

**Degree to Higher National Articulation:
Final Report**

A large, abstract, light blue graphic element on the left side of the page, consisting of overlapping circles and lines, resembling a stylized 'Q' or a ribbon.

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2009

ISBN 978 1 84482 899 9

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

Printed copies are available from:

Linney Direct

Adamsway

Mansfield

NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788

Fax 01623 450481

Email qaa@linneydirect.com

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Preface

The Scottish Advisory Committee for Credit and Access (SACCA) is delighted to publish this second report on degree to Higher National (HN) articulation.

This report follows on from the *Degree to Higher National Articulation: Project Report*¹ published in September 2008. The project report described initial exploratory work which aimed to obtain an indication of the extent of current practice in Scotland. The work also sought to determine what barriers existed to prevent degree to HN articulation and the opportunities for extending degree to HN transition.

This second report investigates the practice of degree to HN articulation in more detail. Educational consultants Hazel Knox and Ruth Whittaker were commissioned to undertake pilot studies with four higher education institutions (HEIs) and their partner colleges in order to identify and share best practice and identify ways to support learners undergoing or about to undergo degree to HN transition. SACCA thanks the institutions and colleges involved for their willingness to participate in the work.

Both reports suggest that more work should be done to ensure that the language of credit and levels of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) should be better understood by learners, parents, school guidance staff, employers and college and HEI staff. The work points to a need to further investigate the demand for degree to HN articulation in all of Scotland's HEIs and colleges. Similarly, there could be value in encouraging HEIs and colleges to consider offering degree to HN articulation and raise awareness of its potential as an educational or career choice.

SACCA will continue to develop degree to HN articulation and will take forward work in the areas detailed above with the SCQF Partnership, other sector organisations, HEIs and Scotland's colleges. Updates on this work will be published on the SACCA website: www.sacca.ac.uk

¹ Available at www.sacca.ac.uk

Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Context	3
3	The Degree to HN project	4
4	Methodology	4
5	Scenarios for degree to HN articulation	5
	Scenario one	5
	Scenario two	6
	Scenario three	7
	Scenario four	8
	Discussion of scenarios	8
6	Generic issues emerging from cross-sector consultation	9
7	Discussion	10
	Degree to HN articulation	10
	Two-way articulation agreements	11
	The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)	11
	The Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) perspective	12
	Guidance and credit transfer processes	13
	Funding issues	14
	Administration and tracking	14
	Key areas of potential demand	15
	The way forward...? 'Make it happen'	15
8	Conclusions	15
9	Acknowledgements	17
10	References	18
11	Appendix: list of participating individuals, institutions and agencies	19

1 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this report is to summarise the outcomes of the SACCA Degree to HN articulation project.

1.2 The aim of the project was to explore the issues associated with degree to HN articulation; its usage and potential value; the barriers to this form of articulation and possible means of addressing them; the longer term actions required to formally embed this form of articulation; and the different contexts in which this articulation may take place. Of particular interest were the opportunities available to first-year degree students to complete an HN qualification after leaving university at the end of semester 1 or 2, with credit.

1.3 The research was carried out from April to July 2008, during which time consultations were undertaken with four universities, seven colleges, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the SCQF. A full list of participating individuals, institutions and agencies is presented in the Appendix (see page 19).

2 Context

2.1 Since the publication of *Credit Transfer at the FE-HE Interface* (Maclennan, Dundas and Musselbrook, 2001) and the completion of the *Mapping, Tracking and Bridging Project* (SACCA, 2004), the subject of articulation has been the focus of a significant amount of research (for example, Osborne, Gallacher and Murphy (2002) and Morgan-Klein, (2003)) and policy discussion (for example, *Learning for all* (SFC, 2007a) and *Articulation for all* (SFC, 2007b)). In the two SFC documents, articulation refers to 'students with advanced standing' (2007a, p 45) and 'entry to the second or third year of a university degree course using a Higher National Certificate or a Higher National Diploma (HNC/D), gained in a college as an entry qualification' (2007b, p 6). Thus, to date, the focus of articulation has been on the progression of students from Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND) qualifications to first degree programmes. The potential for articulation to take place from a degree programme to an HN programme remains largely unexplored.

2.2 Boyd, Crossan and Whittaker (2007) suggest that articulation from degree to HN may occur either if a student undertakes an HN qualification after completion of a degree and seeks to use some of the credit gained towards the new award, or if a student leaves part-way through a degree programme and seeks to transfer credit gained towards an HN qualification. This project focuses on the latter scenario.

