

**Promoting the lifelong learning opportunities afforded by the SCQF**

**Purpose and recommendation**

- 1 SACCA is asked to consider and comment on the conclusions of the attached paper. The paper was prepared by QAA Scotland consultants with the brief to identify and explore the potential for the SCQF to promote lifelong learning opportunities in higher education.

**Further information**

2. For further information on the material covered in this paper please contact David Bottomley.

**Promoting the lifelong learning opportunities afforded  
by the SCQF**

**Credit-based links between Colleges and HEIs**

**Bill Thomson, Joan Menmuir**

**June 2006**

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## **1. Background and summary**

SACCA at its meeting on 14-02-06 considered a paper on making the most of the potential created by the implementation of the SCQF (Item 4. Paper 40-04)

The paper set out proposed plans for developing a two-year programme of work to support the higher education sector in making use of the opportunities created by the implementation of the SCQF. It suggested that the first stage of the work should involve exploration of the potential opportunities offered by the SCQF and the ways in which it can help widen access, participation and progression both into and out of higher education.

SACCA was invited to consider the proposals and to identify potential areas and issues to be addressed during the programme of work.

### **Consultation**

As part of the process of clarifying these issues Bill Thomson and Joan Menmuir were asked by QAA to

- Survey higher education institutions and colleges of further education to obtain comments on the 2004 Guidelines on Facilitating Credit-based Links in Higher Education
- Run a workshop for participants from HEIs and colleges of further education at the SCQF May 2006 Conference to consider what if any changes should be made to the Guidelines in order to support institutions in developing credit-based links
- Survey and meet with the Co-ordinators of the Regional Access Fora to obtain initial feedback on the value or otherwise of the Bridging toolkits and to highlight any need for their further development
- Consider what if any changes might usefully be made to the Guidelines and Toolkits in light of the outcomes of the QAA work on PDP and the Effective Learning Framework, and the Enhancement Theme on Student Needs and to make recommendations accordingly.

### **Report**

The report includes a summary of the findings from the four parts of the work followed by a more detailed report of each area. Fuller records of the survey, meetings and other information relevant to the brief are included as appendices.

The report has been designed in this way to facilitate its use with a range of possible audiences. It can be cut at the end of point 5 in the following summary; each of the four detailed reports can be circulated separately; and the appendices can be detached completely. If this is done a small amount of editing will be needed.

## Summary

1. There is general satisfaction with the content of the Guidelines on Facilitating Credit based Links in Higher Education although their use is perceived to be 'patchy' across the sector by regional access co-ordinators. The developments, changes and operational issues identified in the survey of colleges and HEIs are summarised in section 2, Conference workshop comments are in section 3.

While there seems to be no need to engage in any major recasting of the Guidelines at this stage consideration should be given to promotional activity to highlight the value of using the Guidelines flexibly to suit local circumstances. This activity could be focused through the Regional Access Fora working individually and together on a national basis. Other suggestions for encouraging implementation are included in section 2

Two important operational issues related to developing credit-based links are included as points 2 and 3 below. A number of others are identified in section 2.

2. There is significant dissatisfaction with the Mapping website of the MTB project which is thought to be out of date. Further details of the comments received are included in section 2 of the report. Attention should be given to clarifying the purposes of the website, establishing an effective system for hosting, maintaining and up-dating the site, and examining the potential to further develop the information resource provided by the site.
3. There seems to be no easily managed procedure for arranging credit transfer from degree programmes to HNQs. Consideration should be given to the development and promotion of a simple operating process.
4. Evidence from the Conference workshop and the meeting with regional access coordinators would suggest that the bridging toolkits appear to be little used and not well known. Current and recent developments especially of ELF and PDP have left them looking dated. There is however a clear need for material and processes that have a relevance to specific contexts such as transition. Consideration could be given to the development of guidance for institutions about how the principles of ELF and PDP could be in the tools they develop for students and staff to support transition. This is explored further in section 5.
5. Quality enhancement is seen by some as being of relevance to the HEIs exclusively. Given that much of higher education provision is within the college sector there would seem to be a case for promoting the benefits and current findings from this approach within Colleges. At the least the insights that are coming from the enhancement themes should be used to support the preparation of students planning to move from College to University.

## **2 Survey of institutional views on 'Facilitating Credit-based Links in Higher Education: Guidelines to Support Colleges and Higher Education Institutions'.**

- *Do the sections of the Guidelines cover the relevant areas of guidance, or is there a need to add or remove sections?*
- *Should the guidelines within the sections be considered adequate as they stand or should they be added to, removed or amended?*

16 Colleges and 12 HEIs responded.

A full summary of responses is included as appendix 1.

The responses supported the objectives of lifelong learning and underlined the importance of continuing to promote the links between colleges and HEIs that work for students and for Scotland. They also endorsed the kinds of arrangements being made to ensure that students are supported as they transfer into and out of colleges and HEIs.

Respondents suggested that successful transitions go beyond the matching of curriculum content and levels. They underlined the importance of relationships between institutions at strategic and operational levels as a key factor in promoting effective learning pathways and emphasised the importance of flexibility and creativity in approach in order to accommodate diversity in the sector.

Institutions saw the SCQF as a means of achieving lifelong learning objectives, and not as an end in itself.

### **Key points**

The responses received were generally supportive of the Guidelines. 14 Colleges and 9 HEIs were content with the Guidelines in their current form.

