



Credit recognition in New Zealand universities: Practice in an international context

A desk-based literature review and analysis

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Disclaimer

This report was prepared to inform discussions within Universities New Zealand – Te Pōkai Tara. The conclusions reached are the author's alone and do not necessarily represent the views of Universities New Zealand, individual universities or Vice-Chancellors.

Executive summary

The purpose of this desk-based analysis was to explore the nature and extent of the recognition of formal and informal learning by New Zealand universities, placing current efforts within an international context and identifying existing good practice and international guidelines and case studies to assist with further development in this area.

The review was undertaken in August and September 2016 drawing on literature and meta-analysis of credit recognition frameworks and various accounts of the extent of transfer and credit recognition, including: university websites and other estimates provided to UNZ of current rates of credit recognition; meta-analysis of credit recognition rates; other accounts of international estimates of the extent of transfer and credit recognition; international examples and good practice guidelines on transfer and credit recognition; international research on the impact of national frameworks and credit policy developments.

The analysis suggests that the NZ university sector does not appear to be meeting the good practice standards of jurisdictions or institutions that they might consider peers or benchmarks and that universities' levels of credit recognition appear to fall at the lower end of the range evident in comparable jurisdictions.

However, international experience suggests that institutional efforts alone will not be sufficient and that a goal-orientated national framework including funding incentives will be needed to drive real change in this area. Development of such initiatives will need to take account of experience elsewhere with regard to unintended consequences, such as reduced cohesion and depth of qualifications, reduced institutional diversity and weakening of responsibility for qualification-level quality assurance. Critically, international experience suggests that students who have not thrived in other parts of the system are unlikely to benefit greatly by credit initiatives.

Despite these concerns, it is submitted that improvements can and should be made to increase credit recognition in the advancement of transparency, equity and efficiency and to bring New Zealand universities in line with good practice elsewhere. It is suggested that universities work individually, collectively and with government to develop and support the following initiatives:

- Improved information for prospective and current students proactively encouraging credit and integrated into online application and enrolment processes.
- Increased numbers of clear articulation agreements with ITPs, PTES and Wānanga across a wide range of fields.
- Consistency around outcomes-focused data definition, collection and dissemination to provide greater capacity for annual and longitudinal data analysis as a sector and to support credit recognition decision-making for individuals.
- Consultation about whether a national web presence, perhaps facilitated through UNZ/CUAP, would be beneficial to provide students with a university sector-wide view of credit policies, opportunities and outcomes.
- Development of a national pathways policy which outlines common nomenclature and minimum standards for both formal and informal credit application to different qualification levels, while retaining a focus on ensuring the integrity of qualifications.
- Discussions about how incentives for credit recognition, including recognition of the costs of transitional support, might feature in a revised funding model.
- Discussions about whether a national body to promote and support credit recognition across tertiary education would be beneficial.

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1. Background

In December 2002, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) published *Supporting Learning Pathways: Credit Recognition and Transfer Policy*. This document, produced by a Credit Transfer Working Party including nominees from across the tertiary sector and government, sought to establish a set of commonly agreed principles to facilitate credit transfer between New Zealand tertiary institutions. In doing so, the Policy included the agreed position that “Appropriate credit recognition and transfer are critical to support learners along the most appropriate learning pathway and consequently are a core part of education and training provision. Credit recognition and transfer decisions should support the mobile learner of the twenty-first century through quality assurance, information provision, and management and use of technology”.¹

Nearly 14 years later, credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning remains a topical issue for the sector and for the government. However, there has not been substantial progress in this area in the intervening period and NZQA work in 2014-15 to review credit transfer principles and practices appears to have stalled.

The February 2016 *Issues Paper* prepared by the Productivity Commission identified that “recognition between providers of one another’s learning credits is inconsistent. Therefore, even if a student comes to view another provider as better, they may be reluctant to shift if they have to repeat learning.”

In responding to the *Issues Paper*, both NZQA and the TEC suggested that credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning remain challenging issues. They suggest that national discussion is needed along with change to enhance flexibility for learners:

- “Learners are increasingly mobile both globally and across institutions. Part of NZQA’s Future State programme has been to consider better recognition of a learner’s skills and knowledge by considering the use of credit recognition and transfer and the recognition of prior learning. This is a challenging issue that cuts across the policy, funding, quality assurance and provision of tertiary education. It is critical that learnings are not duplicating learning and can have their skills recognised, without compromising the integrity of the qualifications gained. In many ways this matter cuts to the heart of the value added by a formal learning experience over the experimental learning or learning gained in another institution. Building on the work started within NZQA it is timely to have a system-level discussion about extending the use of recognition of prior learning and removing current impediments to credit recognition transfer.” (Extract from NZQA submission to the Productivity Commission, 2016)
- “Learner choice should play a central role in driving the way the system evolves. For this to happen, learners need to a) be well-informed and b) have flexibility to move and transfer credit around the system. ... Changes that could give learners more flexibility include improving recognition of prior learning and credit transfer across TEOs, and unbundling delivery components to give learners greater choice.” (Extract from TEC submission to the Productivity Commission, 2016)

Universities New Zealand, responding on behalf of the Vice-Chancellors (collectively), submitted that New Zealand universities engage in all three types of unbundling of the type

¹ NZQA, 2002.

suggested by TEC above, namely: multi-institution pathways, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and credentialing. The submission further pointed out that:

- “All universities have credit transfer and recognition of prior learning policies. Credit transfer is common with around 16% of students coming to university having gained credits at a similar or lower level in the same field for which they are enrolling. RPL is much less common but does take place, particularly where practical experience is a requirement for gaining academic credit.” (Extract from Universities New Zealand submission to the Productivity Commission, 2016)

Given the level of interest in this topic and its implied link to several government strategic priorities for tertiary education - pathways, access to information for decision-making, learner outcomes and learning for life² – it was anticipated that the Productivity Commission might make recommendations regarding credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning.

2. Productivity Commission draft report

This bulk of this analysis was prepared in August and September 2016 before the release of the Productivity Commission draft report. As anticipated, in its draft report of 29 September 2016, the Productivity Commission made a number of findings related to credit recognition and transfer, making the following recommendations:

- R12.6: Students should be able to mix and match courses from different providers. The funding and regulatory system should not penalise providers for participating in such arrangements.
- R12.18: Government should establish a student ombudsman service within NZQA to promote credit transfer, and with the power to arbitrate disputes between transferring students and their destination provider.

The findings of this report are broadly consistent with the Commission’s findings about the extent of credit recognition and the identification of some of the underlying causes. However, the Commission’s recommendations failed to address specifically the acknowledged role that funding incentives play and recognise international experience of proposed solutions.

This analysis suggests that New Zealand should draw on extensive international research and experience in the development of any proposed solutions while acknowledging and responding to the national context.

The suggested road map for change outlined here (which implicitly address both of the Commission’s recommendations) has grouped next steps into actions to be considered by individual universities, the university sector collectively and for the sector to engage with at a national/government level.

² Also noted, when establishing funding and approval processes for the new ICT Graduate Schools the Government was clear in communications that this model was also intended to make it “easier for students to transfer between courses” (Parliament press releases 2015 and 2016).

3. Approach taken

The purpose of this analysis was to:

1. Explore the nature and extent of the recognition of formal and informal learning into, and between, New Zealand universities *for domestic students*;
2. To place current policies and practices within an international context;
3. To identify areas in which improvements could be made;
4. To provide guidelines, benchmarks and case studies to assist in further development in this area.

Stage One of this analysis was undertaken relatively quickly to provide an initial overview of 1 and 2 (above) and to identify whether further exploration was warranted to provide a stronger evidential basis from which to determine the need for further development work across the sector. This analysis was then expanded (Stage Two) to include further details about international benchmarks and good practice examples, including exploration of the impact of introduced changes in national frameworks overseas.

It should be noted that this was a desk-based analysis, with resulting limitations.

Stages One and Two were conducted in August/September 2016, looking at:

- Meta-analysis particularly focused on accounts of national and international estimates of the extent of transfer and credit recognition with the aim of establishing where New Zealand universities might fall within an international range of estimates;
- New Zealand universities' estimates of credit recognition, websites, calendars and other policy and process documents;
- International literature and guidelines on transfer and credit recognition, particularly focused on Australia, Canada, the US, the UK and European comparators;
- International research and accounts of the impact of the introduction of national or state frameworks and other policy instruments.

