

## **Impact for Access project evaluation**

- This paper reports on the review of the Impact for Access fund to assess how the funding has met its aims. It documents the key findings and recommendations from the review, and the findings and recommendations of the individual projects.

## **Recommendations**

- The Committee is asked to note how we are incorporating the findings of these research projects in our work to implement COWA, DYW and the GAP including the development of a School Engagement Framework and an Adult Engagement Framework.
- The Committee is asked to consider, particularly in the other findings and issues for consideration section, if there are any other areas that the SFC should consider in more depth.

## **Financial Implications**

- There are no financial implications in this paper.



## **Impact for Access Project Evaluation**

### **Purpose**

1. This paper reports on the review of the Impact for Access (IAC) fund to assess how the funding has met its aims. It documents the key findings and recommendations from the review, and the findings and recommendations of the individual projects.

### **Three main priorities identified by the evaluation**

2. Continual evaluation of existing outreach programmes to assess if they are providing the desired outcome i.e. providing disadvantaged children with the opportunity to access HE, before further investment is made.
3. Extend widening access programmes to all MD40 pupils in all schools in Scotland (as part of the School Engagement Framework) working in partnership with the whole Education sector. The programmes should link to existing activity that is being developed for the Learner Journey.
4. SFC to encourage the sector to implement a consistent approach to contextualised admissions and minimum entry requirements that are based on qualifications that are necessary to be able to successfully complete a degree course, in order for disadvantaged applicants to have a fair opportunity to access HE courses.

### **Background**

5. The IAC fund was set up to develop standards on access and build the principles that underpin successful access activity. Evidence gathered from the programme would inform SFC on how to achieve its national ambitions in relation to Access and inform the Commission on Widening Access and the Triennial Review.
6. The fund was introduced with the publication of Learning for All: Measures of Success, November 2014<sup>1</sup>. An invitation to bid for the second phase of the fund was sent out in AY 2015/16. See at Annex B.
7. Use of the funding was assessed using the following criteria:
  - Production of recommendations based on findings on what works on access.

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[http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical\\_publications\\_SFCST062014\\_LearningforAlleighthupdatereportonmea/SFCST062014\\_-\\_Learning\\_for\\_All.pdf](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical_publications_SFCST062014_LearningforAlleighthupdatereportonmea/SFCST062014_-_Learning_for_All.pdf)

- Improved evidence gathering.
  - Impact assessment and judgement of access work.
  - Recommendations for the SFC as well as the project, college and/or university that focus on how we can improve our evidence and influence change.
  - How quality improvement principles are linked into the work.
8. This paper seeks to review the programme. The review process consisted of analysis of final project reports and internal monitoring reports.

### ***Projects***

9. In total SFC supported 11 projects which focussed on a range of groups and issues. The projects are listed below.
- Studying With Conviction research (Recruit with Conviction) – exploring impact of criminal convictions on access to education and throughout the student cycle (£29,880).
  - Corporate Parent Training (Who Cares? Scotland) – project to support 10 HE/FE institutions December 2016 to August 2017 (£170,000).
  - Exploring the support needs of Transgender students (University of Strathclyde) – research into the experience of trans gender diverse applicants, students and staff in Scotland’s colleges and universities (£64,162).
  - Tackling Gender Imbalance in HE (Robert Gordon University) – investigation into reasons behind gender imbalance and recommend action to address gender disparities in the region (£75,000).
  - Mapping and evaluating the use of Contextualised Admissions in Universities (University of Durham) – mapping use of CAs to create a picture of nature of CA practice and ways in which effects are evidenced. (£179,110).
  - So You Want to be in the Professions (University of Stirling) – assessed the impact of gender and WA characteristics on entry to HE focusing on professional subjects and subjects with a gender imbalanced intake. (£98,000).
  - Research on Widening Participation (Heriot Watt) – project to evaluate the support methods in place for widening participation students (£44,100).
  - Beyond Access to HE: Widening Access initiatives and student retention (University of Edinburgh) – project to provide evidence on SFC-funded WP funded activities for retention (£43,686).
  - Engaging With Pupils in High Progression Schools (University of Glasgow) – research to find ways to engage with and raise aspirations and applications among MD40 pupils in higher progression schools (£118,329).