All respondents were satisfied that the current 7 sections covered the relevant guidance although one respondent suggested that a specific section on staff development could be developed. Two respondents suggested that the section on specific articulation agreements could be revised. One suggested including other forms of agreement in the section and the other suggested providing greater clarity about the use of the terms 'progression' and 'articulation'. One other respondent suggested that the section on learning, teaching and assessment could be reviewed.

Several respondents asked for the Guidelines to be more widely promoted in the sector.

Several respondents suggested that the period before review could be extended as practice was still developing but one suggested the main challenge for the Guidelines is that they are kept updated and relevant.

Although respondents felt that no changes to the sections of the Guidelines were necessary at this time, almost all offered comment on other aspects of the Guidelines. Some of the comments referred to general issues, some to specific guidelines within sections and many to operational matters relating to the Guidelines and the MTB project.

### **General issues about use**

The sections of the Guidelines can form a useful framework for identifying practice within an institution. One College suggested that it would welcome the central development of such a framework with quality indicators and key prompts. One HEI indicated that the framework it has developed allows it to use the information collected to identify activity and inform HEI/College liaison groups. Another HEI noted that many of the guidelines echo guidance already given to the sector and as such are already embedded in institutional procedures.

It was suggested by one HEI that a practical checklist could be developed to accompany the Guidelines as a way of introducing the approach to staff interested in creating credit-based links.

### **Specific comments, mainly operational**

#### **Section 1 Institutional policy**

This section was seen as a particularly useful way of taking forward wider access work.

An exemplar policy was requested by one College and one HEI.

#### **Section 2 Information about programmes leading to qualifications**

**2.1** 'Brief programme specifications' have not been added to the mapping website

##### **2.1 and the MTB project**

Respondents felt that the mapping website has not maintained/sustained its potential as an information source. They indicated that there was little evidence of national co-ordination to maintain awareness, currency and accuracy. It appears to be difficult for students to use, and to up date and is now out of date. There was felt to be a need to rationalise the number and range of websites providing this type of information.

**2.2** As new HNQ frameworks are developed, part of the validation process could be to establish, agree and publish credit transfer opportunities rather than leave it to individual Colleges.

**2.7** There was a request for guidance on how to transfer information to Careers Scotland, learndirectscotland and SAAS.

#### **Section 3 Credit transfer between HNQs and degrees**

HNQs are very tightly prescribed in terms of learning outcomes (and, currently, performance criteria) and mapping of achievements from degree to HNQ can be complex and time consuming. An example of the process was requested. (Some participants at the workshop at the SCQF Conference in May 2006 agreed that it was currently impossible).

**3.3** There was concern about HNC/D holders with qualifications on old frameworks who are seeking entry to HEIs and how their qualifications will be accommodated in credit transfer arrangements.

**3.3** It would be helpful to include reference within this guideline to institutional RPL mechanisms, particularly APEL since it is complex.

The standardisation of access adopted by the OU model was cited as particularly useful as it set out clear, realistic and achievable routes to higher levels for HN students.

## **Section 4 Programme Design**

In sections 4 and 5 respondents noted that HEI staff found it difficult to influence HN curricula as SQA reviews were national and there were numerous sensitivities between Colleges and themselves.

**4.1** One college noted that a college cannot develop the rationale, aims and learning outcomes of an HNQ programme, as suggested in the guideline, since these are overseen by SQA.

It was noted that when Colleges, SQA and HEIs work together, flexible and creative approaches are possible.

One HEI suggested involving graduating and post HNQs students in programme design.

It was suggested that in Sections 4 and 5 the guidelines should take into consideration the impact of an influx of college students into an HEI student cohort.

## **Section 5 Learning, teaching and assessment**

It was suggested by one HEI that this section was the key to successful progression and could be revised to include what has been learned in various projects such as staff exchange and subject specific toolkits.

**5.1** It was suggested that funding for bridging might affect the wording of this guideline.

**5.2** It was noted that there is little scope for assessment practices to be adapted within colleges. SQA unit specifications are very prescriptive and there is little opportunity to make changes. However, it was also suggested that discontinuity between assessment practices is likely to be less apparent with the introduction of graded assessment units in the form of exams.

**5.4** One college suggested that sharing staff resources between colleges and HEIs by sharing teaching, staff exchanges and staff shadowing was difficult to achieve in practice due to budgetary constraints.

## **Section 6 Student Support**

There is some repetition between guidelines in sections 5 and 6 as orientation, preparation and support are geared towards dealing with changes in learning, teaching and assessment post transition.

It was noted that there is no reference to career planning in section 6

An example of student support working well in practice was requested by one HEI.

**6.5** It was suggested that the PDP guideline could be used as an opportunity to signpost individualised support for learning through e portfolios.

### **Section 7      Specific articulation agreements**

The Guidelines say that they focus on links between HNQs and degrees and are relevant to the range of credit transfer and progression routes currently available to learners as they move between colleges and HEIs in either direction. Some respondents note some difficulty/confusion interpreting the term 'progression' and note that a progression route might refer to progression into rather than progression within a qualification.

One respondent noted that section 7 of the current Guidelines concentrate on a model based on a limited view of articulation arrangements and noted that there was little or no reference to alternatives such as partnership agreements, collaborative developments, or franchise arrangements.

Some respondents felt the word articulation should be more clearly explained.

An example of a specific articulation agreement was requested by one respondent.

### **3 May 2006 Conference 'Working together to create new opportunities and meet new needs'. Workshop on College- HE articulation at the institutional level.**

The Guidelines on facilitating credit-based links (2004) were examined and their use was linked to practice in one institution.