2.3 There are many reasons why students who begin a degree programme are unable to continue to successful completion (see Quinn et al (2005) and Yorke and Langdon (2004, 2006)) and there is evidence from across the higher education (HE) sector that the majority of students who withdraw do so during their first year of study (see Yorke (1999), Harvey and Drew (2006) and Bennett et al (2007)). For some of these students, progression to an HNC/D programme may be an appropriate option. This option enables them to continue with their learning and obtain a widely recognised and respected qualification. However, to make this route attractive to students requires that they are able, where appropriate, to transfer credit into their HN programme of study.

Thus, they are not being required to repeat learning already undertaken, they are saving time and money, and they derive the motivational benefits of having their learning recognised in credit transfer.

3 The Degree to HN project

3.1 The Degree to HN project was commissioned by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Scotland (QAA) on behalf of SACCA to build on the work carried out by Boyd, Crossan and Whittaker (2007) and further explore degree to HN credit transfer in Scotland. Of particular interest were the opportunities available to students to complete an HN qualification after leaving university with credit.

3.2 The project involved working with a small number of universities, colleges and other agencies to identify and share practice with respect to the transfer of students and credit from degree programmes to Higher National Qualifications (HNQs). A full list of participating individuals, institutions and agencies is given in the Appendix.

3.3 The project focused on practical and strategic issues, and investigated:

- the various scenarios within which opportunities for credit transfer from degree to HN are currently being explored by universities and colleges
- the procedures required in order for credit transfer from degree to HN to occur
- the ways in which proposals for credit transfer from degree to HN are initiated
- the awareness among staff and students of opportunities for credit transfer from degree to HN
- the benefits to students, universities and colleges of credit transfer from degree to HN.

4 Methodology

4.1 A qualitative methodology was adopted, involving face to face interviews, telephone conversations, group discussions and email exchanges with representatives of four universities, seven colleges, SQA, SFC and SCQF (see the Appendix for full list). These consultations explored a wide range of issues including:

- the policy perspective
- scenarios within which degree to HN articulation might occur
- barriers to degree to HN articulation
- the role of articulation agreements
- the purposes of HN and degree qualifications
- the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
- terminology
- logistics and administration

- student tracking
- student funding issues
- institutional funding issues from university and college perspectives
- potential demand for degree to HN articulation
- staff development
- awareness raising among staff and students
- potential benefits to universities, colleges and students.

5 Scenarios for degree to HN articulation

5.1 Where discussions on degree to HN articulation are ongoing, different universities are adopting different approaches. Four scenarios have been identified which indicate the various contexts within which degree to HN articulation is being explored by the institutions consulted.

Scenario one

5.2 The imminent co-location of the university and the college provision onto a single rural campus is based on sharing physical and social spaces and student services. This move also provides opportunities to explore academic coherence across the programmes of study delivered.

5.3 A pilot programme has been developed in Business and Management whereby university and college staff will jointly deliver a programme which is based on the first two years of the university degree programme and has exit points at the end of each academic session - HNC at the end of year one, HND at the end of year two, and Ordinary degree at the end of year three.

5.4 The underlying philosophy is to deliver HN and degree programmes locally and jointly, where neither programme would be economically viable on its own. The university is keen to retain the curriculum of its degree programme (as the same programme is franchised out to a large number of colleges and educational institutions worldwide) and the college is keen to introduce HN provision in business, where previously this was not viable due to low student demand. A single Business School has been set up as the vehicle through which provision will be promoted, students recruited and the programme delivered. Market research indicates that there is local demand for both degree and HN provision, so both institutions and students will benefit from these arrangements.

5.5 The programme is fundamentally about providing pathways through learning and seamless guaranteed progression for successful students. Essentially it is not about credit transfer, but rather the recognised exit points from a programme of study. However, to be successful, the programme requires that degree modules are approved for the award of an HN qualification, so that students have choices regardless of their intention at the outset. Thus, students can start on the degree and exit with an HNQ, or start an HNC or HND and exit with a degree.

Specific issues emerging from Scenario one

5.6 Issues emerging from Scenario one include:

- different entry requirements for HN and degree students who will be on the same programme and taught and assessed jointly
- requirement for HN graded units in order that HNC or HND be awarded
- learner support, given that some learners will have met different entry requirements and have different educational aspirations
- SCQF volumes and levels of credit for HNC and HND awards and for progression on the degree pathway
- staff development issues, given that the programme will be jointly taught to a mixed cohort of students
- differentials in the funding per student and the funding which accrues to colleges and universities
- staff sensitivities about the loss of their programme identity
- students' identification with the institution confirming their exit award
- differentials in employment terms and conditions among college and university staff who teach and assess the same students.

