

Extending the Authority to Credit Rate

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) is pleased to respond to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) consultation on extending the authority to credit rate. This response has been compiled by the General Secretary, Professor Andrew Miller and the Policy Officer, Dr Marc Rands, with the assistance of a number of Fellows with considerable experience in this area.

The SCQF has created a comprehensive model of credit rating that has attracted world-wide interest in the educational sphere. However it is not yet well understood by many of the stakeholders here in Scotland. Any process for expanding coverage needs to ensure that the reputation already gained is not damaged and that the language and purposes of credit rating are understood. The reputation of the SCQF rests at present on the SQA and Higher Education (HE) institutions that have a broad range of experience. It is concerning, therefore, that at this very early stage, the SCQF can consider the possibility of empowering the narrower expertise of organisations which focus on satisfying their own profession or trade. Despite the SCQF's stated desire to achieve consistency and rigour, the spectre of inconsistency of practice between the newly-accredited bodies looms large. In addition, the consultation paper fails to recognise that if there is growth in the number and types of credit rating bodies, there may be competition between them and there will be a need to ensure that this does not undermine the integrity of the framework or create confusion and uncertainty for stakeholders: especially employers and learners.

The specific questions in the consultation paper are now addressed below:

Future Scenario 1 – HEIs, SQA & Scotland's Colleges

Scenario 1 extends the credit rating powers to Colleges only. This would be an important step in adding vocational qualifications not already covered by Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). It would also begin the process of extending credit rating to a limited cohort of institutions which are already well versed in the practice. The SQA and/or the HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) are probably best placed to judge quality control but it would also be important to have involvement from the HE sector in order to ensure that the potential for articulation is not lost.

Future Scenario 2 – HEIs, SQA, Scotland's Colleges, Professional Bodies/Statutory Bodies & Awarding Bodies

Scenario 2 extends credit rating further and should only be embarked upon once the problems of introducing Scenario 1 have been identified in practice and overcome. At this point the proposed Joint Approvals Board (JAB) would become important, not only for initial approval but also to monitor continuing approval by showing how the credit ratings have been used (e.g. via pass rates, achievement measures, employment achieved). These are the kind of performance indicators that institutions should already be using, so reporting them to the JAB should not be an additional burden and it should ensure that such programmes of learning adhere to the stipulated quality assurance criteria and, more generally, the principles of the SCQF.

Creating an Additional Central Credit Rating Panel

In terms of the establishment of an additional central credit rating panel, it is difficult to comment without the Framework being in place, but it is likely to be needed in a greatly enlarged framework where organisations other than HEIs, SQA and Colleges are able to credit rate a broader range of learning and training than is currently accredited. It would also help to provide credibility to the process by providing new credit rating bodies with national approval and monitoring procedures that are comparable to those of HE and SQA qualifications.

Additional Information

Copies of this response are available from the Policy Officer, Dr Marc Rands (email: mrand@royalsoced.org.uk) and from the RSE web site (www.royalsoced.org.uk).

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