A full note of the workshop is included as appendix 2

#### Key points

- Support is important during the transition from HNQ to degrees, even when the qualifications are being undertaken in the same institution. The potential to credit rate support through bridging units/modules was identified.
- Participants agreed that local arrangements were working well although there was perceived to be a lack of consistency across the sector in progression from HND.
- Degree to HNQ transition was difficult/impossible.
- The financial constraints and opportunities for students undertaking transitions was not well understood by participants
- The mapping website of the MTB project was out of date
- The term 'progression route' was used in the guidelines to mean opportunities for entry into as well as credit transfer within degrees. Some participants felt that the term progression in this context should refer only to credit transfer within degrees.
- The bridging toolkit had not been used by any workshop participants with their students, although some had seen it.
- There was no support in the workshop for reviewing the Guidelines at this time

#### **4 Meeting with Regional Access coordinators**

The meeting was used to explore three issues, the use of the student bridging toolkit, the need to review the Guidelines on facilitating credit-based links in higher education, and the potential of developing a set of examples of practice in facilitating credit-based links in higher education.

A full note of the meeting is included as appendix 3

##### **The bridging toolkit**

- The document contained some very useful information and was potentially helpful to students if used in conjunction with a tutor. It was felt to be less useful as a stand alone resource for students
- There had been a very positive atmosphere at the launch of this resource, but the momentum had not been maintained. Strategic steer for use was not available
- The toolkit will most likely have been used as a generic resource or amended to suit specific purposes. Some institutions may have neglected its potential
- A clearer picture of use could be obtained by contacting institutions and consulting students themselves

The bridging toolkit for HEIs was not discussed at the meeting.

##### **The Guidelines on facilitating credit-based links in higher education**

- The Guidelines had been welcomed in the sectors and were being actively used to facilitate links and develop practice, but mainly in the Colleges and HEIs who were already committed to developing links.
- Use of the Guidelines was perceived to be 'patchy' across the sector.

##### **Developing practice**

- A set of examples of practice in facilitating credit based links could be collected through the forums and then disseminated. Take up could not be assured. It was noted that active involvement in making a change to practice tends to be a better driver.
- It was suggested that further work needs to be done at different levels to embed the process of facilitating credit based links within institutions. There was a strong feeling that relationships and people networks were very important in the process.

Work that could be undertaken under this last point might include work at

- senior management level in Colleges and HEIs in relation to policy

- departmental level with subject based staff, through national subject networks as in the subject specific SFC bridging projects. Associated with this development work was the need to involve professional bodies within core subject groupings. Particular mention was made of the value of College/HEI jointly developed degrees where progression was built in from the start
- staff level in Colleges and HEIs during induction and CPD programmes in order to develop people networks and provide information and advice

There were no direct links from the fora to the work of HEA Scotland.

There seemed to be a lack of clear information channels from national initiatives to the fora coordinators.

## **5. The Bridging Toolkits and the link to ELF and Responding to Student Needs.**

### **The Bridging Toolkits**

The bridging toolkits, developed as part of the MTB project, were launched within the broad context of the work of the enhancement theme 'Responding to Student Needs'.

A fuller description of the toolkits is included in appendix 4.

There are two toolkits, one designed for students and the other for HEIs.

The toolkit *Preparing to move on from an HNC or HND to a degree: Making the change from College to University* (SCQF, 2004) was written for students. It helps them identify the changes they can expect as they move from a college to a university. It also provides sources of further information and advice on the topics addressed. Appendices provide bridging support contacts and student support service contacts at Scottish HEIs.

The toolkit *Bridging Gaps between HNQs and Degrees: A Guide to Facilitating a Seamless Student Transition* (SCQF, 2004) provides HEIs with a mechanism to audit current practice and identify gaps in provision. The Toolkit is designed to be useful at institutional, departmental or programme level. It also provides advice and suggestions to address gaps identified. A number of examples of good practice in the sector are provided as sources of further advice and there are web links to all of the Scottish Colleges.

The indications from the Conference workshop and from the meeting with the regional access co-ordinators are that the student toolkit is not well known in the sector and is not used directly, though it may be used to inform the local development of specific support material and processes. There is evidence that some institutions have developed their own approaches to supporting transitional students either before or independently of the student toolkit. We have no evidence on the use of the institutional toolkit.

Work on developing the toolkits preceded recent and current published activity within the enhancement themes and while both were ground breaking in their time they now look dated. There would be a strong case for using more recent and current thinking to frame a new approach to transition that would build on experience of the toolkits but locate it within ELF and PDP. The evidence of the survey conducted for the Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (SIESWE, 2006) as well as comments at the May conference also strongly suggest the need to contextualise material used to support students.

### **The Effective Learning Framework (ELF) and Personal Development Planning (PDP)**

Work on PDP started with the establishment in 2002 of a Joint Working Group (JWG) to support the implementation of PDP and to encourage dialogue about PDP across and within Scottish HEIs. A consultation process ended in February 2005. A document based on discussion within the JWG and on the consultation process is in the process of publication. (*Effective Learning Framework: supporting effective learning, QAAHE, 2006*) This suggests that

- Institutions should have an explicit institutional ELF and within this they should have a system of student focused PDP.
- Focused learning questions (FLQs) will provide a structure and a prompt for students to develop their PDPs but while generic FLQs are potentially powerful more specific material is needed.

The JWG envisages that institutions would work with a set of generic questions which start at the institutional level then cascade to subject and discipline areas.

### **Responding to Student Needs**

An enhancement theme steering committee on Responding to Student Needs was established in 2003, project work was commissioned in 2004 and reports from each of the four projects in the first part of the work were published in 2005 along with the work on student evaluation and feedback (*Responding to Student Needs, QAAHE, 2005*). The focus of the first part of the work was the first year experience of new undergraduate students.