3.1 Nomenclature/credit terminology

As noted throughout this report, there is significant variation in nomenclature both nationally and internationally. For the purposes of reading this report, in general:

Formal credit recognition – Formal credit recognition is when one tertiary provider recognises learning a student has undertaken with another tertiary provider and allows this to be credited toward a new qualification. A credit transfer process assesses formal learning. Credit given might be specified (e.g. a student may not have to sit COMPSCI 101 because they are deemed to have completed similar content elsewhere) or unspecified (e.g. 60 credit at 100-level).

Informal credit recognition (often known as Recognition of Prior Learning or RPL) - a system of formally recognising the skills and knowledge a student has gained from informal learning, such as on-the-job experience, training and workshops. An RPL/informal learning process assesses informal learning and may involve development of a portfolio and/or completion of outcome assessments.

Transfer – A student moving from one provider to another either prior to or following graduation. There may be a significant time interval between study at one institution and applying to another.

Articulation agreements – formalised linkages between institutions with specified credit transfer arrangements for individual qualifications.

3.2 Scope

This paper looked only at credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning for New Zealand domestic students. Excluded are the approximately 26,000 international students enrolled in New Zealand universities in 2015.

Also excluded is the practice of cross-crediting which can occur when a student is working on two qualifications and the institution allows a paper or course from one qualification to count towards the other qualification. While this does enhance pathways and outcomes for students, it is excluded from this analysis because it is occurring entirely within an institution. If the cross-crediting occurs between institutions, it is deemed to be credit recognition for the purposes of this analysis.

While this paper looks at both formal and informal prior learning and the recognition of such, there has been little attempt at this stage to differentiate credit for formal learning ("credit transfer") and credit for informal learning (often referred to a "Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)" although usage varies across the sector and internationally). This is mainly due to relatively limited use of RPL to date and to inconsistent nomenclature and inadequate data capture, as noted elsewhere. It is expected that an expanded and more detailed analysis as part of enhancement work would clearly differentiate between credit for formal and informal learning.

4. Findings

4.1 New Zealand universities

4.1.1 *Extent of transfer and credit recognition*

The extent of credit awarded by New Zealand universities and other TEOs is not clear, with credit recognition data not included in TEC/Ministry of Education statistical requests and substantial variance in institutional practices, nomenclature and data collection methodologies. Even within institutions, data collection practices vary with much information about student pathways, credit recognition and supporting evidence held only at department/school level.

New Zealand is not alone in this. Variance in nomenclature and processes are similarly noted in other jurisdictions and, it is suggested, contribute to a level of confusion for students and to lower credit transfer rates as a result.

While the data are not definitive, we have an idea of the range of credit recognition rates, observing that the proportion of prior formal learning recognised for each successful applicant may vary from minimal to full in estimates of credit granted:

- A 2015 UNZ information request of New Zealand universities produced a range of between 4% and 16% of students admitted into undergraduate programmes receiving credit (in full or part, including recognition of informal learning). However, this enquiry proved difficult to fulfil for all universities, due to differences in definitions, nomenclature and data collection methodologies, with some information only collected at the faculty or department level. There are no standardised reporting requirements in this area for the universities.

- With regard to levels of *movement* within the tertiary sector, a 2015 UNZ analysis of 2003 – 2013 students who had completed credits found that 18% subsequently enrolled in study in the same broad field in a different tertiary institution (at a lower, higher or equal level) - 7% stayed within the same sub-sector (e.g. ITP to ITP) and 11% moved to a different sub-sector (e.g. ITP to university). Of all those who enrolled at another tertiary institution during this 10-year period, 80% (approximately 137,000) were enrolling in courses at a similar or higher level and in the same broad field of study and so might be expected to be eligible for some form of credit recognition. In addition, some students may have gained credit for prior non-formalised learning.
- A 2013 report published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario looked at “College-to-University Transfer Arrangements and Undergraduate Education” in 14 jurisdictions (two Canada provinces, nine US states, and Australia, Scotland and New Zealand). This report states “Among the jurisdictions we surveyed outside Ontario, only one (New Zealand) has a highly decentralized transfer policy that relies on individual universities to decide which credits they will accept from colleges, with no transfer policy that relies on individual universities to decide which credits they will accept from colleges, with no system-wide goals or institutions to promote transfer. The available data show low rates of transfer: about 4 per cent of college students transfer to a university degree programme”.

Without further access to comparable data, an estimate of 4% – 16% of undergraduate students receiving credit seems to encapsulate the variation from institution to institution, with the rate for the sector as a whole across all levels and fields most likely to be closer to the lower end of that range.

4.1.2 Credit transfer and recognition policies and practices

The above analysis of transfer/movement found that 11% moved to a different sub-sector (e.g. ITP to university) and of all those who enrolled at another tertiary institution during this 10-year period, 80% were enrolling in courses at a similar or higher level and in the same broad field of study and so might be expected to be eligible for some form of credit recognition.

All New Zealand universities have policies and procedures for the granting of credit in recognition of prior formal and informal learning and take broadly similar approaches. However, nomenclature, fees charged and limitations (on the extent of credit granted, on the length of time since study was undertaken, and when credit can be sought in the admission process) differ, sometimes substantially. (Refer: Appendix One for links to relevant policies and processes)

Anecdotal evidence suggests that not all transfer results in the awarding of credit for prior learning (formal and/or informal). There are a variety of reasons for this, some more systemic than others:

- A change in the field of study (i.e. prior study not relevant);
- Non-success in prior study (i.e. students not demonstrating required levels of competency in study already undertaken);

- Students not applying for credit (i.e. may not know they can, or choose not to; institutions not knowing about or not pro-actively seeking information about prior study undertaken for the purposes of credit);
- Differences in institutional policies and practices for credit recognition (e.g. time limitations, variation by qualifications, fees);
- Differences in the application of policies on a case-to-case basis in the context of a commitment to not “compromising the quality or standards of qualifications” and the granting of credit “at the highest level consistent with the student’s chances of success”.

This final bullet point includes principles extracted from the 2015 Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) 2015 Handbook, section 5.3 “Definitions, principles and guidelines for cross-crediting and transfer of credit”. Underpinning the sector’s approach to credit, these principles were “agreed by the JCG [Joint Consultative Group], 1993”. The principles are primarily concerned with distinctiveness, students’ chance of success and the standards and quality of qualifications. These do not appear to have been updated to the 2002 NZQA disseminated principles which focus more on learners, transparency and equal standing and to which universities were a party in their development.

Even within the university sector, while operating under the same principles, variance in credit recognition practice can be seen to occur in three main ways:

- Information access. e.g. What information is available? How easy is to find on the website? How comprehensive is that information ahead of an application for formal or informal credit recognition? How much information is available about the likely outcome of credit applications in advance?
- Ease of process. e.g. What are the barriers to seeking credit? When is it provided to potential or current students? Who initiates the process? It is proactively encouraged during the enrolment process? Is the process easy to follow? What fees are charged – and at what level? (Refer: Appendix One for fee variance)
- Limitations. e.g. Are there restrictions on how long ago the formal or informal learning took place? Can it take place at any time during study?

There is some evidence of an emerging proactive approach to credit recognition among New Zealand universities. In recent years, some New Zealand universities have commenced online initiatives to make it easier for students to ascertain the possibility of credit from prior formal learning before applying for entry (in particular, the University of Waikato’s online “Academic Credit Explorer” initiative is a clear example). At least one other university is actively attempting to use credit transfer to attract students from other universities and to provide clear tables of likely credit that will be granted (i.e. the University of Auckland).

While not often clearly signposted, finding information about credit recognition is not particularly difficult on NZ university websites. However, the level of variance between institutions with regard to terminology is notable along with a predominately reactive approach based on student-initiated contact. Crucially, while all universities have shifted to online enrolment in the intervening period since the 2002 principles were agreed, the majority still practice a paper-based approach to credit transfer and recognition. As a result, opportunities for credit are seldom a seamless part of admission and enrolment processes.

