

Key Project Updates

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on developments within access policy areas which relate to the work of the Access Programmes Steering Group. Outputs and recommendations from APSG should take these developments into consideration to ensure policy areas are working together to create effective change for disadvantaged and underrepresented individuals.

Background

2. In direct response to Government policy and legislation, particularly in relation to the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA), a number of national developments have taken place to drive forward the access agenda and ensure opportunities are provided to all disadvantaged or underrepresented groups to access further and higher education. The updates provided below are for those projects which have been funded or are led by SFC, and form part of wider development within Scottish access. These should be kept in mind during continuing APSG conversations and actions.

Bridging Programmes Advisory Group (BPAG)

3. In line with the creation of the APSG, the BPAG was created to progress actions in relation to CoWA Recommendation 7; the development of Bridging Programme activity.
4. Similar to the APSG, BPAG has spent the past 6 months creating a definition for 'bridging', mapping existing activity, and creating clear aims and objectives for the group. A draft aims and objectives document will be distributed for further discussion at the next BPAG meeting (Oct 2019) and when agreed, will also be shared with the APSG to ensure transparency between members on what is being developed by each group in the sector. This includes a timeline of activities under the three key themes of; Research and Alignment, Delivery Model and Academic Benefit and Transferability.
5. Mapping indicated that there was little 'Bridging' activity present in the sector which fell under the group's current definition. This was mainly due to lack of credit-bearing elements, or clear consideration of participation in Admissions processes. The group therefore are initially identifying ways in which current programmes can be developed into 'bridging programmes'.

Schools Engagement Framework (SEF)

6. Discussions on SFC's response to the CoWA Report; *A Blueprint for Fairness*, and its impact on the work of SFC-funded programmes began in 2016. An initial scoping paper from this time set out the approach of the current schools programme activity and how this may be developed moving forward to meet the needs of CoWA recommendations, in particular recommendation 4. Over the past two years a conceptual framework has been created which would aim to align work happening across different organisations, agencies and institutions. It is now felt that the Schools Engagement Framework will incorporate the work of the APSG, BPAG and SFC-funded Access Programmes (including SHEP and AHDP). Therefore, the aims and objectives of the framework should also be applicable to this group. The three programme streams should work together to create an improved national partnership approach to providing access support across Scotland, meeting the needs of CoWA recommendations (in particular, 4 & 7). Learning from the group in relation to mature and returning learners may also feed into the work of the Adult Engagement Framework.

7. The SEF focussed on key themes when determining how the SFC-funded access programmes could develop to meet the recommendations of the CoWA report and Government policy areas. These included;
 - Priorities and Targets
 - Expectations
 - Engagement
 - Individual Programmes
 - Intersectionality
 - Funding and Targeting

It is recommended that the work of APSG moving forward focusses on these key themes. This idea is developed further in paper 03_APSG_19_07_ObjectivesoftheAPSG.

SFC-funded Access Programmes (SHEP and AHDP)

8. The Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) and Access to High Demand Professions (AHDP) are two SFC-funded programmes which aim to support school pupils from non-traditional and underrepresented backgrounds to apply to and enter Higher Education. Both programmes have been successful in raising progression rates in partner schools and increasing applicants and entrants to specified subject areas over the past 10 years.

9. SHEP supports regional collaboration between schools, colleges and universities to raise awareness of and aspiration to higher education (HE) to increase progression to HE from schools with traditionally low rates. The programme supports the Senior Phase of Curriculum for Excellence, focused on S3 to S6. The programme covers four regions:
 - North programme (Aspire North).
 - Fife and Tayside programme (LIFT Off).
 - South East programme (LEAPS).
 - West programme (FOCUS West).
10. AHDP is a group of seven institutions funded by SFC to help individuals from low progression, low socio-economic or under-represented backgrounds to apply to high-demand subjects at university. The programme has two branches - REACH (access to law, medicine, veterinary medicine and dentistry) and ACES (access to creative education, Scotland).
11. These programmes are currently under development in line with the recommendations set out in the Schools Engagement Framework and A Blueprint for Fairness. This includes targeting individual pupils in schools across Scotland (rather than targeting full school groups in low progression schools), identifying core programme activity to ensure accessibility to all learners regardless of geographical location and reducing duplication through effective partnership working. Enhancing the programmes by ensuring pupils can build on skills consecutively throughout their educational journey, in a regionally and nationally consistent manner, will provide better outcomes for our most disadvantaged and underrepresented students, but also allow for stronger evaluation and analysis.
12. The programmes currently have funding secured until August 2020. Managers and SFC staff are in conversation at present to create the next funding proposals and business plans for the programmes.
13. A one year funding uplift was granted for 2019-20 which sees the initial rollout of the programme into more schools, in a three-tier roll out approach.