The four projects were

- Induction
- Personal tutor systems
- Approaches to integrating student support
- The first year learning experience

A fuller description of ELF and Responding to Student Needs is included as appendix 4

### **Recommendations**

The ELF and Responding to Student Needs projects have produced data from Scotland and elsewhere in the world that provides a potentially rich body of material that could be used in developing support for transition between Colleges and HEIs.

There is a question as to how far **generic** structures and prompts are helpful. It can be argued that these are necessary at the level of institutional policy and direction but that at an operational level, both for staff and for students, it is vital to supplement, or replace, generic questions and information with material directly and clearly relevant to the particular context. This is indicated in the ELF document and more directly in a recent subject based study in 2006 for SIESWE, the Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (see appendix 5).

A major issue is the extent to which the enhancement themes, PDP and ELF are exclusively a concern for HEIs. It might be argued that these do and should apply equally to the college part of the HE sector, especially where transfer is an element of provision. The evidence of the induction project of the Student Needs Theme, for instance, shows clearly that transition has pre as well as post and continuing stages.

If the Colleges are to develop as credit rating bodies and if transfer becomes a two way process i.e. from University to College as well as from College to University, there is a strong case for the outcomes of the enhancement themes to be shared by both sectors.

Guidance for institutions as to what should be in the tools to support transition could be helpful. This might include suggestions on using the generic terminology of the PDP project to develop applications that are vocational or discipline based and using the models identified by the Responding to Student Needs project to develop procedures that are congruent with the institution's own common processes and language.

There is no need to alter the Guidelines.

## **Appendix 1 Full summary of the survey of institutional views on 'Facilitating Credit-based Links in Higher Education: Guidelines to Support Colleges and Higher Education Institutions'.**

- *Do the sections of the Guidelines cover the relevant areas of guidance, or is there a need to add or remove sections?*
- *Should the guidelines within the sections be considered adequate as they stand or should they be added to, removed or amended?*

Responses were received from 16 Colleges and 12 HEIs

### **Colleges**

Adam Smith College, Anniesland College, Barony College, Coatbridge College, Cumbernauld College, Elmwood College, Glasgow College of Nautical Studies, James Watt College, Jewel and Esk Valley College, Langside College, Lauder College, Motherwell College, South Lanarkshire College, Stevenson College, Stow College, West Lothian College

### **Higher education Institutions**

Aberdeen University, Abertay University, Bell College, Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow University, Paisley University, Queen Margaret University College, St Andrews University, Scottish Agricultural College, Stirling University, The Robert Gordon University, Strathclyde University.

## **Full summary of responses**

### **General comments**

The main challenge for the guidelines is that they are kept updated and relevant. We would suggest a resource is identified to update the information and promotional activities annually. Enable dialogue of widening access forums, avoid duplication, support collection of stats/data

Need overview of toolkits, research, practice based resources (by SACCA?) or into guidelines

More promotion across the sector

Staff development could be a specific section

Successful transitions go beyond the matching of curriculum content and levels. The importance of relationships between institutions at strategic and operational levels is a key factor in ensuring meaningful dialogue takes place to build robust learning paths. These points are effectively stressed in the guidelines.

The seven sections cover the relevant areas, although not all the issues raised will be relevant to all institutions.

The main change we would encourage is simply one of emphasis to encourage flexibility and creativity in the arrangements by which learners move between colleges and HEIs. Flexibility is necessary to accommodate the diversity of the FE and HE sectors.

The SCQF also contains SVQs and further work is required with regard to supporting progression opportunities for learners who have successfully achieved higher level SVQs and wish to use these as a basis for progressing into HEIs.

Many of the guidelines are embedded in existing institutional procedures and are seen in the overall context of existing policy and practice. One HEI indicated that it was concerned that they should be seen as reinforcing existing guidance rather than adding an additional onus on institutions.

The sections form a useful framework for identifying (university) practice. They allow us to identify areas where there is a great deal of activity and others where there is little or none. This information can be fed in and acted on by the Joint Liaison groups. These groups comprise senior staff (university) and college staff representatives from each of the colleges we work with.

We have an 'HE Transition unit', piloting, developing and mainstreaming activities to support before during and after transition (HEI)

The Guidelines are helpful, but are extensive and tend to appear somewhat prescriptive. There may be a risk that (university) staff interested in creating links are put off. We would suggest that consideration is given to producing a practical checklist behind which the full guidelines might sit.

Develop a framework or summary of the sections with quality indicators and key prompts against which individual colleges could report performance and agree actions for improvement.

Need more explanation of SCQF and levels in the document. Need definitions of acronyms.

Need clear explanation with examples of general and specific credit.

Guidelines should be wholly endorsed by all institutions, in a format shared by all institutions, share agreed documentation, be accessible online to students

Include consideration and reference to funding decisions (by SAAS and SFC) which impact on institutions and learners, for example the practicality of SAAS support for a student going from a degree to HNQ

Ensuring the appropriate balance through more acknowledgement that progression routes and programme design could be skewed by overemphasis on transition to university. Support for HNQ students going into employment also needs to be preserved.

There should be increased clarity over the difference between 'entry' and 'articulation'. The guidelines could cause entry into year 1 of a degree to be construed as articulation. Entry arrangements for HNQ students should be published in the same way as for

Highers - HEI prospectuses to include general credit arrangements with individual programmes specifying specific credit arrangements.