Overall, with some pockets of exception, students’ ease of access to university credit recognition information and guidance varies significantly and could be seen to sit poorly

alongside the government's *Information for Learners* priorities. As discussed later, international evidence suggests that "information and guidance is the first step towards an effective credit accumulation and transfer system".³

4.1.3 Articulation agreements

Articulation agreements with other tertiary institutions are one way that institutions can make credit recognition of prior formal learning more transparent and easier for students. Some articulation agreements are in place between universities and ITPs, but these are not particularly widespread and tend to be concentrated in certain fields of study. These fields are broadly consistent with an Australian study of 2014 that found that transfer from VET to university tended to be heavily concentrated in business (general), engineering, nursing and accounting, along with information technology and hospitality management.⁴

The following list identifies some current articulation agreements, with examples of variability in transparency for students noted:

- The University of Canterbury launched a new Master of Health Sciences and Bachelor of Nursing joint initiative with Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) in October 2014. The programme gives the opportunity for students who already hold a degree to gain two further qualifications in just two and a half years.
- The University of Auckland has a longstanding articulation agreement with MIT covering several different pathways options (business, engineering, nursing and teacher education).
- A 2010 partnership between Waikato, Bay of Plenty Polytechnic and Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi was signed to allow students to "staircase seamlessly between those institutions". Waikato Institute of Technology joined the partnership in 2014. According to the University of Waikato's website, "whether you're enrolled in a University of Waikato or Bay of Plenty Polytechnic Programme, your on-campus experience will be seamless. You can begin with polytechnic qualifications and use them as the entry to a university degree, or start directly in a university programme." **It is not readily apparent from the University's website how Wānanga students can make use of this partnership.**
- In 2015, Massey University signed an agreement with the ACG Tertiary & Careers Group which will allow ACG Yoobee Diploma of Animation and Digital Video (Level 5) and Diploma of Computer Graphic Design (Level 6) graduates to gain advanced standing into the second year of Massey's Bachelor of Design (Hons) and the Bachelor of Creative Media Production. **This information is readily available on the Yoobee website, but not easy to find on Massey University webpages.**
- According to the NorthTec website, AUT has articulation agreements in place with NorthTec covering qualifications in Business, Science (Conservation and Environmental Management) and Sports Science. **There does not appear to be any mention of these agreements on the AUT website or Calendar.**
- According to the Ntec Tertiary Group New Zealand, Ntec has an agreement with Massey University which means that students who have an IELTS of 5.5 with no band less than 5 and who have subsequently successfully completed the Concordia Institute of Business, Certificate of University Preparation for International Students Level 3, have direct entry into the following Massey University degree programmes:

³ Souto-Otero, 2013.

⁴ Cameron et al, 2014.

Bachelor of Applied Economics, Bachelor of Accounting or Bachelor of Business Studies. **There does not appear to be any mention of this on Massey University website or Calendar.**

The more visible of these agreements appear to be good examples of articulation agreements. However, there is little evidence of outcomes reporting for the benefit of students (although such reporting might exist internally). One exception is a 2015 report produced by Bay of Plenty Polytechnic (now Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology) looking at a representative sample of 107 graduates (2009-2014) from the New Zealand Diploma in Business offered by the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic.⁵ Through their articulation agreement with the University of Waikato, these students have guaranteed credit into the Bachelor of Management Studies (BMS), Bachelor of Business Analysis (Financial) (BBA(Fin)) and Bachelor of Tourism (B Tour).

Some relevant findings:

- 70% later enrolled in a degree programme at the University of Waikato;
- Of those who didn't enrol at Waikato, 62% didn't enrol because they got employment. The remainder gave time and financial constraints as the key reasons. *Note – this is consistent with international evidence that personal reasons and individual barriers ultimately determine decision-making, even with guaranteed articulation agreements in place.*
- Ethnicity matters: 76% of NZ European graduates later enrolled in a degree compared with 28% of Māori graduates. Of those who did enrol in a degree programme, 76% of NZ Europeans completed their degree compared with 20% of Māori.
- Age matters: 77% of graduates 30 years of age or less later enrolled in a degree, compared with 69% of graduates 31-40 years of age and 50% in the 41+ age group.
- Overall, 80% of the DipBis graduates are now employed. Again, ethnicity matters: NZ European had an employment rate of 89% compared with Māori (46%).

The study concludes that “The pathway package offered by the two institutions, a vocational polytechnic and an academic university, is considered by graduates to be highly successful for both employment outcomes and as a seamless model for obtaining two qualifications.”

At foundation/pre-degree level, there are many examples of university partnerships with non-university institutions such as Victoria University's foundation studies programme being developed with ACG – Academic Colleges Group - from 2017, the University of Auckland's Certificate in Foundation Studies (again, with ACG) and the University of Canterbury's partnership with CCEL for English language courses. The Certificate of University Preparation is a full-time formal qualification offered jointly by the University of Waikato and Wintec for students who don't initially meet the entry requirements for study at a New Zealand university. The Programme gives students University Entrance and can help make the transition into degree-study.

At a cursory glance (and not a focus of this analysis), it appears that universities are increasingly promoting foundation programme of their offering, sometimes in collaboration

⁵ Richardson, 2015.

with other institutions, in preference to staircasing with credit pathways from other New Zealand institutions.

Overall, while there are some pockets of good examples, there is not widespread use of articulation agreements facilitating transfer (as opposed to facilitating entry) between New Zealand universities and ITPs, and even fewer to be found between universities and PTEs, and universities and Wānanga. Indeed, this review of university websites highlighted that New Zealand universities appear to be increasingly more likely to have articulation agreements in place with international institutions than those at the national level.

4.1.4 MOOCs

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) emerged globally and were touted as a new and disruptive mode of learning in 2012. The format is principally a variant of long established distance learning coupled with learning technologies increasingly used elsewhere in tertiary education and predicated on growing demand for free access to accelerated content modules. Various versions of MOOCs had been evolving for at least 5 years prior to 2012. Several New Zealand universities have since launched MOOCs using international platforms, namely the University of Waikato, Massey University and the University of Auckland in 2013/14. One of the issues that the sector (globally) has since been grappling with is credentialisation; a related issue is whether and how MOOCs should be treated in terms of credit recognition.

This is still a development very much in its infancy in New Zealand. However, an email exchange between academic managers and UNZ in early September 2016 confirmed that at least one New Zealand university had been approached with a request to grant credit for a successfully completed MOOC and others have been giving thought to the issue. The exchange confirmed that universities do, or intend to (in the case of those who haven't yet received requests), treat applications on a case-by-case RPL (informal prior learning) basis with applicants needing to submit a portfolio and/or sit a "challenge examination" to ensure they had met the required course learning outcomes. Some universities (e.g. the University of Waikato and the University of Otago) already have established RPL papers. These would be used in the instance of prior MOOC study, requiring a detailed assessment of whether the content the student had covered in the MOOC matched to the content of one of the RPL papers.

This approach would seem to fit with NZ university/CUAP principles for credit recognition, and with international guidance. i.e. that higher education institutions must always take full responsibility for the quality of their entire offering, including the granting of credit within.⁶

4.2 International comparisons

4.2.1 Extent of transfer and credit recognition

Corroborating the New Zealand example, a literature review confirmed that estimating the extent of credit transfer within almost any jurisdiction is currently difficult. Accordingly, any level of comparability *across* those systems is likely to be flawed, noting again that the proportion of credit recognised for each successful applicant may vary from minimal to full. However, for indicative purposes, estimates of the proportion of undergraduate level students who transfer *and* gain credit range as follows:

⁶ Academic Partnerships, 2014.

Australia

10% – 16%⁷ (Note: 2009 report estimates – no indication from subsequent 2014 research that this has changed significantly).

United States

21% – 27% (Note: this varies significantly by state, from a low of 11% to a high of 46%. This estimate takes into account research that suggests that approximately 40% of the estimated one-third of students who transfer before graduating get no credit at all).⁸

In the US, credit appears to be more likely to be granted within states, backed up by consistent and transparent agreements underpinned (in the main) by the community college system. Those states with an entrenched and large community college system tend to have higher rates of college transfer (e.g. Texas, California) than those with fewer institutions (e.g. Alaska, Massachusetts). California, in particular has a strongly transparent system but credit is broadly limited to like-to-like institutions (public-to-public) and for students moving in the expected trajectory, from a 2-year college to a 4-year college.