Scenario two

5.7 A Memorandum of Agreement has been signed by the university and a local college, backed up by individual programme-level articulation agreements, to facilitate transfer from HN to degree with credit in a range of subject areas. Good personal and working relationships exist between college and university staff.

5.8 The articulation agreement between HNC/D in Communication and Media and BA Communications and PR is based on a broad curriculum match between HNC/D units and modules delivered in the first/second years of the degree. There is also a match in the order of delivery of modules and units between semesters 1 and 2 in the degree programme and the first and second blocks of the HN programme. Overall, the skills and knowledge gained in each programme are comparable. In matching the programmes, the focus is on the educational experience rather than individual module/unit outcomes.

5.9 A pilot is underway to explore the potential for degree to HN articulation which allows students to transfer credit accrued in degree modules into the HNC/D programme. Transfer may be sought by students who may or may not have completed year 1 or by students who do not complete year 2. All provision in the first year of the degree programme is at SCQF level 7 and in the second year at SCQF level 8. A maximum of 60 credits can be accrued per semester. Of particular interest is the transfer of students at the end of semester 1 of their first year into the HNC programme.

5.10 It is possible that students who transfer from the degree and subsequently successfully complete the HND may wish to return to the degree programme in due course. The underlying philosophy is that if articulation can occur in one direction (HN to degree), there should be no barriers to articulation in the other (degree to HN).

Specific issues emerging from Scenario two

5.11 Issues emerging from Scenario two include:

- formal procedures to ensure that pre-exit guidance is given in good time
- the need to respond rapidly and flexibly to students wishing to withdraw at the end of semester 1 having passed some or all assessments
- bureaucratic procedures take time and university credit may not be confirmed by the examination boards until the end of semester 2
- where the authority lies to approve an individual's programme for an HN award
- how to emphasise a positive perspective, to avoid the degree to HN route being perceived as failure by staff and students
- promoting student and staff awareness - while colleges are content to have articulation from HN to degree promoted in their publicity materials, universities may be unwilling to see degree to HN articulation promoted in their prospectuses and other literature.

Scenario three

5.12 Formal articulation agreements are in place between the university and a number of local colleges and it is within the context of articulation from HN to degree that degree to HN is initially being explored.

5.13 The university has robust educational guidance procedures in place with a team of staff who have university-wide responsibility for providing guidance to facilitate the transfer of credit into university programmes and the transfer of credit between programmes. Educational guidance staff are also proactive in contacting students who do not complete an award to offer guidance on how to complete a qualification. Students are encouraged to return to university and continue study on a part-time basis. However, for some students, this is neither desirable nor feasible. In order to encourage these students to continue with their learning, the university would like to be able to propose transferring to an HN programme to build on the credit already accrued, with a view to the students returning to university at a later stage.

5.14 The underlying philosophy is that students should not face a 'dead end' in their learning if, for whatever reason, they are unable to successfully complete the degree programme for which they initially enrolled. Rather, if they have accrued credit, they should be able to use this within another educational context.

Specific issues emerging from Scenario three

5.15 Issues emerging from Scenario three include:

- the need for flexibility in dealing with individual students - there will rarely be a 'cohort', so credit transfer arrangements must operate at the individual level
- credit transfer between HEIs is straightforward. Colleges require processes for verification of credit in order to make degree to HN articulation straightforward
- the need to respond quickly and flexibly to students wishing to transfer, particularly those who withdraw at the end of semester 1 having passed some/all assessments and wish to continue their studies in an HN programme in semester 2
- how to emphasise a positive perspective, to avoid the degree to HN route being perceived as failure by staff and students
- the terminology used is important
- staff development issues at module and programme levels as well as at institutional level
- tracking students is a major issue - there is a need for focus on successes of students across different educational contexts and modes of study (full or part-time)
- credit is currently 'tracked', but transfer is not.

Scenario four

5.16 Following successful completion of a degree programme, a graduate may seek to study an HNC or HND and thus gain a vocational qualification. It could be advantageous, in terms of time and money, if some credit were to transfer from the degree into the HN programme.

5.17 This scenario is essentially outside the remit of the current project. However, in discussion with college representatives, it was indicated that students seeking entry to HNQs following completion of a degree are generally doing so as part of a change of career direction or to undertake a specific vocational qualification to enhance their employability in a particular field, such as journalism or horticulture. Hence, credit transfer may not always be appropriate.

Discussion of scenarios

5.18 Scenarios one, two and three fundamentally differ in the extent to which they require flexibility in the transfer of credit from a degree programme into an HNQ.

5.19 In Scenario one, all students follow the programme of study which has been jointly approved by the university as the first and second year of a degree programme and by SQA for the award of HNC/D (with the addition of work to meet the graded unit criteria). In this scenario, no flexibility is required as all students study the same modules.

