Definition of Access Programmes

Purpose

1.   This paper provides a draft definition of Access Programmes and feedback given by agencies and institutions on this, in order for members to consider final terminology.

Background

2.   At the first meeting of the Access Programmes Steering Group (APSG) members noted the need for clarity as to what constituted an access programmes and which would be included in the remit of the APSG.

3.   It was agreed that a definition should be developed and, from that point, it may be more straight-forward to identify where duplication was taking place, as well as being a starting point for coordination of Access Programmes at a local, regional and national level.

4.   A subsequent meeting of the Bridging Programmes Advisory Group (BPAG) also identified a need for clarity as to what constituted a bridging programme and how this fit with other terms used in the sector, including access and articulation.

5.   Therefore, two draft definitions were created based on conversation and feedback from both the APSG and BPAG which aimed to provide a basis from which key stakeholders across the sector could comment. These would then be presented to members of APSG and BPAG. This would allow for a wide spread understanding and relevant input from across the sector.

6.   Both definitions were sent to members of APSG and BPAG, access managers and practitioners within universities and contacts at agencies/organisations already identified in previous mapping as having been involved in access activity. Contacts were also encouraged to forward these on where appropriate. A full list of the agencies, organisations and institutions contacted can be found in Appendix item 1 of Paper 2, as well as a note of whether a return was received. If considered appropriate by the APSG, a second wave of mapping can take place to target college contacts.

Access Programme Definition

7. The following definition of Access Programmes was created by SFC and sent to relevant university and agency contacts in March 2019, alongside a definition of Bridging Programmes, for comment.

8. *"Access programmes are tailored programmes of activity which are designed to encourage individuals from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds to understand, make a competitive application to and support them to succeed in gaining a place in Higher Education. Typically these are sustained programmes of activity which include more than one point of intervention or continuous support. Skills gained on access programmes are transferable across the sector and are not specific to one institution. These programmes will usually include activities based on one or more of the following;*

    * *Aspiration building*
    * *Attainment raising*
    * *Academic development*
    * *Information, advice and guidance on HE admissions and the application processes*
    * *Build individuals knowledge of the Higher Education environment"*

9. Of the 19 universities the papers were sent to, 14 returned mapping documents, with only 4 providing feedback on the given definitions of Access and Bridging. ASPIRENorth and the Brilliant Club also provided feedback on the draft definition.

10. Although there was agreement that emphasising the transferability of skills across the sector was important, it was also felt (particularly from universities and agencies in the north of Scotland) that there should be an understanding that access programmes may operate differently depending on locality/region or demand (e.g. delivery of a sustained programme of support in a city will differ from a rural area, and there may be more demand in a certain area for a specific type of activity).

11. A question was also raised around whether programmes contribution to attainment and retention should be acknowledged or mentioned in the draft definition.

12. Feedback was provided by the Brilliant Club on the wording used; suggesting that 'tailored' should be changed to 'targeted' and that 'understanding' be broadened to include what aspects of HE we are aiming to help pupils understand (e.g. 'to experience HE', 'to feel a sense of belonging' etc.).

13. Although each of the areas discussed in the three points above suggest considerations for small edits to the draft definition, the following point,

submitted by the University of Glasgow, may support larger changes to the definition and communication around programmes in general.

14.   Feedback provided by the University of Glasgow;

The use of the word Access to describe this type of programme is not appropriate because:
- *An 'Access' programme should provide access to HE, i.e. aid an applicant gain access to a university or college by influencing the admissions process and offer made to the applicant, usually by linking into contextualised admissions*
- *'Access' programmes are universally recognised as being programmes whereby adult returners can access HE. To use the terms access programme in this way would create confusion*

The (given) definition could be attributed to a targeted WP or outreach programme (although outreach is also conducted in a non-targeted way and can cover a broad range of initiatives). Suggestions could be: WP outreach; aspiration-raising.

To be truly effective, they should link directly into senior phase programmes and outline a pathway of support for a learner, which they can see aiding them all the way into HE.
…
Close partnership working and true collaboration between the schools' programmes and HEIs is crucial for this to work. Proper ways of evaluating success and impact of the above programmes have to be included in programme design."

15.   Important points to consider from the feedback given above is the use of access within current terminology and it's link to programmes like SWAP or those tied to specific institutions, the crossover of access programmes and bridging programmes, and the importance of interrelationship of all programmes to create a pipeline to Higher Education.

16.   Clearly consideration must be taken in the naming of these programmes, as described above; the main aims and the definition of what constitutes as a programme falling under the discussion remit of this group and Recommendation 4 of CoWA.

17.   Agreement on the naming of the collective group of these programmes is then dependent on where this wording will be used and with which stakeholders. For example, if only used within this group (APSG) and not nationally, then the understanding of what fits into the category is evident, and arguably the naming of the category should stay in line with CoWA Recommendation 4 – 'access'.

18.   However, if the goal of definition setting is to create more clarity on a national basis around the naming conventions of programmes and how learners navigate through this system, then we may wish to consider a terminology change.

19.   Therefore *Widening Participation* could be used to describe programmes falling

under the definition provided above, *Bridging* could cover programmes which provide additionality in the form of SCQF Level 7 or above credit bearing elements, which would be considered in application processes across the sector, and *Access* programmes could cover programmes which provide routes into specific courses or institutions (e.g. SWAP, Gateway programmes etc.). All three aspects should complement and work with each other to create a pipeline which the learner moves through throughout the Learner Journey. Some programmes may fit into more than one category because of their longevity of contact.

20. If a tri-definition approach was adopted, thought would then have to go into the remit of the APSG and what aspects fall under the remit of this group.

21. **Members are asked to consider the draft definition and the information provided above to;**

     a. **Agree on terminology around the pipeline of access/widening participation/bridging programmes**

     b. **Agree on a (re-edited) definition**

     c. **Agree on which areas of the pipeline of programmes fall under the remit of the APSG. How does this relate to other groups?**

Further information

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