Canada

Approximately 14%. Survey data suggests that approximately 16% of undergraduate students transfer at some point during their studies (similar to Australian estimates). Of students who transferred into universities, 89% were able to transfer at least some of their credits, and one-third were able to transfer all of their credits. On average, students who did transfer credit saw over 75% of their credits recognized (with the majority of those who didn't gain credit attributing it to a change in their field of study).⁹ A study of one province – Ontario – found that 83% of students who transferred received credit and that over three-quarters of remaining 17% didn't even apply for it. "Fully 95% of credit requests were at least partially successful, and, additionally, a third of students who didn't ask for credit were awarded it anyway."¹⁰

United Kingdom:

Unknown. "In some areas, moreover, there are challenges in knowing actual demand and usage, let alone potential or untapped demand... not recorded via higher education institutions' data submissions to the higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), and figures on actual usage for the sector have not been available."¹¹

The UK Department for Business Innovation and Skills has recently been consulting on "Accelerated Courses and Switching University of Degree" and calling for data to substantiate mostly anecdotal evidence about credit transfer rates across the sector.

In Scotland, a 2012 study found that credit transfer does occur between Vocational Education and Training (VET) and universities, specifically between Higher National (HN)

⁷ Curtis, 2009.

⁸ National Centre for Education Statistics, 2014.

⁹ Usher, 2013.

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Souto-Otero, 2013.

qualifications and degrees but that this is limited, problematic and concentrated in a small number of institutions. Credit is discretionary and over half of HN graduates who progress to degree courses in another institution do not receive full credit. "Universities vary widely in their willingness to transfer credit from HNs; the large majority of HN students who gain full credit are concentrated in just four universities."

Ireland

Unknown. A 2015 study found that "records are maintained by some providers but comparable data and measurable indicators of activity are not currently available across the sector". Like New Zealand, there are some positive developments at a national and institutional level, but evidence that a lack of alignment, coordination and inconsistencies in practice and terminology are problematic both for students and data analysis. i.e. a "lack of accurate data across institutions makes it difficult to link take up by the applicant to proactive information, guidance and supports. In practice, many institutions fail to make the availability of RPL clearly visible to potential applicants through webpages or prospectus".¹²

4.2.2 National statements and frameworks

Internationally, most jurisdictions have national and/or state-level statements about credit recognition and transfer, which could at first glance be seen to be broadly similar to the NZQA *Credit Recognition and Transfer Policy* (2002). However most of these have been:

- Reviewed in recent years; *and*
- Contain state or national-level goals to increase credit transfer; *and*
- Are actively driven by a body or group that helps drive activity in this area including through the development of online portals for student information and support; *and may*
- Include incentives or penalties to encourage behaviour via funding models, performance requirements and, more rarely, incentives for employers to encourage work-based RPL applications.

The development of a European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) in 2009 has helped make credit transfer more consistent and transparent across Europe and within member countries but does not appear to have been adequate in itself to have driven a substantial increase in credit recognition at a national level. Instead, individual countries that have emerged as leaders in this area tend to be driven by a national framework (see below). In the UK, it is noted that "there is a need, thus, for greater pressure or the provision of greater incentives to higher education institutions to reward the use of credit transfer and accumulation systems".

For comparative purposes, below are some examples and experiences of national or state-level statements and frameworks:

Australia

Formal credit recognition is guided by the AQF Pathways Policy (2013). This document includes the statement that "Issuing organisations will systematically negotiate credit agreements with other issuing organisations for any AQF qualifications to maximise the credit available to eligible students for both entry into and credit towards AQF

¹² National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2015.

qualifications." The policy also details minimum percentage credit as the basis for negotiation. e.g. "33% credit for a Diploma linked to a 3 year Bachelor Degree".

The Higher Education Standards Framework (applies to all institutions from 1 January 2017) includes a section on "Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning". Extract: "TEQSA expects providers to take a positive attitude to the award of credit wherever practicable, but TEQSA must also be satisfied that the granting of credit will not disadvantage students (e.g. by admitting students who are insufficiently prepared to undertake the level of higher education required) or diminish the integrity of the qualification awarded."

Like New Zealand, Australia does not currently have clear credit goals and incentive structures in place. This may be addressed through the above relevant section of the new Higher Education Standards which will be in place from 2017 although it is not yet clear how proactively TEQSA will pursue variances from the Standard expectation. In the meantime, several Australian universities have highly detailed and interactive websites to pro-actively encourage the declaration of prior learning, including:

- University of Canberra "[Credit – Finish your studies sooner](#)"
- UWS Tertiary Education Pathways and Partnerships "[Claim your credit](#)"
- University of the Sunshine Coast "[Credit transfer calculator](#)"

United States

Significant variance exists from state to state but, overall, almost three-quarters of states have adopted some sort of statewide policy to facilitate transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions.¹³

A summary of 50 states' legislation related to credit recognition and transfer confirms:¹⁴

- 36 states have transferable core of lower division courses.
- 16 states have statewide common course numbering.
- 31 states have statewide guaranteed transfer of an associate degree.
- 15 states have statewide reverse transfer.

With respect to incentives, California's universities are required by law to give transfer students priority over direct-entry students. Texas imposes a financial penalty on any institution that "inappropriately or unnecessarily requires a student to retake a course that is substantially equivalent to a course already taken in another institution."¹⁵

Several US states (specifically, Ohio, Louisiana and Indiana) are held up as "best practice" in this area through the use of indicators that emphasise student progress, not just completions, and include performance agreements that provide incentives for articulation, transfer, and credit attainment whether via recognition or completion.¹⁶

Examples of good practice in online resources appear to be less common at state level, but consistent state-wide information is available on most institutional websites. In addition, private developers are emerging with website solutions like [Transferology](#) used by Ohio University.

¹³ Jenkins and Fink, 2016.

¹⁴ Education Commission of the States, 2016.

¹⁵ Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 4, Subchapter B, Rule 4.26.

¹⁶ Maio, 2012.

Canada

In 2002, a “Ministerial Statement on Credit Transfer” was introduced in Canada requiring that provinces and territories must report each year on the implementation of the statement's principles, their activities, framework for action, and priority action areas. This was reviewed and updated in 2009.¹⁷

This is supplemented at a more detailed level by the “ARUCC Transcript and Transfer Guide”, a national, online resource for “Canadian registrarial and pathway practitioners and policy developers”. It contains standards, definitions, and additional resources for close to 500 transcript and transfer credit terms in an online, searchable format. This resource is intended to encourage best practice and enhance student mobility and data portability.¹⁸

Under this national directive, at provincial level there are many examples of these practices being adopted in a collaborative manner. The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) was established in 1989 with a mandate to facilitate admission, articulation, and transfer arrangements among British Columbia's public and private postsecondary institutions. As of 2013, there were over 92,000 course transfer, 900 block transfer, and 50 degree partnership agreements in the B.C. transfer system.

ONTransfer is a service provided by the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) to connect current and prospective students to transfer opportunities.¹⁹ ONCAT is a member organisation with participation of all 44 publicly funded colleges and universities in Ontario. ONCAT was established in 2011 to enhance academic pathways and reduce barriers for students looking to transfer among those institutions.

United Kingdom

The UK is party to the “European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System” (ECTS). Supplementing this, a “Higher Education Credit Framework” (developed and endorsed by nominees of Universities UK, GuildHE, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and the Higher Education Funding Council for England) has also been in place since 2008. However, as corroborated by research elsewhere, without a goal-orientated national framework, little progress appears to have been made. Isolated cross-sector solutions have arisen to fill the void. For example, SEEC is a consortium (registered charity) of universities and HE providers working together to advance the use and practice of academic credit. Originally the “South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer”, SEEC covers a number of institutions throughout the UK including the Open University, Middlesex University, University of Hertfordshire, University of West London and University of Portsmouth. SEEC advocates for greater commonality via a national framework.

The UK Department for Business Innovation and Skills has recently been consulting on “Accelerated Courses and Switching University of Degree” and calling for data to corroborate mostly anecdotal evidence about credit transfer rates across the sector. A report from this consultation and evidence gathering exercise is expected in late-2016. In the meantime, a number of submitters have made their feedback publicly accessible. Most note that credit processes already exist and demand remains low for individual/personal reasons, while acknowledging that greater transparency (backed up by adequate support) and a focus on

¹⁷ Council of Ministers of Education, 2009.

¹⁸ Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions & Transfer, 2016.

¹⁹ Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer, 2016.

more articulation agreements would be useful. [Refer Appendix Two – extracts from submissions].

In Scotland, a series of reforms over the past decade have sought to proactively encourage RPL, in particular. These include: a national system of outcomes-based modules in education and training; a unified system of national qualifications (NQs); the Scottish credit accumulation and transfer system (SCOTCAT); Scottish vocational qualifications framework (SVQs); merger of existing qualification frameworks such as NQs, SVQs and SCOTCATS together into the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF); centralisation of qualifications award with SQA.

