

## Articulation and progression

### *An introduction to articulation*

1. Articulation – the movement of students from Higher National Qualifications (HNQs) at college into second or third year of a university degree – has probably always happened, to a certain degree and on ad-hoc basis in Scotland. More recently it has been defined as a student gaining entry into second year of a degree with a Higher National Certificate (HNC) gained at college, or into third year with a Higher National Diploma (HND) gained at college.
2. There are currently three different models of articulation in operation:
  - Progression (P) – where a student enters first year of a degree programme with an HNC/D, therefore receiving no recognition for prior HE study
  - Advanced Progression (AP) – where a student, typically, enters second year of a degree programme with an HND, therefore receiving only partial credit for prior HE study
  - Advanced Standing (AS) – where a student enters second year of a degree programme with an HNC or third year of a degree programme with an HND, therefore receiving full credit for prior HE study.
3. In addition, SFC has allocated over 1,000 additional funded places, with their own sub-set of measures and models of operation, for universities to use with college partners to support more HNQ students making the articulation transition with a guaranteed place on a degree.

### *Advice to the Commission on articulation*

4. Submissions to the CoWA emphasised the role of articulation in creating a more flexible and accessible education system but they highlighted the need for clarity in how and where articulation can happen. Submissions noted how articulation arrangements were in place between partnered institutions – usually Post 1992 universities and colleges but some raised the point that such bilateral arrangements could be too narrowly focused on HNC/D and that this was to the detriment of other ways of learning. Some respondents therefore stated that a focus on levels of study (as per SCQF) rather than particular qualifications could help develop the use of articulation to widen access.
5. At the expert group on admissions, there was debate over the role of articulation in supporting access. Though all agreed articulation was positive, some argued that it was more appropriate for some institutions than for others. For example, it does not necessarily fit well with a faculty based university. It

was also noted some of the more selective institutions have found that articulating students often struggle, especially if they are admitted with advanced standing. However it was acknowledged that this is likely because they have had less investment to develop the strong curricular links with colleges necessary to make articulation work.

6. This all illustrates the complicated articulation landscape that is difficult for pupils, parents/carers, schools, and institutions to understand. SFC is currently developing/implementing (?) a 10 year strategy for articulation and so there is now an opportunity for the SFC to rationalise these models and develop a more comprehensive approach to articulation.

***The current levels of articulation and who articulates***

7. Articulation has always been considered an access route that enables a wider range of students to access university than through the ‘traditional’ route from school. When the characteristics of those articulating are considered, it is clear that it is not only widening access on the basis of socioeconomic background but also in terms of age, ethnicity and gender.
8. Table 1 below provides an overview of the data between AY2008-09 and AY2013-14 (from the start of the regional articulation hubs to most recent data) under the four main headings of articulation activity on the National Articulation Database (NAD). This represents all entrant activity<sup>1</sup> between the Scottish colleges and universities.

**Table 1: Numbers of students with HNQs entering degree programmes at Scottish universities**

	Unknown (U) <sup>2</sup>	Progression (P)	Advanced Progression (AP)	Advanced Standing (AS)	TOTAL
2008-09	382	2,217	746	2,583	5,928
2009-10	490	2,630	763	2,932	6,815
2010-11	522	2,649	702	3,046	6,919
2011-12	413	2,848	645	3,095	7,001
2012-13	533	2,978	738	3,578	7,827
2013-14	479	3,364	537	3,871	8,251
Total	2,819	16,686	4,131	19,105	42,741

<sup>1</sup> All entrants include both Scottish domiciled and non-Scottish domiciled students to ensure the widest count of articulation and taking account of both regional articulation hub measures as well as individual institutional outcome agreement measures.

<sup>2</sup> Unknown (U) – this record is most likely to occur when there is not enough complete data to provide a full record of progression for the student.