- Profiling Successful Students (SWAP) – project to identify indicators for a quality framework for delivery of guidance (£50,000).
- Research evidence to improve educational outcomes (University of Strathclyde) – research to determine what works on current SFC funded access programmes (£93,000).

## Key findings

10. Overall all the projects delivered on their individual outcomes and conditions of grant and collectively provided evidence to inform SFC on the experiences of groups that are considered to be deprived or disadvantaged and what current support in the sector is successful. Shown below are the key findings from the overall programme, where possible we have outlined how we will take that finding forward.
11. There were several school related findings, including:
  - MD40 and Care Experienced pupils in low and high progression schools require continuous engagement throughout their learner journey starting in the early years of secondary school and continuing through the period of transition to higher education (HE) to enable high attainment and progression to HE and retention in HE.
  - A small number of schools have persistently low HE progression over the period examined. These appear to have significant underlying difficulties associated with deprivation.
  - Working regionally and in school clusters is an effective way of working with large numbers of schools and pupils in a targeted manner.
12. These findings are being taken forward by the School Engagement Framework.
13. Parent/guardian/family, teachers, tutors and career guidance staff of MD40 pupils and Care Experienced pupils require continuous engagement, with timely and targeted advice and guidance (AIG), throughout the learner journey to enable and encourage discussion regarding school and post school and to ensure all groups are aware of the pathways and progression routes available and the attainment requirements for all university courses. The SFC will take this forward as part of the School Engagement Framework and the outcome of the Scottish Government's Learner Journey review.
14. Targeted widening access outreach programmes positively impact on application and enrolment levels and retention for widening access groups. The variety of outreach programmes provided by multiple providers and the

different outcomes they can provide to individual pupils can be confusing for pupils, school staff and parents. This concurs with the Blueprint for Fairness findings and will be taken forward by our work to develop a national bridging programme/national framework for existing bridging programmes. This is outlined in the paper on COWA implementation.

15. Increasing the provision of outreach activity with younger year groups will assist in challenging the gendered assumptions around subject and career choice. The SFC will take this forward as part of the School Engagement Framework.
16. To achieve success in widening access, the Education sector needs to work together (that is school teachers, education authorities, careers advisors, colleges and universities) and with expert groups. An approach which is aligned with other education sector initiatives and policies e.g. the Learner Journey is more likely to be sustainable and make better use of resources. This is highlighted in both the Youth Employment Strategy and the Blueprint for Fairness and is central to our implementation of the SFC related recommendations. We also feel that this approach is evident through our initial planning of the School Engagement Framework and the Adult Engagement Framework.
17. Across the sector there are different approaches to contextual admissions (CA) and a variety of language is used to describe the different CA processes. This can make it difficult for potential applicants and all other stakeholders involved in an applicant's learner journey to understand and exploit the opportunities available. Universities Scotland is responding to this finding in their work to agree a common language for the application process. We will also take this forward in our work to monitor to access thresholds as outlined in our paper of the implementation of COWA.
18. Minimum entry requirements, based on qualifications that are necessary to be able to successfully complete a degree course, will enable contextually disadvantaged students to access university course places and realise their potential. This is the foundation of many of the COWA recommendations.
19. Specific student support is required in the transition to and at the beginning of the first year of HE studies when students are more at risk of dropping out. This includes pre-university activities to prepare students for HE study, prolonged induction programmes, summer schools, mentoring and personal tutor. This will be considered as part of our work to develop a national bridging programme/national framework for existing bridging programmes. This is outlined in the paper on COWA implementation.

