

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NSQF

Developing the Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) System

Proposal for research and concept testing to underpin development

1. Introduction

In its meeting on 13th December 2013, the Cabinet Committee on Skill Development decided that a credit accumulation and transfer system (CAT system) would be integrated into the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) to allow people to move between education, vocational training and work at different stages in their lives according to their needs and convenience.¹

The NSQF Notification states that, with the anticipated credit system: “It will be possible for a student to leave education domain, get some practical experience in industry and return to studies to gain qualifications to progress higher in his chosen career”.² The NSQF Notification defines credit as ““recognition that a learner has successfully completed a prior course of learning, corresponding to a qualification at a given level.”³

In 2015, the India-EU Skills Development Project (India-EU Skills) met with the National Skills Development Agency (NSDA) and a range of other key stakeholders to begin the development of national policy to support the implementation of a national CAT system. The draft policy⁴ was completed in November 2015, followed by proposals for the establishment of a working group to develop a national CAT system⁵ (the Starter Paper).

This proposal outlines the next steps required to support the development of a national CAT system which can achieve the aims set out in the NSQF Notification. It proposes a 3-phase approach:

- Phase 1: Engagement of key stakeholders in helping to identify potential aids and challenges to the implementation of a CAT system and to test the concepts within the draft policy and proposals.
- Phase 2: Establishment of a working group on credit to devise the CAT system based on research in Phase 1
- Phase 3: Consultation with key stakeholders on proposed CAT system

¹ Ministry of Finance Notification, New Delhi, 27 December 2013. (Referred to elsewhere in this paper as the “NSQF Notification”.)

² NSQF Notification, p5

³ NSQF Notification, 27 December 2013: p1

⁴ Draft Policy For Credit Accumulation And Transfer In The NSQF, Version 1.1 (27.11.15)

⁵ Working Group On Credit Accumulation And Transfer In The NSQF: Starter Paper (03.03.2016)

2. Defining the aims of the 3-phase approach

PHASE 1: Gathering evidence to underpin design

The NSQF Notification requires the development of a national CAT system which is open to learners across India. The system should support lifelong learning in India by embedding credit accumulation and credit transfer in the NSQF. This, in turn, should support the development of a more diverse and differentiated post-school system by promoting the articulation of qualifications in different education, training, academic and occupational sectors. It should make it easier for learners to achieve outcomes at different times and in different places, and to transfer between qualifications in different institutions or different sectors, without having to repeat learning.

A wide range of stakeholders will be responsible for ensuring that the CAT system works effectively. These include:

SUPPLY-SIDE STAKEHOLDERS:

- **Organisations responsible for designing and developing qualifications:** The organisations have a vital **role in the development** of effective CAT systems. The draft CAT system policy requires these organisations to embed the capacity for credit accumulation and transfer in the design and development of qualifications, and to ensure that progression routes are accessible.
- **Education and training providers:** These organisations will be the **implementers** of the CAT system. The draft policy identifies their responsibility for ensuring that individuals whose previous learning carries recognised credit can access and progress through further learning on the basis of that credit.

DEMAND-SIDE STAKEHOLDERS

- **Employers and individual learners:** These are the key **beneficiaries** within the CAT system. Policy and processes need to be developed in a way which makes the CAT system accessible and easy to navigate.

REGULATORS

- **Regulatory bodies:** These organisations are responsible for **monitoring implementation and continuous improvement** to ensure that the CAT system achieves the aims set by the NSQF Notification.

If the policy and the CAT system itself are to be implemented effectively, it is important that developments are based on a firm understanding of the contexts and needs of supply-side and demand-side stakeholders. In particular, it is important to identify any existing credit systems and how these might align or co-exist with a new national system. It is also important to identify any perceived challenges to the use of a national CAT system from both supply side and demand side, and to consider how these can be addressed during the development phase.

It is also important to ensure the effective engagement of regulatory bodies to ensure that regulation of the CAT system is appropriate and proportionate, and does not place undue burdens on suppliers or users.