Information on RPL (e.g. SCQF RPL guidelines, various reports on RPL in Scotland, etc.) is freely available from the SCQF and QAA websites. RPL information is also available from the websites of professional bodies, voluntary organizations, higher and further education institution. Additionally, many RPL resources, such as RPL kits, profiling tools, skills passports, etc., have been developed by a voluntary RPL Network. This includes an "Employer Toolkit: "Would you credit it?" - a short guide for employers describing the benefits of having learning programs credit rated and recognized on the SCQF.

Ireland

The Irish credit recognition framework is characterised as committed to RPL but currently fragmented and inconsistent. A 2011 "National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030" government report called for a national framework for RPL (the term is used in Ireland to cover both formal and informal prior learning assessment) to be developed. There is growing support for the development of a multi-agency approach to encourage take-up of RPL across the country with authors of a 2015 research report also recommending "the adoption of a nationally agreed common definition and understanding of what constitutes RPL within a higher education context. The definition would facilitate meaningful data collection, benchmarking and comparative analysis of practice institutionally, nationally and internationally". This same study summarised good practice in RPL as having the following characteristics:

- National policy framework aligned to relevant international frameworks
- Measures to address the issue of funding
- Clarity of definitions and meaning
- Coherent data capture
- Clear roles and responsibilities at system and institutional level
- Robust quality assurance
- Structure to support sharing of good practice and development of capacity and capability
- Structures to support applicants.

Work on a national framework appears to be gathering speed. In the meantime, the Council of the European Union "2012 Directive on non-formal and informal learning" recommends that European institutions have strong arrangements in place for RPL by 2018.

France

VAE ("Awarding academic credit for experience") is a national government website driven by Campus France (a French national agency for the promotion of higher education, international student services, and international mobility). The "Portal of the Validation of

Acquired Experience” is open to everyone for exploration of credit opportunities for their prior experience, including international students.

Netherlands

EVC is a national website designed to provide students with centralised information about RPL and APL (Acceleration of Prior Learning). EVC is the responsibility of the Dutch Knowledge Centre which also established and monitors a voluntary code (A Quality Code for APL: Identifying and Accrediting a Lifetime of Learning, 2006) and plays a role in validating learning outcomes in the Netherlands. The Centre works under guidance of the Dutch Ministry of Education. From 2007, the Dutch government has been subsidising RPL initiatives and providing tax advantages to employers which actively support the scheme. RPL is now included in over 90 collective labour agreements. It is estimated that, working under this Code and using the EVC resources, between 2011 and 2014 nearly 18,000 RPL applications were successfully approved each year.²⁰ Following a review of RPL in 2013, the Netherlands is now transitioning to a new private system which it claims will better connect RPL initiatives with their national qualifications framework.

Denmark

In Denmark it is a legal requirement that all applicants are required to apply for credit transfer from prior unfinished education at the same level when applying for an educational programme at a Danish university. This was introduced as part of the Danish government’s “Study Progress Reform” in 2013, largely to reduce completion times. The changes have been the subject of heavy criticism with critics suggesting that the “system is forcing students to have subjects credited that have absolutely no relevance to their studies” leading to composite degrees that, it is claimed, reduce the subject knowledge acquired by students as they change direction.²¹

It has also been suggested that that overly prescriptive staircasing and articulation arrangements can lead to an overly insular system and impede internationalisation – affecting both international students wanting to apply for entry with credit and also domestic students who want to undertake student mobility opportunities but cannot as credit transfer has reduced the amount of options they have within their degree.

South Korea

South Korea has a rather innovative approach to credit recognition which began in the mid-1990s. The system, known as the “Academic Credit Bank System” (ACBS) was designed to help lifelong learners receive degrees while not placing additional pressure on already overflowing higher education institutions. A government organisation was established in 1997 and this was then transferred to a separate corporation (National Institute for Lifelong Learning Education) in 2008. “The easiest way to understand ACBS is to think of it as a degree-granting agency of last resort.... ACBS allows people to do is to pool the credits they have earned from various sources, and package those into a degree, or a plan of study that leads to a degree... ACBS verifies that the courses match program requirements and that they have been issued by accredited programs (see below for details on accreditation).”²² Effectively, students graduate with a degree from the Ministry of Education. In 2011, the

²⁰ Pijls, 2015.

²¹ Young, 2015.

²² Usher, 2014.

ACBS awarded approximately 15% of all junior college degrees in Korea, with nearly all growth over the previous 5 years occurring in child care and social work. 74% of all ACBS graduates are now female. While regarded as an interesting model with some limited success, "it has not had the kind of transformative effect on higher education that some of its more optimistic proponents had hoped for. One of the perceived barriers to greater take-up is the lack of prestige attached to ACBS degrees."

4.2.3 International research and experience

In the absence of good national data, international research provides some of the strongest confirmation that New Zealand universities' approach to credit recognition is likely to be out of step with good practice. A 2013 report published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario looked at "College-to-University Transfer Arrangements and Undergraduate Education" in 14 jurisdictions (two Canada provinces, nine US states, and Australia, Scotland and New Zealand).

This report states "Among the jurisdictions we surveyed outside Ontario, only one (New Zealand) has a highly decentralized transfer policy that relies on individual universities to decide which credits they will accept from colleges, with no transfer policy that relies on individual universities to decide which credits they will accept from colleges, with no system-wide goals or institutions to promote transfer. The available data show low rates of transfer: about 4 per cent of college students transfer to a university degree programme".²³

A 2013 UK report similarly found that "where institutions are left to devise and implement their own procedures in areas such as recognition of prior learning this can lead to a number of problems and barriers, together with an overall lack of cohesion.... More generally, the diversity in practice in the sector is challenging for users and leads to lack of transparency".²⁴

A 2010 study of European national systems for the recognition of prior learning found that countries could be divided into 4 groupings in terms of their level of development. Category 1 (High) included France, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal all of which were described as "have established practices for recognition of prior learning encompassing all or most sectors of learning and significant levels of take up. Category 2 (Medium-High) included Denmark, Germany, Sweden, England, Wales and Scotland and "have established systems but relatively low take up, or well-established systems but only in certain sectors without a national framework for recognition." Countries with a "medium-low" level of development include Belgium, Ireland and Italy and are characterised by "greater sectoral fragmentation and lower take-up levels". The final grouping are countries "with a low level of development are in the process of developing or approving legislation or policy relating to recognition of prior learning, or tools which might support the introduction of a process of recognition such as occupational profiles, as well as countries where very little activity, if any at all, is taking place." Based on these descriptions, it is probable that New Zealand would fall between groups 3 and 4 on a similar assessment. In addition, some countries (like Denmark and the Netherlands, see later in this report) have made significant progress and nation-wide changes since this study while New Zealand universities have taken only minor steps in recent years.²⁵

²³ Trick, 2013.

²⁴ Souto-Otero, 2013.

²⁵ Hawley, 2010.

Research in the United States into transfer and credit found three key factors that are likely to lead to the successful granting of credit recognition for individual students:

- Students transferring in line with how a system is structured for pathway movement (i.e. clearly articulation agreements, junior college structures, moving “up” the systems rather than “down”, etc.); AND
- Students performing satisfactorily in all parts of the system (i.e. poorly performing students in one sector are not likely to receive credit when moving to another institution); AND
- Students transferring from like-to-like institutions (i.e. between public institutions in the same system).

These findings accord with a 2015 review of “guided pathways” versus “self-service” models of study that recognises that students outside of structured programmes which don’t build on core skill acquisition, cohort-based support and a lack of coherence “often have difficulty navigating these choices and end up making poor decisions about what program to enter, what courses to take, and when to seek help. Many drop out of college altogether”.²⁶

A 2016 UK study found a number of potential barriers which may deter students from transferring institutions:

- Lack of information;
- Inertia;
- Credits are not a universal currency (“even courses which share the same name (for example: BA Hons Economics) differ between institutions in both content and quality”);
- Bureaucratic burden;
- Other barriers – including government incentives/disincentives to increase credit transfer rates.

In Scotland, while RPL/informal learning has been actively encouraged through national frameworks and collaborative initiatives, prior *formal* learning credit recognition remains limited. It is suggested that “one explanation for the limited amount of credit transfer is the extent to which the Scottish system enables flexible entry, flexible pacing and progression through programmes without the need for formal credit transfer procedures. Scottish credit arrangements are based more on credit accumulation than on credit transfer.” A 2012 research report suggested that flexibility and integration of the Scottish system is still limited by three types of barriers: institutional factors, perceptions about different types of learning and political barriers.