## **Specific points in relation to the text of the Guidelines**

### **Section 1 Institutional Policy**

This section was particularly pertinent (HEI). The detail of our wider access work is often developed from best or current practice, rather than from detailed internal plans and policies. This section has been helpful in identifying ways of taking this forward.

Developing institutional policy would be assisted by a standard model to be used as a baseline for development. This could be developed through ASC or SFEU for example.

An exemplar university policy would be a good idea

### **Section 2 Information about programmes leading to qualifications**

**2.1** The mapping website is not always accurate, it is difficult and frustrating for those who attempt (and often fail) to update the site.

The mapping website is not a user friendly resource for students.

There is a need to rationalise the number and range of websites providing this type of information. A wasteful duplication of effort.

The mapping website is not up to date. There is little evidence of national co-ordination in order to maintain currency and accuracy. When launched it appeared valuable and useful. Have colleges and universities been updating their entries?

Increase awareness of the national database, how it is being used, how to use it, who is responsible for keeping it up to date.

The mapping website needs to be robustly maintained.

Explicit objective criteria should be publicised for each programme, in a format shared by all institutions.

MTB was interesting but only demonstrated the wide range of access and progression routes available, which learners often have to negotiate themselves.

Colleges can still be left with a struggle to get confirmed places for progression for students and will be limited to working in a unilateral way with individual HE establishments.

The standardisation of access adopted by the OU model is particularly useful. It sets out clear, realistic and achievable routes to higher level for HN students.

**2.2** A central body such as SQA could be tasked with establishing, agreeing and publishing opportunities as part of the validation of new HNQ frameworks. The current guideline suggests that colleges should do this individually.

There is some duplication and repetition in the Guidelines.

2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.7 essentially refer to the same thing, but for different audiences. They also take account of what is included in 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3.

**2.3** Students are not always told at the start of HNQs that these qualifications will not necessarily give them advanced standing within degree programmes.

**2.4** HNs are very tightly prescribed in terms of learning outcomes (and, currently, performance criteria) and mapping of achievements from degree to HNQ can be complex and time consuming.

Include an example of how this is being used to clarify the process of HEI /College transfer.

HEIs need to observe this guideline.

**2.7** Need guidance on how to transfer information to Careers Scotland, Learndirectscotland, and SAAS.

Section 2 needs something on the 96 point HNC transfer.

### **Section 3 Credit transfer between HNQs and degrees**

**3.1, 3.2 and 3.3** are effectively incorporated in sections 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.7.

**3.2** should be reworded to read 'colleges and HEIs should include reference to 'preferred' SCQF credit points ..... for entry and progression' since RPL might also be involved.

**3.3** SQA should publish clear credit transfer arrangements for units/qualifications achieved prior to the introduction of the revised design principles to ensure maximum recognition of prior achievement.

It would be helpful to include reference to institutional RPL mechanisms, particularly APEL since it is complex, within this guideline.

Many students are still on HN frameworks which do not contain levelled units, and for some time in the future there will be HNC/D holders with qualifications on old frameworks who are seeking entry to HE. This group are not considered in the guidelines.

It seems unlikely that experiential learning can be levelled consistently?

As we experience students studying levelled units within modernised frameworks, it is becoming apparent that levelling (of HNs) is not consistent between subject areas.

No reference to the UCAS process

**3.4** HEI Admissions staff don't always advise pre-entry

## **Section 4 Programme design**

Involve graduating students and post HNQ students in programme design.

Sections 4 and 5 should take into consideration the impact of an influx of college students into an HEI student cohort.

In sections 4 and 5 it is sometimes difficult to be specific about the ability of the university staff to influence the HN curriculum – the SQA reviews are taking place on a national rather than a local basis. There are also numerous sensitivities about being seen to ‘tell’ colleges what they should be doing, and vice versa, so curricular influences can be very limited.

**4.1** This guideline needs to, in part, be addressed by SQA as they oversee the rationale, aims and learning outcomes.

**4.2** could be a more overt link to 2.4 re transfer from degrees into HNQs.

## **Section 5 Learning, teaching and assessment**

This section is the key to successful progression. What has been learned from the staff exchange project, and subject specific toolkits. Perhaps this section needs to be reconsidered and revised.

**5.1** This guideline could be interpreted in a variety of ways. The focus should be on supporting learners to adapt to HEI assessment (as in 5.2) and not mean changing HN assessment practice.

There is little scope for assessment practices to be adapted within colleges. SQA unit specifications are very prescriptive and there is little opportunity to make changes.

**5.2** Discontinuity between assessment practices is likely to be less apparent with the introduction of graded assessment units in the form of exams.

Reference to colleges to be removed if SFC now funds HEIs to support all bridging activity.

**5.3** Design is for SQA so only mention delivery and learner support here in the guideline.

**5.4** The guideline refers to sharing staff resources between colleges and HEIs. Sharing teaching, staff exchanges and staff shadowing are laudable aims, but budget constraints might make them difficult to achieve in practice.

## **Section 6 Student support**

It would be useful to have a case study of where this has worked effectively.

Some overlap in section 6 with sections 2 and 3 as information and awareness raising are a key component of pre-entry support.

Some repetition between 6.2, 6.3, 6.6 and 5.1 and 5.2 as orientation, preparation and support are geared towards dealing with changes in learning, teaching and assessment post transition.

No mention of career planning anywhere.

Refer specifically to transition in this section

**6.4** Be more direct and say 'open days and inductions 'should' take account' etc.

**6.5** PDP reference. Use the opportunity to signpost individualised support for learning through e portfolios.

## **Section 7      Specific articulation agreements**

This section is confusing and we would welcome revision based on clarity around 'progression' and 'formal articulation agreements' (HEI).