5.20 In Scenario two, the degree and HNC/D programmes have been separately approved by the university and SQA respectively and designed so that articulation from one to the other is smooth. The credit transferred from the degree programme into the

HNQ will depend on which module(s) the degree student has passed, hence not all students will transfer with the same profile of credit or require the same HN units to attain the HN award. Thus, there is some flexibility from the individual student perspective, but this is constrained within the context of the particular degree and HN programmes.

5.21 Scenario three requires total flexibility in approaching the approval of credit for transfer from a degree programme into an HNQ. Each individual student could potentially present a different credit profile and require an individualised programme of study to gain an HNQ.

6 Generic issues emerging from cross-sector consultations

- The need for new terminology to refer to 'degree to HN articulation': describing it as 'reverse articulation' has negative connotations and implies that this form of articulation is only to cater for students who have failed.
- The need for clarification of terminology particularly with respect to understandings and usage of 'articulation' and 'credit'.
- Awareness raising of SQA policy on flexible routes to credit (Mearns, 2007) particularly in relation to what SQA will require in order for students to gain an HN qualification. SQA policy indicates the amount of credit that can be transferred into an HN qualification, outlines the contexts in which this might take place and explains the principles of broad matching of programme aims and objectives, as opposed to specific matching of units and modules. The policy was approved in June 2007 and will be launched at the end of 2008.
- The need for universities, colleges and SQA to deal with individual students.
- The timing of delivery of programme materials so that transfer from degree to HN is feasible during the academic year.
- The need for rapid confirmation of credit accrued at university.
- Funding issues for universities, colleges and students.
- The need for mechanisms to track students across university/college transfer.
- Accepting transfer to HN as a positive outcome for the student and the university.
- The different purposes of HN and degree programmes - different contents, different styles of delivery, different modes of assessment.
- Credit, not graded credit, is transferable.
- Under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), many issues arise for students with disabilities who wish to transfer (particularly during an academic year), including disclosure between institutions, entitlement to support and ensuring support is put in place in good time.
- The need for robust guidance - pre-exit guidance at university, pre-entry guidance at college.

- Benefits to HEIs include an enhanced reputation as providers of guidance into appropriate learning for students; closer working relationships with colleges at SCQF levels 7 and 8; re-enrolling students who have transferred from degree to HN upon successful completion of the HNQ; and, potentially, in terms of progression statistics if 'transfer to college' is defined as a positive transition, rather than indicative of withdrawal.
- Benefits to colleges include closer working relationships with HEIs at SCQF levels 7 and 8; an in-flow of students; and the financial benefits of drawing down additional Student Units of Measurement (SUMs).
- Benefits to students include being guided onto an appropriate learning pathway; flexibility to accommodate timing of transfer; no repeat of learning already undertaken; a reduction in the time to reach a widely respected qualification which will equip them for employment; and financial benefits if student funding issues are satisfactorily resolved.
- Potential demand may always remain low.
- Success relies heavily on good working relationships between HEIs and colleges at both senior management and subject level.
- Successful transfer may depend on part-time study being available in all HN programmes.

7 Discussion

Degree to HN articulation

7.1 Throughout the consultations undertaken, there was widespread support for the idea of degree to HN articulation, alongside concerns about the practicalities of making it happen. It was felt that the opportunity for degree to HN articulation addresses an anomaly in the education system. Students who withdraw from a degree before completion, particularly if they withdraw during year 1, can find themselves at an educational dead end. The sense of failure this may engender may also present a major barrier to re-engagement in education. Incorporating the possibility of transferring directly into an HN programme after withdrawing from a degree would be of value to students who wish to continue their learning immediately in order to achieve a positive outcome in terms of a widely recognised and respected qualification which prepares them for employment. However, whereas articulation from HN to degree is seen as advancement, degree to HN articulation is perceived as a sideways or backward step. This perception is reinforced when the term 'reverse articulation' is used. This terminology is unsatisfactory and carries connotations of failure and lack of progress, and it also raises issues of parity of esteem with regard to different qualifications.

7.2 It can be argued that the transfer of credit from year 1 of a degree into an HND programme represents upwards progression in terms of the SCQF. Currently, however, this would not be recognised as such by the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) and students articulating from degree to HN would be viewed as undertaking a lower-level qualification and would therefore lose their funding. The emphasis in degree

to HN articulation should be that of alternative progression within the context of the SCQF and undertaking a 'passport to employment'.

7.3 Three issues arise from the above findings. First, the terminology used to refer to degree to HN articulation; second, the interpretation and perception of progression in terms of the SCQF; and third, issues of parity of esteem between different educational qualifications. Addressing each of these issues was seen as fundamental for the widespread acceptance of degree to HN articulation across the HE sector in Scotland.

