal credit to have this effect.

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ANNEX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

This is a comparative European project funded by the Federal Institute for Vocational Training in Germany (BIBB). The aim is to compare how credit systems operate in different countries in the area of VET with a focus on initial entrants.

The working definition of credit system that we are using is:
> *"procedures enabling the recognition and crediting of evidenced / proven learning outcomes in order to ease access and transition within the qualification system and / or to shorten the duration of training".*

Question areas:
- what are the main developments/initiatives?
- what are their main purposes/ what problems or issues do they aim to address?
- what are the policies and/or drivers behind them and who is pushing it?
- what are the formal procedures / arrangements?
- what are the expected/formal outcomes?
- how does it operate in practice?
- what is the impact to date in practice: most successful and least successful aspects?
- what are the main issues?
- what factors have helped/hindered?
- to what extent do the developments relate to wider policies on lifelong learning?
- influence of/connection with SCQF?
- influence of/connection with ECVET?

ANNEX 2: ORGANISATIONS COVERED BY THE INTERVIEWS

- SCQF Partnership
- Scottish Qualifications Authority
- Skills Development Scotland
- Scottish Funding Council
- SVQ/MA Work Based Learning Network
- Scottish Training Federation
- Modern Apprenticeship Group in Scotland
- Alliance of Sector Skills Councils in Scotland
- Construction Skills (Sector Skills Council for the construction industry)
- Scottish Social Services Council (Sector Skills Council for childcare, health and social care)
- Semta (Sector Skills Council for science, engineering and manufacturing)
- Edinburgh, Lothians, Fife and Borders Regional Articulation Hub (ELRAH)
- South West Regional Articulation Hub (SWAH).
- Glasgow Caledonian University
- Motherwell College
- Reid Kerr College
- Jewel and Esk College
- City Building Glasgow (training provider)
- First4Skills (training provider)
- EDETA (training provider)
- Best Training Ltd (training provider)