20. Young men are more likely to drop out of higher education than young women and the withdrawal rates of trans/gender diverse students on university courses is higher than the general withdrawal rates for Undergraduate study in Scotland. The GAP did not originally consider gender related retention rates but the Annual Progress Report did outline that this should be considered in more depth. This will be taken forward as part of our male engagement strategy as outlined in our GAP.
21. There is generally a very low level of awareness amongst staff and students around trans and gender diverse issues which contributes to the sense of isolation and hostility experienced by students. There are actions/changes that can be made relatively easily by institutions that would make a big difference to the experience of students in this group. The SFC will promote and fully support the work of TransEdu and will take this forward as part of implementation of the GAP.
22. An enhanced understanding of intersectionality of widening access factors across all education sectors is necessary to understand the barriers faced by different groups and ensure every potential student has equal access to HE. Through our equality work we are seeking to improve our intersectional analysis and reporting.
23. It is currently very difficult to assess if long term widening access interventions and engagements have positive long term impacts. Tracking of pupils along their learner journey would be required to do this. The SFC is working with [HEAT](#) who, on a subscription basis, support English institutions to track students and monitor interventions. We are considering supporting a pilot in Scotland.

#### ***Other findings and issues for consideration***

24. Across many of the projects, Personal Tutor support emerged as a significant area of support for all students, and a support mechanism that if used effectively could be valuable in identifying academic and non-academic issues that are causing difficulties for individual students and potentially causing them to drop out.
25. Intersection of convictions with protected characteristics means that barriers to access to education relating to convictions would have a disproportionate impact on various protected characteristic groups. Currently, the level of awareness of issues for students with convictions varies across institutions and there are several areas where the sector as a whole and individual institutions, can make a positive difference to potential applicants with convictions and to

the experience of students with convictions as well as students that gain a conviction whilst studying.

26. Studying with Conviction report highlighted that ‘in order to comply with changing provisions to protect people with convictions set out in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 in Scotland. UCAS should either avoid asking for criminal conviction disclosure for Scottish Universities or set out separate disclosure forms for Scottish Universities so that applicants can disclose in line with Scots law when applying for Scottish Universities and English Universities within the same application’.
27. One study outlined that articulating students are more likely than non-articulating students to drop out of HE<sup>2</sup>.
28. Students transitioning into HE have common and specific needs. All new students/first year students experience similar challenges e.g. forming peer relationships whereas HN students specifically have challenges adopting to a different style of teaching/assessment and curriculum alignment, and mature students have different and specific issues with integration. Support offered to students transitioning to HE should be targeted at their specific needs. Some students have complex needs which require specific support packages.
29. There is variation in non-continuation rates across different fields of study, with higher chances of dropping out among students studying STEM subjects and business and mass communication than among students in social studies and humanities and art.
30. Cost of going to university is a barrier. Grants and scholarships are a necessary condition for widening access for those from lower income households (and essential for increasing access to high status institutions).
31. ‘Academic reasons’ is reported to be the main reason for non-continuation for about 30% of the students who dropped out from Scottish universities.
32. Pairing of SFC projects that have similarities is effective and makes efficient use of resources of the stakeholders involved.
33. One of the projects reported that “broad commitment to share understandings is insufficient to provide the imperative for time-consuming cross-institutional activity. If joint or linked projects are funded across institutions, clear mutual

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that some groups (articulation hubs) dispute some of the findings in relation to retention. This was raised with the researchers who evidenced how they reached their conclusions and demonstrated the findings, whilst not the same as others elsewhere, can be back-up by statistical evidence.



deliverables should be agreed between the partners and SFC to give a stronger impetus to ensuring the collaboration is achieved in support of the aims.