9. What can be seen is that there were a total of 3,871 students who received full credit and recognition for their previous HNQ and we know from the NAD that 3,788 of them were Scottish domiciled students. This means the remaining 83 students were not ordinarily resident in Scotland but were eligible for SFC-funding (most likely EU students). For the purposes of this paper, the data used will look at **all** articulating students – Scottish domiciled and non- Scottish domiciled.
10. The NAD uses a number of factors in matching student records across the three inputs of SQA, FES and HESA, this means there is a significant amount of data that can be found on key protected characteristics. In summary for 2013-14:
  - 71% of all articulating students were 16-24 years old - this age band also makes up the largest number of HN leavers from colleges.
  - For learners over the age of 25, whilst they made up 35% of overall articulation activity in universities in 2013-14, they were only 31% of HN qualifiers from colleges in the preceding academic year (2012-13). This means that articulation enabled a higher percentage of adult learners through to degree than actually qualified in the previous year, which suggests some were returning to HE after a gap in their studies. This is just one demonstration of how articulation journeys are not linear paths from college to university but are also used by learners to hook back into higher education.
  - 53% of articulating students are male in comparison to 44% for undergraduate entry as a whole and this balance in favour of male students has been the case since 2008-09, apart from 2012-13 and 2010-11 when it was a straight 50/50 balance.
  - 89% of articulating students are white, with BME students making up 11% of all articulating students. In comparison to 93.6% White and 6.4% BME of the whole undergraduate entrant population.
  - Just over 23% of articulating students were from MD20 postcodes.
  - There is no difference to be seen in disability declarations between articulating students and other students.
11. Further information at a regional and subject level is available here (AIC paper from Feb 2016).
12. What we know about articulation for AY2015-16 can be taken from looking at targets in Outcome Agreements, articulation hubs and for the additional articulation places, but we need to exercise caution and remember that these are targets and not final figures. A further element of caution is that for some OAs it is the same target as given for the articulation hub (especially in single institution hubs). At a conservative estimate, using all targets available, there is

potential to achieve anything between 4,000 and 4,500 articulating students in AY2015-16 – but until January 2017, we will not know what has been achieved.

13. In terms of the additional articulation places, the SFC review to date of the impact of these places has shown that, whilst the initial implementation was difficult due to limited notice for institutions, they have been extremely well received, with many universities requesting extra places. They have also had a positive impact at colleges as well, with college partners noting that the additional articulation places meant they could increase the number of HN students accessing courses, even if they did not progress to a degree course immediately after. The additional articulation places were established with guaranteed Associate Student Status – this meant students on those places received access to university facilities such as libraries, gyms, and associations, as well as information, advice and guidance. Some colleges felt this resulted in more interest in articulation from student peers, who had previously not considered articulation as a pathway.
14. All of this information suggests there is scope to expand articulation and a drive to use the SFC processes to pursue the access agenda as fully as possible. However, many Outcome Agreement Managers are encountering discussions where their institutions are not willing to commit to more articulation. This is usually the case where the institution has 25% or more of their student cohort who are entering university degree courses through this model. For other institutions that may be newer to articulation, it can be difficult to see how they can increase their articulation ambitions beyond the additional funded places.

### ***What does success look like?***

15. **Success** in articulation will be a reduction in the number of HNQ students moving onto degree programmes with partial or no credit (advanced progression and progression). We know from Table 1 (at the top of this paper) that, in 2013-14, more HNQ students moved into degree provision without any or only partial credit for their previous study than those that received full credit (3,901 – progression and advanced progression) to 3,871 (advanced standing). Even with recognition for the different reasons why students may not receive full credit (outlined earlier) there is definitely room to increase the overall numbers of articulating students with advanced standing. And part of that increase should be in the promotion of articulation as a valid and acceptable route to degree – not a second-chance route or a less-confident route, but a route for the learner who is aware they have choices and is prepared to test those choices at college. Our goal is that by 2025-26 two thirds of HN entrants will progress with advanced standing. As noted above, it is currently 49.4%.