Scotland's Community of Access and Participation Practitioners (SCAPP)

14. SCAPP is one strand of the Framework for Fair Access which was launched in May 2019 by the Commissioner for Fair Access. The Framework was a direct response to CoWA Recommendations 2 & 3 and aims to identify impactful access activity at each stage of the learner journey and provide guidance on delivery and evaluation. SCAPP provides a forum to share and develop best

practice in access support across Scotland, with five key thematic delivery objectives outlined;

- **networking** (providing opportunities to collaborate, discuss and share practice, resources and skills),
- **training and development** (identifying and promoting training opportunities)
- **evaluation and research** (providing up-to-date evidence, improve evaluation strategies and support collation of national and regional data to better target and track relevant groups)
- **quality standards** (aligning evidence and practice, explore accreditation processes to endorse the value of the work of practitioners)
- **the toolkit** (informing and contributing to the work of the Toolkit and championing it's use).

15. SFC provided funding to support the recruitment of the SCAPP Development Officer. Katie Monk has been in post for four months and is supported by a short-life working group. The key priorities at present for both Katie and the steering group are the production of a baseline survey and the creation of a business plan for SCAPP.
16. Katie and the working group have created the basis of a SCAPP network which we hope to be able to continue growing. At present SCAPP has 87 individuals signed up to the mailing list and the official SCAPP Twitter account has 107 followers. APSG members are asked to encourage their networks to engage with SCAPP.
17. Alongside the launch event for the Framework for Fair Access, SCAPP have held three events; a workshop at the SFC Fair Access Conference in Perth (June 2019), a Supporting Estranged Students Event in Edinburgh (August 2019) and a Best Practice Event in Aberdeen (August 2019). Early focus has been on enhancing evaluation and facilitating interactions between practitioners and researchers. More information on the outcomes of these events can be found in Annex A.

Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP)

18. SWAP is a partnership between colleges and universities in Scotland that work together to support access to higher education for adult learners who have no or few qualifications and who have been out of education for some time. SWAP provides full-time, one year access programmes across a range of subject areas. This includes programmes relating to science, engineering, social sciences, humanities, education, languages, business, law, social work, nursing, allied health professions, medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine. Programmes

are run by partner colleges across Scotland. Successful completion of a SWAP access programme enables students to progress to a range of degrees at SWAP partner universities.

19. Although still confirming data for last year's programme activity (2018-19), preliminary data suggests;
 - SWAP had 1780 enrolments
 - Of which; 1032 progressed to university and approximately 193 to HNC study. A number of students also completed the programme and progressed to other college courses or employment.

20. Developments in programme activity include;
 - A new medical studies programme at Edinburgh College.
 - New programmes at West Highland College, North Highland College, Dumfries and Galloway College (Stranraer Campus) and Argyll College. The Argyll programme is being delivered by distance learning.
 - Access to Childhood Practice has been extended to three additional campuses.
 - A mentoring project which is funded by the Robertson Trust will be embedded in the programme.
 - Development of STAY project and retention strategies with university partners.
 - A partnership with NHS Education Scotland and College Development Network on a nursing forum which seeks to find solutions relating to widening access and the nursing and allied health professions.

21. Alongside providing alternative routes into Higher Education for adult returners, due to the good learning and practice SWAP has developed from 1989 to present day, there are many lessons which practitioners can learn from SWAP and apply to working with disadvantaged or underrepresented school-aged groups. Indeed, SWAP is now developing programme activity which will support the work being done through schools-based access interventions;
 - Through the *Partnerships for Education Project*, SWAP is working with SHEP to analyse best practice in working with parents.
 - A partnership between SWAP, Engineering Academy at the University of Strathclyde, New College Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire Council to develop a new programme which could be based on the current SWAP 'Access to' model but aimed at care experienced and SIMD20 pupils in the senior phase of school.

Further information

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Update on SCAPP Activity

Approximately 65 people attended the SCAPP workshop at the Fair Access Event across two sessions. This session aimed to gather information on what the sector thought it did well/had developed expertise in, what were problems/limitations and how these could be overcome. A range of answers were given by participants with the most common answers provided below;

- In response to *'what expertise to you feel your team has developed?'* the key themes in answers were – better partnership working and engagement with other projects; knowledge of pathways into education including articulation routes; knowledge of particular target groups (e.g. estranged students, carers, refugee and asylum seekers) and circumstances which may contribute to barriers faced by young people (e.g. rurality, mental health).
- In response to *'what problems do you think the widening access/participation sector face?'* the key themes in answers were – communication and understanding (lack of joined up thinking between partners; different HEI's, agencies, organisations etc, issues with engaging with parents and pupils, navigating policies); funding (lack of resources and impact on fixed term contracts); difficulties with identification and measures.
- In response to *'what tools do you think you need to solve those problems'* the key themes in answer were – better clarity around and sharing of data (with a suggestion of regional targets); increased partnerships and collaborations (including bringing more of the school voice); CPD and training opportunities (particularly around evaluation and data analysis).

15 people attended the Estranged Students Event in Edinburgh (this was the maximum given the capped number). Researchers presented their work on estranged students and a student discussed their personal experience of estrangement. A roundtable then gave researchers and practitioners an opportunity to discuss how to implement lessons learned.

32 people attended the Best Practice Event in Aberdeen where networking between practitioners and researchers and discussion of evaluation technique was emphasised. Attendees were given an opportunity to attend two of three different presentations; 'Data and Evaluation', 'Supporting Volunteers' and 'How do people really make career decisions' led by researchers, and then all participated in a 'Methods Swap Shop' where attendees were encouraged to share good practice in activity and evaluation.