Two-way articulation agreements

7.4 There was a general consensus that articulation agreements are the foundation on which ways forward can be built. *Articulation for All* (SFC, 2007b) focuses on credit transfer from HNQs into years 2 and 3 of degree programmes. However, other forms of articulation can be viewed as by-products of this form of relationship between universities and colleges.

7.5 Extending degree to HN articulation within existing HN to degree articulation arrangements, thus enabling two-way articulation, appears to be the most feasible scenario from a university and college perspective. Articulation agreements allow issues associated with the transfer of credit to be resolved in advance. Credit transfer requests are therefore managed within an agreed framework rather than individually negotiated. Such agreements also enable the possibility of articulation back into a degree on successful attainment of the HN qualification.

7.6 The comparability of the curricula of the degree and HN programmes in year 1 would need to be explicitly addressed in the planning and programme design stage to ensure core areas are covered. The practical application of knowledge which underpins the HN curriculum would need to be reflected in year 1 of the degree programme. In order to enable students to transfer from a degree to an HN programme midway through the academic session, close curriculum matching between the two programmes would be required as well as the dovetailing of delivery where possible. However, it was considered that most students wishing to use credit gained through part completion of the first year of a degree programme would not seek to immediately commence the second block of an HN programme, but would most likely opt to embark on the programme at the beginning of the next academic session.

7.7 Good personal and working relationships between staff 'on the ground' are essential. It was highlighted that it is these relationships between college and university staff that underpin successful articulation arrangements for HN to degree. While the technical aspects of degree to HN articulation are important, these working relationships need to be firmly in place, along with mutual incentives to 'make it work'.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

7.8 There is a need to raise the profile of the SCQF. Whereas in the USA the language of credit and transfer is widely used and understood, in Scotland the emphasis is on programmes, rather than credits. The language of SCQF levels and credits is not well understood by students, parents, school guidance staff, employers and (in some cases) college and HEI staff. There has been confusion over recent years with many changes in HE terminology, in relation to SCOTCAT, Scottish Degree (SD), Scottish Higher Education

(SHE), and now SCQF terms. Staff, students and employers tend to use and understand the terminology of HNC/D at college and of years 1 to 4 at university, rather than the language of SCQF levels and credits. There is a need to use the terminology of the SCQF in catalogues and brochures. It is essential that in formal documentation staff use the terminology of SCQF consistently, so that levels and credits mean the same across sectors. This raises issues of ensuring a mutual understanding of module/unit descriptors in terms of the language used, the credit ratings assigned, the assessment strategies employed, the notional teaching hours proposed, and so on.

7.9 It was emphasised in the consultation that the SCQF should be viewed as a rigging and not as a ladder. The SCQF provides the vehicle for the recognition of credit gained. Articulation from HN to degree, or from degree to HN, needs to be promoted as 'credit transfer' across different learning situations and environments. 'Credit transfer' does not have a directional connotation. Progression should be defined as using credit in a continuing learning process, rather than necessarily moving up to the next SCQF level. The concept of degree to HN articulation being promoted as a 'pathway to employment' was suggested during the consultation.

The Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) perspective

7.10 The SQA policy on flexible credit was approved by the SQA Qualifications Committee in June 2007 and will be launched at the end of 2008 (Mearns, 2007). The SQA policy and procedures upon which degree to HN articulation will be based centres on a model of a 'broad match' between the aims and objectives of the HN qualification for which credit is being sought and the elements of the degree programme for which credit has been awarded. In order to ensure that the 'employability' of HN qualifications is not undermined, the policy states that the broad match of aims and objectives should include not only a match of knowledge/skills content but also the extent to which these have been applied.

7.11 The policy also enables credit to be awarded for both accredited and informal learning, that is, learning gained through practical and life experience. Thus students can gain credit towards an SQA group award from a wide range of sources. Students will not receive certification for the individual SQA units on which the broad match is based and will always need to complete the HNC/D graded unit(s) in order to achieve the group award. It is anticipated that there will be a number of ways in which the graded unit(s) criteria can be met, for example through project work.

7.12 SQA does not propose to deal with individual students. A flexible credit request must be submitted to SQA by a college on the student's behalf. Flexible credit decisions will be made by appropriately skilled and trained staff in colleges in accordance with the guiding principles issued by SQA. Decisions will be documented and subject to external verification. It is proposed that colleges will pay the group award fee to SQA and will draw down the proportionate SUMs for the achievement of the remaining units by the student in order to complete the qualification. Once the remaining credit has been successfully achieved, the HNC/D will be awarded.