A 2016 analysis of Canadian transfer students identified some of those institutional factors. Specifically, that transfer students cost significantly more than “direct” students – up to 80% more - for universities to admit and integrate. The research found that transitional support costs are significant and that there is a very genuine need for “a continuing role for government in financially supporting universities and colleges in recruiting, admitting and integrating transfer students”.²⁷

Australian research suggests that coordinated and nested study programs are particularly effective transfer mechanisms between VET (Vocational Education and Training) and

²⁶ Community College Research Center, Columbia University, 2015.

²⁷ Trick, 2016.

universities and that poor performance and the practice of ungraded assessments in VET (i.e. pass/fail) is an impediment to VET to higher education transfer.²⁸ Researchers summarised that variances in the amount of credit awarded appeared to be more closely linked to the policies and practices of universities rather than to the characteristics of VET award holders or differences between study, *per se*.

The same research concluded that credit transfer appears to be highly concentrated in certain fields of study - business (general), engineering, nursing, accounting, information technology and hospitality management - and does not appear to facilitate greatly students' decisions to change their field of study.²⁹

In the UK it has been noted that the tension between the acceptance of credit, increased differentiation and the achievement of graduate outcomes is important and not yet addressed in the national context: "More generally, it has been argued that there is a tension in the policy expectation for all institutions to embrace transfer equally when there is also a growing expectation for institutional diversity".³⁰

Critically, given various governments' push for greater credit recognition, there is an emerging body of research suggesting that "the links between CATS [Credit Accumulation and Transfer Schemes], widening participation and increased flexibility of learning are not obvious. Learners themselves have not yet expressed significant demand".³¹

4.3 The NZ non-university sector

The focus of this paper has been to look at NZ universities in the context of international practice, experience and research. However, suggestions that New Zealand universities are not doing enough to encourage formal and informal credit recognition to accelerate learning and qualifications invariably lead to comparison with efforts made by the non-university sector. In addition to a small number of articulation agreements (which are largely with universities and, to a lesser extent, with or between ITPs), the following observations can be made:

Compared with NZ universities, in general ITP websites do tend to more proactively market opportunities for formal and informal credit and reference to articulation agreements on their website, as part of admissions processes and in promotional documentation. For example, Manukau Institute of Technology has a prominent link to RPL under their "Study Options" menu on the home page and provides an 0800 number for prospective students to talk to someone about RPL. However, it could be argued that many of these institutions have narrower roles, fewer programmes, fewer regulations and less complex admissions requirements than is the case of universities, allowing for greater prominence for credit-related information.

Otago Polytechnic's "Capable NZ" initiative is a high profile example of a proactive approach to recruiting students who want to quickly upskill their qualifications and receive awards based on the assessment of their prior learning (APL), Work-based Learning (WBL) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). For example, to complete a bachelor degree via one of these streams may take only 10 - 15 months depending on the extent of prior learning and

²⁸ Cameron et al, 2014.

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ Souto-Otero, 2013.

to allow time to complete a new learning project to assess outcomes.³² Students who enrol in Otago Polytechnic's Bachelor of Applied Management via Capable NZ may be able to be awarded the entire qualification based on their previous experience and current work environment. "People with relevant, substantial experience and learning may be able to obtain all or part of this degree via Independent Learning Pathways (ILP) through Capable NZ."³³

Similarly, ARA (the Institute of Canterbury, previously CPIT and Aoraki Polytechnic) has a Centre for Assessment of Prior Learning (CAPL) dedicated to advancing applications in this way, backed up by dedicated academic staff in pre-defined fields of study, a CAPL Degree Information Pack and website, and application packs specifically designed for each degree.³⁴

Unitec has an online form for prospective students to initiate discussion with an advisor about assessment of prior learning, marketed under the tagline "Don't waste time and money repeating material - get your previous experience assessed before you enrol."

By way of comparison, a review of Wānanga websites found that one provided no clear information on credit transfer of RPL at all, one mentioned it as a possibility as part of the enrolment process (but provided no further links to information) and the third mentioned it only in a detailed search of academic regulations. This final reference was less than proactive suggesting criticism of a lack of reciprocity in articulation across the sector: "Where it is appropriate, Te Mana Whakahaere will credit to a student's programme of study successful studies undertaken elsewhere, as well as relevant learning and experience. However, at this stage no reciprocity can be guaranteed for students of Te Wānanga o Raukawa who seek to enrol at other institutions."

Ako Aotearoa, the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence, created a short guide about Credit Transfer for the sector in 2011.

³² Capable NZ: Frequently Asked Questions www.capablenz.co.nz/about-us/frequently-asked-questions/#Assessment

³³ Capable NZ: Bachelor of Applied Management. www.capablenz.co.nz/programmes/programme-areas/bachelor-of-applied-management/

³⁴ ARA Centre for Assessment of Prior Learning. www.ara.ac.nz/study-options/centre-for-assessment-of-prior-learning-capl

5. Conclusions

Placed within an international context, New Zealand's universities' credit transfer and recognition rates appear to fall at the lower end of those of comparable jurisdictions. This is uncertain given the availability of national and international data but New Zealand's place within this range would be consistent with research that characterises impediments to higher rates of credit recognition. There are a number of reasons for this - not all of which under the control of institutions - and also doubt about whether increased levels of credit transfer will achieve the goals sought at a national policy setting level.

International research and analysis suggests that systems with lower levels of credit recognition tend to be underpinned by diffuse models that do not provide incentives to institutions to reward the use of credit transfer and recognition systems. The lack of a specific, goal-driven and incentivised framework across New Zealand is likely responsible for a continued diversity of practices and policies, which contributes to student confusion or uncertainty, a reactive approach from institutions and low credit recognition as a result. In addressing this, the government will need to reconcile this imperative with a focus on institution-specific graduate outcomes and the differentiation sought at sub-sector level. It will also need to work with quality assurance bodies to ensure the "integrity of qualifications".

Research suggests that even strong articulation pathways cannot provide much assistance for students who perform poorly or those who wish to make substantive changes in their field of study. Credit recognition (or a lack of) is not the only barrier to movement within the sector. Personal barriers, including inertia, finances and lack of prior success need to be taken into account. A study of one New Zealand articulation arrangement found that age and ethnicity have bearing on the take up of credit transfer options.

Despite these concerns, it is submitted that improvements can and should be made to increase credit recognition in the advancement of transparency, equity and efficiency and to bring New Zealand universities in line with good practice elsewhere.

It is apparent that there is an opportunity for the expansion of opportunities for transfer and the recognition of accompanying credit within universities and some advantages from sector and national-level collaboration. There are many good examples to be found overseas and provided here, particularly Canada, some US states and parts of Europe. However, international research and experience also suggests that this is not likely to occur without a nationally-incentivised framework, one which might have unintended consequences for the sector as a whole and may not have a significant impact overall on the government's goals for educational achievement and lifelong skill development.

Drawing on good national practice and international experience, it is suggested that New Zealand universities work individually, collectively and with government to develop and support:

Institution level (individual universities)

1. The provision of clearer and more consistent information for students, with applications for credit and RPL proactively sought in a timely fashion as a coherent part of online admissions processes.³⁵
2. Greater numbers of articulation agreements between universities and ITPs, between universities and PTEs, and between universities and Wānanga detailing clear staircasing paths for students.³⁶
3. Access to credit decision evidence at an institutional level (rather than being retained within departments and schools) and in standardised categories to support annual and longitudinal data analysis including tracking of incoming/transfer student outcomes. [Links to 4]

Sector level (universities, collectively)

4. Consistency around outcomes-focused data definition, collection and dissemination to provide greater capacity for data analysis as a sector and to support credit recognition decision-making for individuals. [Links to 3]
5. Consultation about whether a national web presence, perhaps facilitated through UNZ/CUAP, would be beneficial to provide students with a university sector-wide view of credit policies, opportunities and outcomes.³⁷

National level (with government and other providers)

6. A goal-driven national pathways policy which outlines the adoption of common nomenclature and minimum standards for both formal and informal credit application to different qualification levels, allowing for individual negotiations that vary from this standard, with a necessary focus on ensuring the integrity of qualifications.³⁸
7. Discussions about how incentives for credit recognition, including recognition of the costs of transitional support, might feature in a revised funding model.³⁹
8. Discussions about whether a national body to promote and support credit recognition across tertiary education would be beneficial.⁴⁰

To secure the benefits anticipated from the implementation of the above steps, government agencies will need to reconcile national goals for increased credit recognition with a stated desire for differentiation within the system and for the development and achievement of institutional and qualification-specific graduate outcomes. Specifically, government will need

³⁵ e.g. University of Waikato "[Academic Credit Explorer](#)"; University of the Sunshine Coast "[Credit transfer calculator](#)". University of Canberra "[Credit – Finish your studies sooner](#)"; Western Sydney University "[Claim your credit](#)".