As a result, it is important to engage and consult with the key stakeholder groups to understand their reactions to the draft policy and their perceptions of the proposed CAT system. In particular, it is important to gain an understanding of any challenges they perceive in the implementation of such a system, and how, in their view, such challenges might be overcome.

The **aim of Phase 1** is to:

- gather evidence of stakeholders' perceptions of the draft policy and proposals to inform the development of the CAT system.

The **output** of this phase will be a report providing evidence which developers need to ensure that the CAT System which takes into account the needs of stakeholders and the challenges they perceive.

PHASE 2: Designing the CAT System

The draft policy paper and the Starter Paper developed by the credit expert in India-EU Skills draw on international experience and best practice. These documents provide a platform for the design and development of the CAT system for India linked to the NSQF.

- The **draft policy** defines the key components of a credit system, identifies responsibilities for its development and delivery, and outlines the key principles on which the CAT system can be based.
- The **Starter Paper** outlines how the CAT system might be developed. It suggests the establishment of a Credit Working Group to carry out this work, and outlines the remit of such a group. It also identifies key decisions needed in the development process and provides a process for arriving at those decisions.

Phase 2 of the proposed project focuses on the establishment of the Credit Working Group and support for the initial development of the CAT system. The **aims of Phase 2** are to:

- establish a Credit Working Group which has appropriate representation from the various stakeholder groups identified in Phase 1;
- ensure that the Credit Working Group drafts a CAT system which reflects the principles in the policy, whilst taking into account the needs and challenges identified in Phase 1.

The output from this phase will be a draft system which can be tested with a wider group of stakeholders and further refined as a result.

PHASE 3: Testing the draft CAT System with stakeholders

The final phase of this project is a consultative phase, aimed at providing evidence to help refine the initial draft system and prepare the ground for pilot projects. It involves re-engaging with stakeholders from Phase 1 (and any who might have been identified subsequent to this phase) to aid that revision.

The key focus of this final phase is the testing of the system with stakeholders. The **aims of Phase 3** are to:

- ascertain the acceptability of the draft CAT system to the various stakeholder groups, with a clear focus on the usability and sustainability of the system
- identify any potential challenges to the implementation of the system, and how these might be addressed

This concept testing stage will provide guidance for any refining of the initial draft of the CAT System. It can also support identification of ‘early adopters’ who may be willing to pilot the refined system.

3. Planning the 3-phase approach

As the organisation responsible for the overall implementation of the NSQF, NSDA is responsible for leading and managing the project. This includes identifying required resources and delegating responsibilities accordingly.

It is proposed that the research and concept testing takes place over a period of 10 months. An outline project plan is given below.

Timing	Activity	Responsibility of	Resource needed
Month 1 Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint project team, including identification of who will conduct the research (in house or outsourced) • Conduct thorough stakeholder analysis • Identify achievable sample of stakeholders to be involved in each stage of the study to inform sampling. • Use stakeholder analysis to identify who should be included in the Credit Working Group. • Establish Credit Working Group so that they can input ideas into the Phase 1 research design. • Deliverable: detailed project plan and established ways of working for Credit Working Group. 	NSDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocated project manager • Allocated research team
M 2 -4 Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct Phase 1 research. An outline proposal for this is included in Appendix 1. Key activities include: 	NSDA to oversee Research may be outsourced to an appropriately-skilled research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocated NSDA project manager • Funding for research (if

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree information needs and develop draft interview schedules for Stage 1 of research • Agree monitoring arrangements with project lead. • Draw an appropriate sample(s) representative of stakeholder groups • Conduct data gathering activities – to provide both qualitative and quantitative data • Analyse and interpret the findings to identify implications for the CAT system. • Deliverable: Report for Credit Working Group on the insight derived from the data, with a focus on key implications for the CAT System 	team	<p>outsourced)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocated time for research activity if kept in house.
M 5-8 Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use insight report and draft policy to identify the most important key features of a national CAT System for India • Review and agree remit and ways of working for Credit Working Group in the light of this understanding. • Design and document prototype CAT System to reflect both insight and policy. • Identify information needed from the testing of the prototype, and how it might be tested. • Deliverables: Prototype CAT System, including guidance for implementation and suggested requirements for testing phase. 	Credit Working Group	Project manager and research team should be included so that Phase 3 can be planned.
M 9-10 Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify an appropriate sample of stakeholders to test prototype CAT System • Agree information needs from testing of prototype 	Project manager/team And research team	Funding/time allocation for design, development and implementation testing phase