- **Success marker 1 - between 2016-17 and 2025-2026 there will be a reduction in the number of students entering university degrees with partial credit for their HNQs or previous study at SCQF Level 7 and 8.**
16. **Success** in articulation currently only relies on one product – Higher National Qualifications (HNQs). If there is to be more movement and the building of a more accessible curriculum, serious consideration should be given to expand the current definitions of articulation to include all qualifications at SCQF Levels 7 and 8. This would mean that articulation routes to degrees could open up for entry into second year of a degree from Sixth Year with Advanced Highers, work-based learning and for Modern Apprenticeships at Level 7 and Technical Apprenticeships at Level 8. This could enable a stronger link between articulation and the Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce programme as well as addressing regional skills developments through employer engagement and connecting with other SFC-funded programmes such as the Schools for Higher Education Programme.
- **Success marker 2 - by 2016-17, the definition of articulation should be considered for the inclusion of all relevant and related previous study at SCQF Level 7 and 8.**
17. **Success** in articulation will be the continuation of a diverse articulating student element in universities, which has a higher proportion of students with key equality and diversity characteristics than the wider student body. From the main characteristics, age, males and MD20 should continue to be maintained and we should look for action on BME and disability to ensure articulation is not overlooked as a route to degree for students who may self-declare under these characteristics. Success marker 3, below, also links to the SFC’s work on the Gender Action Plan and wider equality and diversity implementation.
- **Success marker 3 - by 2025-26, articulating students will provide higher proportions in relation to all key equality and diversity characteristics than the wider university student body.**
18. **Success** in articulation will be more HNQ students moving onto degree programmes with full credit (advanced standing). As noted above, the current target for Scottish-domiciled students only for AY2016-17 is 4,100 articulating students, and the overall targets of hubs, OAs and additional articulation places combined look to be between 4,000 and 4,500. It is proposed that growth be incremental yet steady and as such it will be influenced and aided by the previous three success markers – expansion through increased number of students with previous HE qualifications gaining full credit as entry to degree; recognition of other Level 7 and 8 qualifications; and maintaining and improving

specific protected characteristics Therefore, it is important that a realistic but ambitious target is set for articulation for AY2025-26.

19. For AY2013-14, the proportion of articulating students to all Scottish-domiciled students was 11%, and they were 49.4% of all HN entrants. Given all we know about the equality and access benefits of this route and our knowledge of how well it can work in our individual institutions we believe that this route could increase to as much as 25% of university provision but this will not happen overnight. Moving forward and taking on board the difficulties in encouraging institutions to commit to articulation from their core resource, we would suggest that an interim target should be set at 75% of all HN entrants (based on appropriate modelling and use of students eligible for SFC-funding) for AY 2025-26.

- **Success marker 4 - between 2016-17 and 2025-2026 there will be an increase in the percentage of students – from 49.4% to 75% of HN entrants - entering university degrees with full credit for their HNQs or previous study at SCQF Level 7 and 8.**

***Role of individual institutions and the Outcome Agreement process in the success of an articulation strategy***

20. Recommendation 8 from the CoWA stated that ‘The SFC should seek more demanding articulation targets from those universities that have not traditionally been significant players in articulation.’

21. A report was presented to the SFC Board in September 2011 on Flexible Entry Routes to HE made the following broad assessments around articulation by institution type of activity at that time (2010-11):

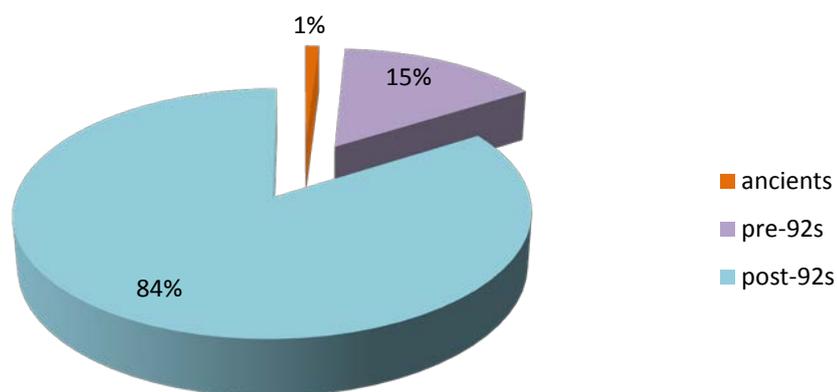
	Ancients	Pre 1992	Post 1992s
Articulation	Very limited articulation activity at present	Some limited evidence but not taken up on a large scale as yet.	Currently account for 90% of articulation.