Guidance and credit transfer processes

7.13 Guidance is crucial and central to the degree to HN articulation process. Pre-exit guidance must be provided by HEIs and pre-entry guidance provided by colleges. The bespoke, individualised guidance model used by colleges for mature students to ensure that they enter programmes at the right level was proposed as the most appropriate guidance model for students seeking articulation from degree into HN programmes.

7.14 Successful degree to HN articulation requires good relationships between university staff and their students and the provision of guidance on transfer at an appropriate time. The degree to HN option should be offered as an exit strategy for withdrawing students. However, in order to provide such pre-exit guidance, effective monitoring and tracking systems need to be put in place to enable the identification of students at risk of withdrawal. It was highlighted that the priority of universities is to retain students at their institution through increasing efforts to ensure that students are recruited onto the right programme and enhancing their teaching and learning experience. While universities may raise awareness of degree to HN articulation as a possible exit route for withdrawing students, they are unlikely to actively promote this option. However, the possibility of transferring into an HNQ programme, rather than leaving with an award following withdrawal from a degree programme, could be attractive to HEIs if this were widely accepted as a positive step.

7.15 For the transferring student, a mapping of the broad objectives of the completed elements of the degree programme and those of the HN programme for which they are seeking credit would then take place.

7.16 The issues associated with this mapping are linked to the nature and purpose of HN qualifications and those of degree programmes. SQA highlighted that HNQs are not designed for the purpose of facilitating articulation into degree programmes. An HNC/D is designed as a one or two year programme, and not as years 1 or 2 of a three or four year programme with HN awards as exit strategies. To adopt the latter approach would undermine the value and purpose of HNC/D provision. The first year at university has an interdisciplinary focus and an emphasis on preparation for the next level of study, whereas the emphasis in HN programmes is on practical skills and employability. An HNC and the first year of a degree programme are therefore designed for different purposes, which makes comparability of the curriculum in even broad terms problematic.

7.17 However, it was pointed out by college representatives that under the new HN framework, there is less difference between year 1 of a degree and an HNC programme than previously due to the greater theoretical research component of the latter. This, of course, varies between disciplines and some HNCs are more practical than others. Articulation from HN to degree works best in cases where the degree programme is highly vocational. Broad credit transfer from degree to HN is therefore likely to work best in these types of programmes.

7.18 It was highlighted that students who have withdrawn from their university programme are likely to be fragile learners and will need a support mechanism to facilitate the transition from university to college. This reinforces the crucial importance of effective guidance: pre-exit at university and pre-entry at college.

Funding issues

7.19 Funding is a major barrier to degree to HN articulation, both for students and for institutions.

7.20 Currently, if a student withdraws from a degree programme to undertake a lower-level qualification they lose their entitlement to SAAS funding. If SAAS recognised transfer from year 1 of a degree programme (SCQF level 7) to an HND programme (SCQF level 8) as upwards progression, students could receive continued funding.

7.21 Given the loss of SAAS funding, it was highlighted that students transferring from a full-time degree programme are potentially more likely to complete an HN programme on a part-time basis. The possibility was raised of using Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), which under certain conditions can be used towards part-time HE learning, to fund the completion of an HN programme following transfer from a degree programme. It was pointed out however, that a long-term funding strategy cannot be based on ILAs since their usage is reviewed on a yearly basis. Thus, funding methodologies for students need to be reviewed and a new funding package in terms of entitlement to fees, grants and loans needs to be proposed.

7.22 Funding methodologies for institutions also need to be reviewed. Issues such as the charges for verification of credit transfer, HN units and group awards need to be resolved. Of particular importance is the issue of college funding for students who transfer midway through an academic year. The question was raised whether colleges could draw down SUMs for a transferring student for whom a full year of funding had already been provided to the university.

Administration and tracking

7.23 Administration of the process of credit transfer, tracking students, registration with SQA and the issue of transcripts are all issues which require to be resolved.

7.24 It was suggested that there is a possible role for SCQF's Mapping, Tracking and Bridging (MTB) website in highlighting opportunities for degree to HN articulation and tracking this activity. However, the MTB website is not currently live. It would require resourcing to an agency to maintain the site and a commitment by HEIs and colleges to regularly update the information held so that it becomes current and useful.

7.25 Tracking students across HEI and college provision is not currently possible. University incentives for supporting the development of degree to HN articulation would require a mechanism for tracking students and a recognition by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) that degree to HN articulation is a positive outcome in terms of progression, rather than a withdrawal. In Scotland, within the context of a single Scottish Funding Council where colleges form part of the HE system, this shift of definition should be more feasible than elsewhere in the UK.