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and implement evaluation processes for stakeholders to feedback views • Deliverable: Report to inform the revision of the prototype and finalise the first version of the CAT System 		<p>Consider if incentives are needed to achieve an appropriate sample.</p>
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APPENDIX 1: Outline Research Proposal for Phase 1

a. Research objectives

The main aim of this stage is to understand the perceptions of the proposed users of a CAT system, both supply-side and demand-side. It will be important to understand what might drive the use of the CAT System and where challenges to use of the system might be envisaged.

The research objectives, therefore, are to identify and understand the following:

SUPPLY-SIDE STAKEHOLDERS

- How do they view the concepts of credit accumulation and transfer? Are they concepts they are familiar with?
- What credit systems currently exist, who do they apply to and how are they used?
- What do they see as the main benefits of a national CAT System?
- What do they see as the main challenges to a national CAT System?
- How might those challenges be overcome?

DEMAND-SIDE STAKEHOLDERS

- How do they view the concepts of credit accumulation and transfer? Are they concepts they are familiar with?
- What would encourage them to access and/or use a CAT System?
- What would discourage them from using a CAT System?
- What could be done to help people make use of a national CAT System?

REGULATORY BODIES (State and sector level)

- How do they view the concepts of credit accumulation and transfer? Are they concepts they are familiar with?
- Do credit systems already exist in their area? If so, who do they apply to and how are they used?
- What do they see as the main benefits of a national CAT System? Are these realizable in their area?
- What do they see as the main challenges to the implementation and effective monitoring of a national CAT System in their area?
- How might those challenges be overcome?

b. Research design

The evidence gathered during Phase 1 of the project needs to provide a firm base for the development of the CAT System. Given the aims for the CAT System, it is important to gain clear insight into how it is likely to be perceived by different stakeholder groups and what factors could ensure that it is implemented effectively. As a result, there is a need for in-depth understanding of views across a robust representative sample of stakeholders. A two-stage information gathering exercise is recommended.

- Stage 1: Exploratory (qualitative) research: The aim of this stage is to explore the issues listed in the research objectives with a small sample of stakeholders from both groups. This stage will provide the basis of wider research with a larger representative sample.
- Stage 2: Survey (quantitative) research: This stage will test the ideas uncovered at Stage 1 across a larger representative sample of stakeholders. Using primarily closed questions, this stage will indicate the extent to which the views uncovered at Stage 1 are shared across supply-side and demand-side stakeholders.

c. Sample

The size and scope of the sample for each stage of data gathering will depend on the stakeholder analysis carried out at the planning stage. It will be important to ensure that representation is included from the three main stakeholder groups, and that the sample reflects the range within each group. The qualitative phase, with a smaller sample, can be used to identify potential respondent groups for the follow-up quantitative phase. At both stages, it is important to recognise that it is the representative nature rather than the size of the sample which provides robust data. It is recommended, in particular, that the stakeholder analysis be used to identify possible quotas for each of the different groups identified within the sample.

d. Data collection

As outlined above, Stage 1 data can be gathered via focus group and/or telephone interviews. The information gathered at this stage can then be used to develop a questionnaire to test how representative that information is among a wider group of stakeholders. It will be important to consider how to drive completion of the questionnaire. In particular, if survey software is being used but groups within the sample are unlikely to have access to the necessary IT, consideration is given to additional methods of administering the questionnaire.

e. Analysis and interpretation

The aim of this phase of the project is to gain insight from the data into the factors which could influence if and how a CAT System is implemented. Therefore, the analysis plan should focus on identifying key enablers and challenges to that implementation, and any potential mitigating actions which the stakeholders suggest. The insight report which is the deliverable from this stage needs to address the question: What does this research tell us about how the CAT System should be designed, developed and implemented?