22. For 2013-14, this assessment has not moved much except between the pre- and post-1992 institutions, where around 5 – 7% of activity has moved from post-1992s to pre-1992s. This is probably largely to do with the influence of Outcome Agreements (OAs) and the regional articulation hubs as opposed to any overarching articulation strategy. Therefore, it is suggested that any strategy could include looking at the contribution made by each ‘type ‘ or

category of institution and using the OA process as the vehicle to achieve targets for individual institutions within each category.

23. In some sense it does not matter if post 92s deliver articulation and pre 92s do less, what matters most is that students have a good subject range of articulation options to choose from and that each region, especially those with high levels of deprivation, have good quantity of routes to chosen from. There may therefore be merit in trying to focus growth on specific subject areas which are both areas of strategic importance and are areas which can be supported well through articulation such as STEM.
24. The first chart (Chart 2) below shows what the current percentage share of articulation activity is by institution category, whilst the second chart (Chart 3) takes this current share and proposes a new proportionate split of activity that may be achieved by AY 2025-26 using the OA process to help universities plan for articulating students.

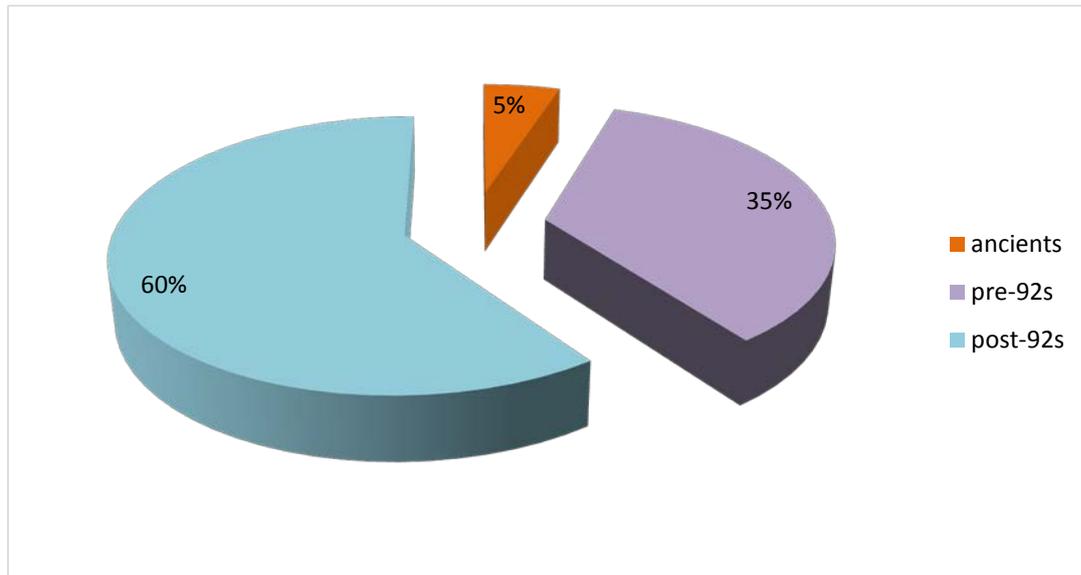
*Chart 2: current percentage share of articulation activity – AY2013-14 - by category of institution*



25. As we know, the bulk of all articulation activity is carried out by the post-92s and the reasons behind this are varied – they have a clearer understanding of HNQs; they have closer relationships with local colleges; they are hosts for the regional articulation hubs thus enhancing their reputation. However, there is no need for this weighting to continue and nor is it considered sustainable for the same five institutions to bear the responsibility for meeting the largest share of a national target.
26. Rather the responsibility be shared amongst the institutions, and this can be done with the acknowledgement that post-92s are still the most practised in the field of articulation, but that ‘new’ players have entered especially with the

additional articulation places and the OA articulation target that is placed on all institutions.