7.26 The issue of the wording on the transcripts confirming HN awards was also raised. It is anticipated that transcripts will record that credit transfer has been approved and list the HN unit(s) undertaken and the award gained. This will require an administrative process to deal with students on a case-by-case basis.

7.27 Particular issues arise for students with special learning requirements. There are data protection implications for students moving from HEIs to colleges in terms of the disclosure of their personal situations and requirements, their entitlement to support under the Disability Discrimination Act, and the time it takes to reassess them and put appropriate support in place. These students may be particularly disadvantaged if they seek to transfer from degree to HN in the middle of an academic year.

Key areas of potential demand

7.28 Many students opt to undertake an HN programme if they do not feel ready to commit to a three or four year degree programme but are aware of the possibility of articulation into a degree programme on completion of their HN qualification. If there are significant numbers of students who drop out of particular degree programmes, an articulation route which would enable them to complete an HNC/D would be desirable. An analysis of degree programmes with high drop-out rates in the first year, and for which HN to degree articulation routes are already established, would enable a targeting of this provision. The investment in developing mechanisms for what will in all likelihood remain small numbers of students can be more readily justified.

The way forward...? 'Make it happen'

7.29 There was considerable support among those involved in this project to take a proactive approach to degree to HN articulation. The view was expressed that the best way forward was to 'make it happen'. In other words, offer the degree to HN articulation route to students, enrol them at college and then tackle the issues, the problems and the barriers as they arise. There is an element of risk for both colleges and HEIs in this strategy and it would require both institutions to work in partnership and accept the risks. However, for the benefit of the students concerned this would be a strategy which would provide them with an opportunity to build on their learning and continue their engagement with higher education.

8 Conclusions

- There was **widespread support** for the idea of degree to HN articulation, alongside concerns about the practicalities of making it happen.
- There was agreement that the **terminology** used to refer to degree to HN articulation is important. The term 'reverse articulation' is unsatisfactory and carries connotations of failure and lack of progress. The emphasis in degree to HN articulation should be on 'credit transfer' and the presentation of an alternative progression route within the context of the SCQF which offers a 'passport to employment'.
- There is a need to raise the profile of the **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)** and promote a greater understanding of the language of credit. The SCQF provides the vehicle for the recognition of credit gained and should be viewed as a rigging and not as a ladder. Articulation from HN to degree and from degree to HN need to be promoted as 'credit transfer' across different learning situations and environments. The term 'credit transfer' does not have directional connotations.

- **Degree to HN articulation within existing articulation arrangements** was viewed as initially the best way forward. Two-way articulation appears to be the most feasible scenario from HEI and college perspectives. Such agreements also embed the possibility of articulation back into a degree on successful attainment of the HN qualification.
- Practical issues, including ensuring **the comparability of degree and HN curricula and the dovetailing of delivery schedules**, need to be explicitly addressed at the planning and programme design stage to ensure core areas are covered and transfer during the academic session is feasible. It has to be acknowledged, however, that HN programmes and degree programmes are designed for different purposes, making comparability of the curriculum in even broad terms problematic.
- **Guidance** is crucial, in terms of the provision of pre-exit guidance by HEIs and pre-entry guidance by colleges, at appropriate times.
 - The degree to HN option should be offered as an **exit strategy** for withdrawing students. In order to provide such pre-exit guidance, effective monitoring and tracking systems to enable the identification of students at risk of withdrawal are essential.
 - The bespoke, individualised **guidance model** used by colleges for mature students to ensure that they enter programmes at the right level is an appropriate guidance model for students seeking articulation from degree into HN programmes.
 - Degree to HN articulation involves a **mapping** of the broad educational aims and objectives of the completed elements of the degree programme and those of the HN programme.
- **Good personal and working relationships** between HEI and college staff are essential. These working relationships need to be firmly in place, along with a mutual incentive to 'make it work'.
- **University incentives** for supporting the development of this form of articulation would require recognition by HESA of degree to HN articulation as a positive outcome in terms of progression, in the form of transfer to another institution, rather than withdrawal.
- **Administration and tracking** issues associated with degree to HN articulation need to be addressed. These include the issue of transcripts for the confirmation of credit and the HN award gained; the processes of credit transfer and registration with SQA; and the tracking of students who move from HEI to college and, perhaps subsequently, back to HEI provision. It was generally felt it should be feasible to address issues of tracking across institutions in Scotland given that there is a single Scottish Funding Council and that the SCQF is in place.
- **Funding** is a major barrier to this form of articulation. There are funding implications for both students and institutions.