Need increasing clarity over the difference between 'entry' and 'articulation'.

Articulation and progression and the impact on student choice.

The current Guidelines could cause entry into year 1 of a degree from a college to be construed as articulation.

The current Guidelines concentrate on a model based on a limited view of articulation arrangements. There is little or no reference to alternatives such as partnership agreements, collaborative developments, franchise arrangements etc.

Provide an exemplar articulation agreement to promote standardisation of information contained within agreements and facilitate communication.

Need articulation opportunities at each year and stage.

**7.2**      Need increased emphasis on the value of tracking students within articulation agreements. Colleges currently rely on HEIs re destination tracking and this needs to be built into articulation arrangements.

## **Appendix 2 May 2006 Conference**

**‘Working together to create new opportunities and meet new needs’.**

### **Workshop on College- HE articulation at the institutional level.**

Note of the workshop

There were 23 participants.

#### **Presentations**

Bill Thomson, QAA Consultant, chaired the session. He explained that the presentations would look at the development and the use of the guidelines and that a note of the discussion would be taken as part of the current consultation on a possible review of the guidelines.

Joan Menmuir, QAA Consultant, described the development of the Guidelines on Facilitating Credit Based Links in Higher Education (2004) and provided an overview of the contents.

- Institutional policy
- Information about programmes
- Credit transfer between HNQs and degrees
- Programme design
- Learning, teaching and assessment
- Student support
- Specific articulation agreements

Kyrsten Black, SAC, explored the use of the Guidelines in practice in SAC.

- SAC degrees are validated by 3 different HEIs and are delivered on 3 campuses although the degrees are not necessarily linked to the nearest HEI. All SAC degrees are built on HNDs delivered by SAC and by other Colleges. Several HN programmes are now developed in consortia with colleges and SQA. Articulation agreements are sometimes college-wide, sometimes subject specific. Agreements create additional benefits like shared field trips and shared assessment practices. The mapping database has helped external articulation. Part time student numbers (now 15%) and mature student numbers (over 50%) are increasing. The SCQF had provided a structure for these developments.
- Degree programmes are designed to build on HNDs and use a matrix to show progression within cognate areas. Barriers to progression (merits in units of HNs) have been removed and replaced by academic counselling. The new graded units in HNs will also help support progression. Induction in year 3 and the associated ‘study skills pack’ (developed within SAC and used throughout the institution) are carefully structured and considered important.

- Mapping of achievement from a degree programme to an HNQ is complex and time consuming and was highlighted as a problem. SAC had never been able to succeed in this and would welcome advice on how to do it.

### **Key points and issues identified during discussion**

SCQF had helped SAC revitalise its provision over the last 6 or 7 years. Bell and Napier participants also indicated their use of an approach similar to SAC, although the Napier participant noted that it was more difficult to manage transitions for applicants from outwith the UK.

Participants suggested that the biggest single barrier to widening participation was the lack of consistency across the sector in terms of progression from an HND. Local 'arrangements' were acknowledged by many to be working quite well.

There was lively debate about why degree benchmarks were not creating more uniformity in degree programme design.

It was suggested that the payment rules for graduate endowment might act as an incentive for students who top up from an HND.

Use of the SAC 'study skills toolkit' in year 3 was discussed as was whether it was credit bearing (it wasn't). Some other institutions did credit rate their study skills units/modules.

There was discussion about the terms 'access' and 'progression' in relation to the MTB mapping database of progression routes from college to university. Some participants felt that the progression routes identified were often about access into a degree programme and not about receiving credit for existing learning within a programme. Participants indicated that the MTB mapping database was now out of date.

There was no support for the suggestion that the Guidelines should be reviewed.

Some participants suggested that they had seen the student 'bridging toolkit' from the MTB project. None had used it with students.

At the end of the workshop participants agreed that

- Movement from degrees to HNQs should be made possible
- Local arrangements worked well
- Articulation should mean getting credit inside programmes not merely access.

### **Appendix 3 Meeting with Regional Access Coordinators 24/04/06**

#### **Present**

Bill Thomson, Joan Menmuir, Kerry Musselbrook, Napier, Alison Watson, Aberdeen and Bernadette Sanderson, Paisley.

#### **Apologies**

Wilma Clark, Abertay.

This note of the meeting was circulated to and agreed by those who had participated.

#### 1. Managing the change from College to University

*How widely is the document 'Preparing to move on from an HNC or HND to a degree: making the change from College to University' used? How is it used? Does it need to be developed further/changed? In what ways would you suggest?*

It was agreed that the document contained some very useful information, and was potentially helpful to students if used in conjunction with a tutor. It was felt to be less useful as a stand alone resource for individual College students who had, as yet, no experience of University life.

It was agreed that there had been a very positive atmosphere at the launch of this resource, but that the momentum had not been maintained thereafter. Strategic steer about how it could be used at the regional and institutional level had not been provided. New regional forum projects and individual institutions may or may not have incorporated it into their work with students.

As a resource for students it will most likely have been used as a generic resource or amended to suit specific purposes in different institutions/projects. Some institutions may have neglected its potential. It was noted that a resource for managing school to college transition would also be helpful.

A clearer picture of use could be obtained by contacting institutions and consulting students themselves.