Chart 3: potential split of articulation activity to be achieved by AY2025-26 by category of institution



27. Chart 3 suggests that, by AY2025-26, pre-92s and ancients increase their overall share of an agreed national target on articulation. This would result in opening up more subject and institutional choices, as well as easing the pressure felt on places by the post-92s. The exploration of subjects and ensuring that more choices are available could be in the areas where there is limited or no articulation activity such as: Creative Art & Design, Technologies, Physical Sciences and Education. In terms of our success markers, this would mean that our ambitions for growth would come largely from the institutions with lower commitments to articulation and its growth. At the same time it would be crucial for us to sustain the current levels in the institutions that have largely been responsible for our success to date.
28. Another benefit to working on the premise of all institutions contributing to an overall national target is that the current guidance for articulation in OAs does not necessarily have to change what will change is our pace and what we expect from whom. For universities, it is at Measure 1 and states:  
  
*The number and proportion of Scottish-domiciled learners articulating from college to degree level courses with advanced standing.*
29. And for colleges, the guidance is at Measure 10 – under High Quality Learning – and states:

*The number and proportion of successful students who have achieved HNC or HND qualifications articulating to degree level courses with advanced standing.*

30. Of course, if we are keen to include other forms of SCQF Level 7 and 8 studies or use all students eligible for SFC-funding to be counted, the wording may have to be altered slightly. Given that the final funding for the regional articulation hubs – as separate entities – will cease from July 2016, it appears to make sense to use the OAs and their negotiation discussion to pursue increases in activity and targets.

### ***Continued centralised support for articulation***

31. One element of the regional articulation hubs that has been considered a success from all participants is the Inter-hub network. This is a national, cross-hub group with members from SCQF, SQA, Universities Scotland and NUS Scotland as well as representatives from SHEP, SWAP and UHI. The purpose of the Inter-hub network is principally one of support and practice sharing through discussion and events. At present this has a rotating chair and venue and although we are keen to maintain that style of fellowship and working we would suggest that it should become an SFC responsibility as part of this strategy to ensure that group is maintained and its material widely accessible to our university partners.

### **Next steps**

32. Beyond the Commission's overarching recommendation for articulation, it also stated:
  - These targets should have a clear focus on the benefits, both to learners and the public purse, of awarding full credit for prior study.
  - In establishing new articulation pathways, colleges and HEIs should build upon best practice models already in place to secure the curricular alignment necessary to ensure that learners are equipped with the necessary prior learning and academic skills to enable them to succeed in degree level study.
  - For the purposes of more effective IAG, the SFC should develop, or commission, an articulation 'map', setting out all of the available pathways across Scotland.
33. SFC will build on the success markers and proposals within this document and align them with the above recommendations to finalise a 10-year strategy. The SFC will work with institutions to establish how they can contribute to the national ambitions for articulation and what it will require in terms of change.

34. The 10-year strategy will use the Outcome Agreement process as the main mechanism to lever further articulation activity from all institutions – on a relative and regional scale, to enable partnership working between colleges and universities. The OA process will ensure that clear targets can be agreed on and measured on an annual basis against the success markers. The additional funded places model is also potentially a mechanism both to embed and safeguard articulation as a priority activity for institutions.
35. It is expected that creating a national strategy on articulation would require some form of centralised body, such as the formation of a National Steering Group, to oversee the development and implementation of it, as well as providing an overview of articulation activity on a national scale, as opposed to institutionally or regionally. The majority of this activity could be monitored through the existing arrangements in the outcome agreements, with a stronger remit being made clear in the next round of guidance.