³⁶ e.g. University of Auckland articulation agreements with [Manukau Institute of Technology](#); University of Waikato articulation agreements with [Waiariki Bay of Plenty Polytechnic](#) (now known as Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology); Massey University's articulation agreements with [ACG Tertiary & Careers Group/Yoobee graduates](#).

³⁷ e.g. [ontransfer.ca](#) (a service provided by the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer to connect current and prospective students to transfer opportunities); e.g. [SEEC](#) (a UK consortium of universities and HE providers working together to advance the use and practice of academic credit).

³⁸ e.g. [Australian Qualifications Pathway Policy](#); Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions & Transfer [Transcript and Transfer Guide](#).

³⁹ e.g. Discussions underway in 2015/16 review of [Ontario University Funding Model](#); US state models held up as "best practice" that use indicators that emphasise student progress, not just completions, and include performance agreements that provide incentives for articulation, transfer, and credit attainment whether via recognition or completion. [Particular references: Ohio, Louisiana, Indiana](#).

⁴⁰ e.g. [Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions & Transfer](#); VAE (France - government) "[The Portal of the Validation of Acquired Experience](#)"; private solutions such as [Transferology](#) in the US.

to reconcile national goals for increased credit recognition with recent international experience that suggests that:

- Overly generous credit transfer arrangements can negatively impact on the cohesiveness of a programme of study resulting in students with qualifications that do not accord with expected graduate outcomes;
- Reduced focus on the integrity of qualifications (including coherence and depth) can weaken institutions' responsibility for the quality assurance of a student's entire qualification reducing accountability and imperatives for improvement;
- Highly prescriptive credit transfer arrangements, rather than ones approved on a case-by-case basis, can lock students into advancing quickly through pathways without acknowledging their individual needs and preferences for graduated learning and failing to acknowledge the additional transition support needs of transferring students (including their impact on non-transferring classmates);
- Higher rates of transfer and credit recognition can have consequences for the internationalisation of institutions. In particular, it is suggested that transfer students may be less likely to take up student mobility opportunities. International experience also suggests that institutions required to give greater levels of credit and take in more transfer students can reduce places available for international students.

Critically, government agencies will need to reconcile national goals for increased credit recognition with research suggests that it is unclear whether the greater promotion of credit via pathways makes a significant difference to individual student decision-making, to graduate flexibility and to increased achievement within priority groups. Research suggests that even strong articulation pathways cannot provide much assistance for students who perform poorly elsewhere in the sector or those who wish to make substantive changes in their field of study.

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Appendix One: Links to NZ university policies, processes and fee information for formal and informal credit recognition

University	Policy/policies	Procedures	Applicable Fees
University of Auckland	https://www.calendar.auckland.ac.nz/en/genregs/credit.html	<p>How do prospective undergraduate students apply for credit for previous courses taken at another tertiary institution? https://uoa.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/1648</p> <p>Transferring from another NZ university for Semester Two 2016 https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/for/future-undergraduates/fu-study-options/transferring-from-another-university-in-semester-two-2016.html</p> <p>Refer tables of Course Equivalencies</p>	<p>Fee \$85 (Free from another NZ university for Semester Two 2016)</p>
AUT University	<p>General Regulations – “Part 4 Recognition of Prior Learning” http://www.aut.ac.nz/media/intranet/pdfs/services-and-operations/academic-quality-office/academic-calendar-2016/GAR-Part-4_Academic-Calendar-2016.pdf</p>	<p>Recognition of Prior Learning http://www.aut.ac.nz/study-at-aut/apply-to-aut/recognition-of-prior-learning http://www.aut.ac.nz/study-at-aut/entry-requirements/postgraduate-and-graduate-admission-requirements/transfer-requirements</p>	<p>Fee \$73.60 (plus NZ\$10 per credit for approved RPL applications.)</p>
University of Waikato	<p>Personal Programmes of Study Regulations – “Part 14. Credit – transfer credit and cross credit” http://calendar.waikato.ac.nz/regulations/personalprogs.html</p>	<p>http://www.waikato.ac.nz/study/transfer-credit.shtml</p> <p>Refer Academic Credit Explorer tool</p>	<p>Fee \$50 (Application for cross-credit from a completed degree) RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) - Challenge Examination (per paper) \$205.00 - Administration fee (per application) \$50</p>

University	Policy/policies	Procedures	Applicable Fees
Massey University	https://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/about-massey/calendar/qualification-regulations/recognition-of-formal-and-informal-priorlearning.cfm	https://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/fms/Study/Enrol/Documents/Forms/Application-for-credit.pdf?244165318979825606F701F7E38ECC79	Fee \$98.40 Cross credit and transfer of credit Fee \$159.20 Recognition of prior learning obtained through training, work experience and life experience (per paper/subject)
Victoria University of Wellington	http://www.victoria.ac.nz/documents/policy/academic/credit-transfer-statute.pdf	https://www.victoria.ac.nz/international/applying/credit	Nil
University of Canterbury	http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/media/documents/policies-and-regulations/credit-transfer-for-students-from-new-zealand-institutions.pdf	http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/future-students/apply-and-enrol/transfer-credit-from-a-nz-tertiary-institution/	Fee \$110
Lincoln University	Statutes and Regulations, Section B "Credit" and H "Credits and Exemptions". http://www.lincoln.ac.nz/Documents/Marketing/Publications/Calendar/Current-Calendar.pdf	Application for Assessment of Credit http://www.lincoln.ac.nz/PageFiles/23485/Application%20for%20Assessment%20of%20Credit%20v3.pdf	Lincoln University does not charge for the credit assessment. However, there will be a \$75 fee for transferring any credit/exemptions awarded to your Lincoln University academic record.
University of Otago	http://www.otago.ac.nz/administration/policies/otago031998.html	http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/entrance/otago012876.html	Fee \$93.00

Appendix Two: Extracts from submissions (UK “Accelerated Courses and Switching University or Degree: Call for Evidence”)

In May 2016, the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills released a discussion document entitled “Accelerated courses and switching university or degree: call for evidence”. Submissions and other feedback received is still being analysed (as at October 2016). However, a number of submitters have made their feedback publicly accessible. Below are some relevant extracts. Most note that existing credit processes already exist and demand remains low for individual/personal reasons, while acknowledging that greater transparency (backed up by adequate support) and a focus on more articulation agreements would be useful.

[The Engineering Professors’ Council](#)

- The current system of credit, usually accompanied by credit transfer/accreditation for prior learning, was put in place to support a perceived demand for students to transfer between UK HEIs. We do not believe that this has happened on any significant scale in practice, except for clearly defined articulation arrangements between institutions, which already work well. Hence we would suggest that demand to transfer mid-degree is likely to be limited.
- University courses are much more diverse than the premise of credit transfer assumes. When students do transfer now, there are often gaps in prerequisite knowledge /understanding, even where they have in theory studied courses similar to prerequisite topics in the receiving institution.
The difficulty of awarding credit in a fair way for year abroad exchange students offers some evidence for this.
- Credit transfer already exists and students do move between institutions for a variety of reasons. However, we are not convinced of any academic benefit of embedding credit transfer more widely and encouraging greater movement between institutions on any significant scale. This question presupposes there is some intrinsic benefit of movement between institutions. In reality, moving almost always involves additional work to bridge gaps in knowledge and may have a negative effect on student performance. Currently, credit transfer works best where students move between institutions through formal agreements to ensure prerequisites are met.
- Curricula in the USA, particularly in early years of university, tend to be more standardised than those in the UK. Greater standardisation is likely to lead to reduction in the overall level of challenge presented by courses as well as less diversity. This lack of diversity would limit the set of experiences provided by universities and could have a negative impact on partnerships with local industries.