#### 2. Facilitating credit based links in higher education

*How helpful have the 2004 guidelines to support colleges and HEIs in facilitating credit-based links in higher education been in practice? We are about to seek feedback from the sector on whether it is time for them to be reviewed. What are your views? Should they be added to? Reworded?*

It was agreed that the Guidelines to support credit based links had been welcomed and were being actively used to facilitate links and develop practice, but mainly in the Colleges and HEIs who were already committed to developing links. It was felt that the Guidelines had done less for those institutions that remain uncommitted and who see little value in making change. Use of the Guidelines was perceived to be 'patchy' across the sector.

A clearer picture of the need to review the Guidelines themselves will be provided through the institutional consultation currently underway.

### 3 Models of practice in College/HEI links

*We are exploring the possibility of developing a document containing examples of practice in College/HEI links to share across the sector. We would like to discuss with you whether you think this is a useful idea and how you think we should go about it. How do we identify and choose examples? What works well? What hasn't worked? Which institutions have good experiences they would like to share?*

It was agreed that a set of examples of practice in facilitating credit based links could be collected through the forums and then disseminated either on paper or electronically. Take up could not be assured. It was noted that active involvement in making a change to practice tends to be a better driver.

It was suggested that further work needs to be done at different levels to embed the process of facilitating credit based links within institutions. There was a strong feeling that relationships and people networks were very important in the process. This could include

- work at senior management level in Colleges and HEIs in relation to policy. Several examples were quoted. HNQ students in one subject area, for example, can't progress to an HEI within Scotland, although access into similar English institutions is readily available. Another HEI draws almost all of its credit linked students from 4 out of a possible 10 local Colleges.
- work at departmental level with subject based staff, through national subject networks as in the subject specific SFC bridging projects. Associated with this development work was the need to involve professional bodies within core subject groupings. Particular mention was made of College/HEI jointly developed degrees where progression was built in from the start.
- work at staff level in Colleges and HEIs during induction and CPD programmes in order to develop people networks and provide information and advice. Case studies and critical incidents would be very useful in this context. A staff exchange project in the West forum area had highlighted some of the difficulties of creating College/HEI links.

Information channels from national initiatives to the fora coordinators could be improved.

There were no direct links from the fora to the work of HEA Scotland.

## **Appendix 4 Bridging Toolkits, PDP and ELF, Responding to Student Needs**

### **Bridging Toolkit for Students**

*Preparing to move on from an HNC or HND to a degree: Making the change from College to University (SCQF, 2004)*

The toolkit is written for students to use. It helps them identify the changes they can expect as they move from a college to a university. It also provides sources of further information and advice on the topics addressed. Appendices provide bridging support contacts at Scottish HEIs and student support contacts at Scottish HEIs.

The Toolkit addresses 6 areas:

- Subject based/curricular continuity issues
- Joining an existing group of students as an advanced entry student
- Teaching and Learning approaches
- Assignments and being assessed
- Student support
- Personal issues

The toolkit is generic and might be difficult for individual college students to use when working alone and with no prior knowledge about how universities work. In a group tutorial setting within a particular programme, it could set a useful agenda for discussion.

No systematic evidence of current use in the sector has been gathered for this report.

### **Toolkit for HEIs**

*Bridging Gaps between HNQs and Degrees. FE to HE Toolkit for HEIs: A Guide to Facilitating a Seamless Student Transition (SCQF, 2004)*

The toolkit provides a mechanism to audit current practice and identify gaps in provision. It also provides advice and suggestions to address gaps identified. A number of examples of good practice in the sector are provided as sources of further advice and there are web links to all of the Scottish Colleges.

The Toolkit is designed to be useful at institutional, departmental or programme level in an HEI. It focuses on 6 specific areas:

- If HNQ direct entry students join a programme, are staff informed and are students identified? Are staff familiar with the relevant HNQs and any specific articulation arrangements made?
- Is there curricular mismatch and have direct entry students been informed prior to starting the programme about likely gaps and provided with information about what they have missed?

- Are direct entry students provided with specific support re different approaches to teaching and learning? Are they allocated a specific named advisor/or linked to support services and told how to contact them?
- Are students well informed about what will be assessed and how assessments are carried out? Are direct entry students given specific input re differences in assessment methodology?
- Are there cross institutional induction arrangements in place? Is departmental induction offered to all students and is there specific 'bridging' support available for transition students?
- Are direct entry students made aware of the student support systems available in the institution?

The toolkit is generic and not targeted at any specific area of institutional policy or programme development.

No systematic evidence of current use in the sector has been gathered for this report.

### **The Effective Learning Framework (ELF) and Personal Development Planning (PDP)**

Work on PDP started with the establishment in 2002 of a joint working group (JWG) to support the implementation of PDP and to encourage dialogue about PDP across and within Scottish HEIs. A consultation process ended in February 2005. A document based on discussion within the JWG and on the consultation process is in the process of publication. (*Effective Learning Framework: supporting effective learning, QAAHE, 2006*) This suggests that

1 Institutions should have an explicit institutional ELF and within this they should have a system of student focused PDP.

*'Greater value will be gained from PDP, by students, staff and institutions, if it is embedded within a framework of institutional and discipline-based learning, teaching and assessment strategies, is an integral component of curriculum-design, and simultaneously accommodates the personal, academic and professional aspirations and experiences of each student.'*

2 Focused learning questions (FLQs) will provide a structure and a prompt for students to develop their PDPs but while generic FLQs are potentially powerful

*'Many students may want more specific prompts which relate more closely to the nature of the precise situation or issue which they are facing'*

3 Translating these points into action the JWG envisages that institutions would work with a set of generic questions which start at the institutional level then cascade to subject and discipline areas.