- **Funding for students** requires SAAS to recognise that transfer from year 1 of a degree programme (SCQF level 7) to an HND programme (SCQF level 8) is progression, thus enabling students to receive continued funding support. Given that many students making the degree to HN articulation are likely to complete the HN programme on a part-time basis, issues concerning the funding available for part-time students also need to be addressed.
- **Funding methodologies for institutions** also need to be reviewed. Issues such as the charges for HN units and SQA group awards, and whether or not colleges are entitled to draw down funding for students for whom an HEI has already been fully funded, remain to be resolved.
- There was general agreement that an initial **focus on key areas of potential demand** would pave the way to making degree to HN articulation happen. An analysis of degree programmes with high drop out rates in first year, and for which HN to degree articulation routes are already established, would enable a targeting of this provision.
- **The way forward is to 'make it happen'**. Colleges and universities need to work in partnership, and jointly accept the risks involved, in order to establish degree to HN articulation as a financially, and operationally, viable credit transfer route.

9 Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Scotland, for providing the resources which allowed this research to be carried out.

We wish to acknowledge the help and cooperation of all those who have willingly given their time and support to the project. A full list of participating individuals, institutions and agencies is given in the Appendix.

Dr Hazel Knox, Project Director

Ruth Whittaker, Project Consultant

10 References

- Bennett, R, Kottasz, R and Nocciolino, J (2007) Catching the early walker: an examination of potential antecedents of rapid student exit from business-related undergraduate degree programmes in a post-1992 university, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol 31, No 2, pp 109-132
- Boyd, V, Crossan, B and Whittaker, R (2007) *Degree to Higher National Articulation, Final Report to the Quality Assurance Agency*, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University
- Harvey, L and Drew, S (2006) *The first year experience: a review of literature for the Higher Education Academy*, available at: www.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/detail/lr_2006_harvey
- Maclennan, A, Dundas, M and Musselbrook, K (2001) *Credit Transfer at the FE-HE Interface*, available at: www.sfc.ac.uk
- Mearns, A (2007) *Working towards Flexible Credit*, Scottish Qualifications Authority, Glasgow
- Morgan-Klein, B (2003), Scottish Higher Education and the FE-HE Nexus, *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol 57, No 4, pp 338-354
- Osborne, M, Gallacher, J and Murphy, M (2002) *A Research Review of FE/HE Links - A Report to the Scottish Executive Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee*, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University.
- Quinn, J, Thomas, L, Slack, K, Casey, L, Thexton, W and Noble, J (2005) *From life crisis to lifelong learning: Rethinking working-class 'drop out' from higher education*, available at: www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop
- SACCA (2004) *Mapping, Tracking and Bridging Project*, available at: www.sfc.ac.uk
- SFC (Scottish Funding Council), (2007a), *Learning for all: report on measures of success*, available at: www.sfc.ac.uk
- SFC (Scottish Funding Council), (2007b), *Articulation for all?*, available at: www.sfc.ac.uk/information/info_consultations/sfc/2007/sfc0507c/sfc052007c.htm
- Yorke, M (1999) *Leaving Early: Undergraduate Non-completion in Higher Education*, Falmer Press, London
- Yorke, M and Longden, B (2004) *Retention and Student Success in Higher Education*, Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University, Maidenhead
- Yorke, M and Longden, B (2006) *First Year Experience Survey*, Higher Education Academy, available at: www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/research/surveys/fye

11 Appendix: list of participating individuals, institutions and agencies

Ms Sandra Allan	Head of Educational Programmes and Curriculum Support Aberdeen College
Ms Heather Anderson	Assistant Principal for Curriculum and Quality Borders College
Ms Margaret Cameron	Manager Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
Professor Bob Craik	Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) Heriot-Watt University
Ms Moira Douglas	Education Liaison Manager Motherwell College
Ms Lesley Gunn	Manager, Study Skills and Access Unit The Robert Gordon University
Ms Sandra Gunn	Assistant Principal Glasgow Metropolitan College
Dr Doreen Kedzierska	HN Project Manager Scottish Qualifications Authority
Mr John Kemp	Deputy Director of Strategic Development Scottish Funding Council
Ms Helen Martin	Access Coordinator Glasgow Caledonian University
Dr Anne McGillivray	Dean of Lifelong Learning University of the West of Scotland
Mrs Liz McIntyre	Principal Borders College
Ms Carolyn McNab	Head of Science and Health Department Stow College
Ms Anne Mearns	Business Manager Scottish Qualifications Authority
Mr Derek Smeall	Assistant Principal Cumbernauld College
Ms Anna Thomson	Policy Officer, Strategic Development Scottish Funding Council

QAA Scotland
183 St Vincent Street
Glasgow
G2 5QD

Tel 0141 572 3420
Fax 0141 572 3421
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk

QAA 276 02/09