***Sharing of research evidence in the sector***

34. A significant amount of the learning from the projects has been shared with institutions at sector wide conferences and regional events.
- Who Cares? Scotland – workshop Learning for All April 2015.
  - Studying with Conviction project, interactive workshop at Learning for March 2016.
  - CA project findings - presentation ‘How to identify minimum entry requirements’ at Scotland’s Fair Access - conference June 2017 and two open events were held for practitioners with a further launch session scheduled for November 2017.
  - TransEdu - The final report was shared with the SFC and partners in July 2017. The research and findings formed the basis of a training session delivered to the Scottish Government Directorate of Advanced Learning and Science Away Day in September 2017. The University of Strathclyde has accepted the institutional recommendations in the final report and will be developing support for trans and gender diverse students. Presentations and keynotes at 11 national conferences and bespoke engagement sessions with Scottish Government, Gender Identity clinicians, teachers, FE and HE academic and professional services staff and researchers. In addition, a full day event was held as part of Strathclyde’s Engage Week, attended by over 100 delegates from FE, HE, the school sector and third sector. Engagement and briefing sessions were delivered to ECU networks and Colleges Scotland.
  - Tackling Gender Imbalance (Robert Gordon University) and So you want to be in the professions (University of Stirling) - the universities jointly shared their project findings at SFC/Stirling IFA national conference in September 2016. The workshop information has also been shared with workshop participants from across the sectors and across Scotland and published on the SFC website.
  - Research Evidence to Improve education Outcomes (Heriot Watt) - In June 2016, the project team shared the findings of their research with the sector at a conference for the research project.

- Engaging With Pupils in High Progression Schools (University of Glasgow) – the research was launched and disseminated to a wider audience of stakeholders at an event in September 2016 at University of Stirling.

### **Learning for SFC**

35. Overall the projects successfully provided:

- Provided evidence and information that could be used to help make judgements about what work is required to increase widening access and improve retention of disadvantaged students.
- Provided valuable evidence, good practice and learning have been gained from these projects.

A number of the projects also produced materials to assist in institution reviews and improvements.

36. Due to the scope of some of the projects, caveats were made in conclusions and in some cases recommendations given to carry out further research to understand if evidence showed anomalies in one region. This suggests that in future it may be worth considering using large scale studies and in-depth studies on specific issues/groups that involve all institutions, especially when looking for evidence to inform decisions about Scottish Government priority areas.

### **Further research**

37. Some of the projects recommended that further research is carried out on specific areas. The recommendations are:

- Further study into the experience of articulating students, as research in this area is limited. Such research would help to better understand the difficulties encountered by these students in the transition from colleges to universities.
- The higher drop-out rates of articulating students requires more in depth analysis.
- More attention should be paid to uncover the reasons for the higher drop-out rates in STEM subjects and business and mass communication.
- More research on student retention in order to be able to draw evidence – based policy recommendations.
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of different WP interventions.
- Analysis of the reasons for dropping out for students with protected characteristics.

- A comprehensive study which identifies successful inclusive practices in different types of universities and fields of studies.
- Data on ethnic minorities and disable students are limited given the small number of cases available but can be looked at in more detail using polled data from successive years.
- This report ('Beyond Access to HE: WA Initiatives and Student Retention in Scotland', University of Edinburgh) has been confined to study young peoples' non-continuation rates. A similar study should be extended to include mature students and part time students, as these groups are traditionally known to be at greater risk of dropping out from HE than young full time students.
- Research on contextualised admissions and mature students.

### **Risk assessment**

38. There are no risks associated with this paper.

### **Equality and diversity assessment**

39. Equality and Human Rights Equality Impact Assessments (EHRIA) were made on each project and included in the project bids that were presented to the Strategic Funding Group.

### **Financial implications**

40. There are no financial implications in this paper.

### **Recommendations**

41. The Committee is asked to note how we are incorporating the findings of these research projects in our work to implement COWA, DYW and the GAP including the development of a School Engagement Framework and an Adult Engagement Framework.

42. The Committee is asked to consider, particularly in the other findings and issues for consideration section, if there are any other areas that the SFC should consider in more depth.

### **Publication**

43. This paper will be published on the Council website.

### **Further information**

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