### **Enhancement Theme: Responding to Student Needs**

An enhancement theme steering committee on Responding to Student Needs was established in 2003, project work was commissioned in 2004 and reports from each of the four projects in the first part of the work were published in 2005 along with the student evaluation and feedback toolkit (*Responding to Student Needs, QAAHE, 2005*). The focus of the first part of the work was the first year experience of new undergraduate students.

The four projects on student needs in the first year of study were

- Induction
- Personal tutor systems
- Approaches to integrating student support
- The first year learning experience

Each deals in detail with issues and examples of practice. Individually and collectively they provide a substantial source of data on current practice both in Scotland and elsewhere in the world.

A summary of some of the main points from each report is given below. The first three project reports have direct application to transition to and from college.

## **1 Induction**

Three phases in the student experience should be recognised: pre entry, on course, progression.

There are four areas where students are required to make adjustments: academic, geographic, administrative, personal.

Three core strategies are required: coordinate, communicate, connect.

The key factor appears to be strategic and policy commitment (and evaluation of actions).

To summarise ideas from surveyed literature, an 'ideal' induction programme (pg 7) would:

- be strategically located within the higher education institution and managed by an authority that has the power to bring about change and drive policy on matters related to support for first-year students
- address academic, social and cultural adjustments required of students
- provide time-relevant targeted information provide early validating experiences
- be inclusive of all student groups
- address special needs of particular groups
- make academic expectations explicit

- include teaching staff at a personal level
- develop required computing skills and e-learning skills
- recognise existing skills/experience
- recognise different entry points to HE
- be inclusive of students' families
- be student-centred rather than university-centred
- be an integrated whole
- be part of an ongoing extended programme
- be evaluated, with findings communicated to relevant stakeholders.

## **2 Personal tutor systems**

Questions raised include

Is the Personal tutor approach working? What about academic advisors? What are the implications of diverse intake, ratios up, learning skills, staff skills, etc? Support by other means such as peer support, technology? How does tutoring link to PDP?

Elements in tutoring include

Academic support (academic success)

Personal support (life/study balance)

Developmental support (usually discipline based, employability etc)

A 10 point guide to implementing a successful system is provided (page 60)

- Establish the role of a first-year champion supported by a centralised resource of administration.
- Plan an effective student support strategy by determining the profile of the student body and their entry-point static risk factors or support indicators.
- Organise the environment into which the students are to be received including assigning students to personal tutors in the first week.
- Monitor and collate student attendance and regularly evaluate the big picture.
- Create opportunities for student engagement or participation in the early weeks and provide rapid feedback on the uptake.
- Communicate to students, from the start, realistic expectations and detailed information on the support that is available.

- In addition to general information, provide a summary only of the facts that first year students need to know.
- Provide training and clear guidelines to assist academic staff in providing general support and identifying a critical incident in relation to student support.
- Develop a code of practice for academic personal tutors.
- Integrate personal tutor systems into the general student experience and close the feedback loops to individual tutors.

### **3 Approaches to integrating student support**

Core characteristics of integrative models are (pg 73)

- Increasing student-peer interaction
- Increasing staff-student interaction, outside formal 'class'
- Increasing student involvement and engagement with the institution
- Linking curriculum and co-curriculum
- Increasing academic expectation of students
- Helping student s prepare for tertiary education
- Empowering front line service staff
- Effective use of emerging technologies

### **4 The first year learning experience**

This project focussed on school transition and does not explore the direct entry student experience in any detail.

It concludes that HEIs should consider a strategic approach to the first year experience and that academics should emphasise a coherent and thought through curriculum.

The second part of the work in the Responding to Student Needs theme looked at student evaluation and feedback on their learning experience.

## **Appendix 5 Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (SIESWE)**

### FE-HE Transition Survey

In early 2006, the Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (SIESWE), as part of its Learning Exchange service, commissioned research into learning materials to support transition for students moving from the HNC in Social Care to the social work degree. The survey was conducted for SIESWE by Sara Dunn Associates. Neil Ballantyne at Strathclyde University is the contact for SIESWE.

An online survey was disseminated to relevant special interest mailing lists and targeted individuals between 29 March and 11 April 2006. In total 63 responses were received.

The key questions addressed were:

- what issues do these students face, and
- what learning materials might help?

### **Main results**

- Social care/social work students making the transition from FE to HE need support
- Support currently offered by institutions is very variable
- Support is needed to improve study skills, in some areas of subject specific knowledge, and in managing personal and cultural change
- Study skills were perceived to be the highest priority support need
- Study skills specific to the social work degree were perceived to be the highest priority for learning materials

### **Main recommendations for learning materials**

- Consider learning objects on study skills including reading, writing, referencing, information literacy, all contextualised for social work degree
- Consider treating reflective practice/critical thinking as a 'study skill' suitable for learning object development
- Consider developing a study skills self-assessment tool
- Consider an online self-assessment toolkit for transition students, covering all areas of student support need, and contextualised for social work.

Awareness of the SCQF toolkit *Making the Change from College to University: Preparing to Move on from an HNC to a Degree* was very low in this study, which may be due in part to the relative newness of the toolkit (2005), and the fact that it is a generic tool

rather than a subject specific one. Those who were aware of it all considered that a social work specific version would be a valuable new tool.

Five of the 63 respondents were familiar with the toolkit (one of these was a SCQF project officer). Of those who knew of the toolkit, only one was actually using it with their students. All 5, however, considered that a social care/social work specific version would be valuable. One respondent commented:

“[The toolkit] does raise some important issues - particularly highlighting what changes may be for students, and getting them to consider how this may affect them. Like everything, how we administer this needs to be considered.”