[University of Southampton](#)

- It is worth separating out the existence of a credit transfer system with the impact that would arise from widespread use of such a system. The system (RPL) already exists and is used by many institutions, but the level of usage is very small compared with the number of students. So one answer to this question is that the impact of a credit transfer system would be minimal, in that there already is one and the impact has indeed been minimal.
- The impact would however be very great if a significant number of students were to use the system to move institution. Implications could include:

- Curriculum and learning design – at the moment, even in modular courses, many subjects build on learning from one year or one module to feed into another. Different courses do not teach the same material in the same order, even in modules with the same name. Students who transfer may either struggle in their new institutions or in some cases take longer to complete their degrees as they have material to catch up.
- To make matters worse, students transferring in from many different institutions will have different gaps would need to be addressed.
- As a result, there would be pressure on institutions to become more and more standardised in what and how they teach. If the UK went down such a route, it could lead to a reduction in the breadth of course material over the sector, reducing both student choice and institutional autonomy.
- If such homogenisation proved impossible or was deemed undesirable, it is possible that universities would have larger numbers of students struggling with their learning, leading to greater student stress and more demand on student wellbeing and support services as well as academic time to support catch-up.
- Finally, those students who have not moved may feel that their teaching and course work is disrupted as those teaching are repeating material in order to help others.
- Student satisfaction in both switchers and non-switchers could go down.

[Guild HE](#)

- Currently, credit transfer processes exist within individual institutions across the higher education sector, based on the notion of academic judgement. In order for there to be a more coherent approach to credit transfer across the sector there needs to be greater transparency in both the process for doing so and in the way the learning gained at one institution is recognised by another.
- ... it is possible to have increased transparency about what learning is transferable and what modules and core content would have to be covered for a student to be eligible to transfer, with added clarity about the application process and timeframe.
- Credit transfer can play an important role in achieving greater social mobility.... Additionally, an effective credit transfer system would support student retention in HE.

[The UK Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine](#)

- From our experiences in the field of medical physics and biomedical engineering, an accreditation system does much to standardise the learning outcomes of different courses and this makes it much easier to compare the students' achievements. However it is important, especially at post-graduate level, to allow universities to build on their own strengths so that their degrees may specialise in one particular area of a subject. Hence accreditation schemes should not be so rigid that they do not allow any specialisation i.e. they should permit a component of core modules (that are appropriate for specific credit transfer) as well as specialised taught modules that are bespoke to each higher education institute's local strengths (which may not be realistic to credit transfer, and if so, only as general credit transfer).
- A centralised UK-wide credit transfer system, in which the student (rather than the academic) applies for credit transfer through an independent system, demonstrating equivalence to academic credits on another UK taught course, might offer a solution

to this issue. This could conceivably be administered by the new national Office for Students to best represent students' interests.

SEEC

- Many of the essential elements of a credit transfer system are already in place so the question is not about the system but about the extent of its use. Currently SEEC member institutions are actively involved in the following types of credit transfer arrangements which significantly benefit learners:
- Transfer between courses internally within institutions
- Progression and articulation arrangements enabling students to move to higher awards utilising their credit within and between institutions
- Students moving between professional and academic qualifications and utilising some or all of the credit in so doing.
- Enabling the identification of credit for work-based learning (either prior-learning through RPEL arrangements or contemporaneous learning through course design).

Credit transfer could be more effectively embedded if:

- There was greater commonality in terms of a national framework within which credit decisions are taken.
- An explicit entitlement to the recognition of prior learning (including both certificated and experiential learning) were established, regulated and monitored.
- All Institutions were required to make their credit transfer practices open and transparent to establish credit as the 'common currency' for learning.
- The Competitions and Market Authority had a role to ensure that institutional policies governing the transfer and recognition of credit were implemented as advertised.
- Learners had an independent source of advice on credit transfer (currently only some institutions provide advice and they may have vested interests that may not align with those of the learner).
- There was a register of the volume of credit given by institutions for professional awards against designated qualifications both to enable learners to consider routes for utilising professional awards towards higher qualifications and for institutional benchmarking purposes.
- A more consistent learner record existed enabling admissions tutors to make detailed decisions on students entering with advanced standing without the need to ask for significant additional evidence.

We would consider the main barriers are:

- Lack of awareness by learners (and some institutions) of existing institutional policies that enable credit transfer
- Self-interest of institutions. Institutions do not gain tuition fee income from credit transfer unless (as some institutions do) they offer specific modules to support the process of making credit claims.
- Lack of promotion of the opportunities of credit transfer. Often institutional policies on credit transfer are not actively promoted by institutions and there is very little public promotion of how credit transfer can operate to reduce tuition fees and study time in gaining higher education qualifications.
- Lack of independent advice.

- Over emphasis on the need for specific credit (the meeting of a full range of specified programme or module learning outcomes) where it may not be needed rather than general credit appropriate to level.
- Lack of a detailed learner record that goes with the learner so that admissions tutors don't have to approach the current (or past) institution which causes delays and may place additional barriers. Learners may not wish their current institution to know that they are considering moving.
- Risks to admissions tutors from accepting students where subsequent failure may count against them
- Institutions providing effective induction/orientation for students entering higher education programmes at later stages.
- Resistance of some institutions to consider the standards of other institutions as being directly comparable.

Supporting Professionalism in Admissions

- In principle, a more flexible and transparent transfer system is welcome, provided it is in the best interests of the student. Most students are satisfied with their choice of course and provider, but this should not mean we overlook our duty to those who are not. For the limited number of students who would want to transfer degrees or courses during their study, this proposal may well aid overall retention and success, if it is underpinned by support and appropriate information, advice and guidance (IAG).
- Depending on the appetite among students for transfer between courses and institutions, the impact of this proposal on time and resources in admissions, student records/services, academic tutors assessing suitability, tutors and others providing guidance, could be very significant indeed. If changing institutions becomes more widespread, a significant effort should be made within HE admissions and related services and from others providing support and advice to students, to ensure students understand the costs and benefits of transferring (academic and non-academic e.g. financial, support, accommodation, new peer group, future prospects). This impact will be felt at both the institution the student is leaving, and the one it is joining. However, SPA does not believe demand to transfer will be high in an environment where clear, supportive IAG is actively provided prior to entry, so any such requests can be readily absorbed into admissions practice.

Royal Society of Biology

- Many institutions already successfully offer a credit accumulation and transfer system. It is noted in the call for evidence that students remaining at institutions may be due to a 'lack of information' on switching. We believe that this information on switching is available, however may not be advertised widely. Institutions are not going to actively encourage students to leave, especially as funding is bound to tightly controlled student numbers, however they may be keen to gain additional students from competing institutions. Seeking to offer students' further flexibility is positive, however we have some concerns regarding the potential impacts of the system on the higher education sector, which will of course depend on the numbers of students wanting to switch.
- It is also noted that there is a strain on the student, that may not have been realised until the student is in their new environment, which may result in disorientation and loneliness, despite support at the institutional level.

University Vocational Awards Council

- A system for credit transfer already exists in higher education. The key issue is the lack of consistency with which the existing system is applied and used by individual HEIs. If greater consistency was developed and credit was seen as a 'common currency' there could be significant and positive impact on the higher education sector and customers of higher education

Bournemouth University

- Supporting transfers is resource intensive and so if it became more widespread there would be a need for investment in staff and systems to support it. Mapping courses is a manual and individual process and is likely to remain so.
- As we have noted above, transfers do not only happen because of dissatisfaction with a provider or a course. The main reason that students transfer is because there is a formal progression route from a course at another institution, either from a foundation course or from an international or other partner whose course has been recognised through a recognition of prior learning process, so that the student can transfer with advanced standing onto a later year of a longer course.
- These mechanisms exist and are used, mainly with international partners, but there is no reason why they could not be developed further. When this happens, the mapping and other academic reviews have already taken place, so that a student who meets the required standard at the previous institution can apply and will be considered for admission with advanced standing at the new institution. The initial work to set up these arrangements is intensive but once in place they work well.
- Similar arrangements work well in so-called "articulation" arrangements, under which a student may be given a place at an institution that is conditional upon completing a course at another institution and meeting the required standing – such arrangements are in place for students transferring from international foundation courses onto university degrees, for example.
- If the number of students transferring grew very significantly, it is possible that similar arrangements might be developed over time in particular disciplines.
- However, there would be a concern that this might lead to standardisation of courses that would reduce innovation and limit the content of courses over time – directly in conflict with the intention of the teaching excellence framework, which is to encourage ambition and innovation in teaching and learning.