

Purpose of Bridging Programmes Advisory Group

Purpose of paper

1. This paper provides background to the establishment of the Bridging Programmes Advisory Group (BPAG), and sets out considerations for the members in terms of the remit and structure.

Background and introduction

2. The Commission on Widening Access published its final report, [A Blueprint for Fairness](#), in March 2016. Since that time, Scottish Government, SFC, colleges, universities, and other key stakeholders have been working to implement the 34 recommendations contained within it.
3. Of those 34, SFC has lead responsibility for 16 recommendations, of which the Bridging Programme Advisory Group aims to prioritise and take forward the implementation of Recommendation 7.

Implementation of COWA recommendations 7

4. COWA Recommendation 7 covers bridging programmes in operation across Scotland. It exemplifies these as – “academically rigorous summer schools, gateway programmes and top up schemes.”

Recommendation 7: *The Scottish Funding Council, working with professionals, should develop a model of how bridging programmes can be expanded nationally to match need.*

- *Given the clear benefits to the learner, the model should ensure that academic credit awarded through the completion of such programmes is transferable between universities.*
 - *Successful completion of such programmes may form on of the conditions of the access thresholds to be developed in line with recommendation 11.*
 - *This model should have particular regard to the evidence that bridging programmes are especially beneficial when delivered earlier in the education journey.*
5. In order to progress this, we have drawn membership from those involved in bridging work (as defined in the Blueprint) and wider representation from the Scottish Government, Universities Scotland and schools. The membership has also been designed to enable us to build on the significant work already

undertaken by the Universities Scotland workstream on bridging that led to the publication of [Working to Widen Access](#).

6. Recommendation 7 also outlines that bridging programmes may, in time, be a feature of access thresholds. The requirement for access thresholds was outlined in recommendation 11 and is provided below. The SFC has leadership of the monitoring of these thresholds.
7. *Recommendation 11: By 2019 all universities should set access thresholds for all degree programmes against which learners from the most deprived backgrounds should be assessed. These access thresholds should be separate to standard entrance requirements and set as ambitiously as possible, at a level which accurately reflects the minimum academic standard and subject knowledge necessary to successfully complete a degree programme.*
 - *The impact of access thresholds and wider contextual admissions policies should be monitored and evaluated by the SFC as part of the outcome agreement process. In particular, the SFC should monitor the extent to which access thresholds differ from standard requirements, the number of applicants receiving adjusted offers and whether the introduction of access thresholds leads to any unintended consequences.*
 - *Should the access threshold fail to deliver the intended outcomes by the end of 2022, Ministers should consider options for providing disadvantaged learners who meet a certain level of attainment with an entitlement to the offer of a place in a university.*
 - *The implementation of access thresholds and more robust arrangements for monitoring and evaluation of impact will make an important contribution to the emerging evidence base in this area. Universities should therefore continually refine their contextual admissions policies and, where necessary, access thresholds in line with this evidence.*

Working to widen access

8. Soon after the publication of the Blueprint for Fairness, Universities Scotland set out how institutions would work together to respond to the call for action outlined in the Blueprint. This included three working groups on admissions, articulation and bridging programmes. The SFC executive and SFC AIC members were invited to attend all of the working groups.
9. The outcome of these working groups was published in [Working to Widen Access](#). The publication made a commitment to the following actions related to bridging programmes.

- Scottish higher education institutions will develop clear and consistent information about contextualised admissions, articulation, and bridging programmes. We will work to publish a set of terms and descriptions that pass user-testing and are ready for use to inform the application cycle for 2020/21 entry at the latest.
- Universities Scotland will work with others to scope the development of a single online resource that enables learners and their advisers to access information about bridging programme opportunities offered across Scotland. We will deliver this scoping exercise for the start of 2018/19.
- Higher education institutions will work to improve the national coherence of bridging activity. This will include better regional coordination of bridging programmes and more mutual recognition of programmes, making it easier for students to transfer. This will be implemented during 2018/19.

Remit of Bridging Programmes Advisory Group

10. All COWA work is reported to the Ministerial-led Access Delivery Group. The Access Delivery Group agreed the Implementation Overview Report (IOR) for Recommendation 7, which is attached at Annex A. The template for this report was created by Scottish Government, completed by SFC and approved by the then Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Shirley-Anne Somerville.
11. The IOR is considered to be the base document for the Advisory Group's remit. Whilst the main focus is the delivery of recommendation 7, BPAG will also be asked to take account of related COWA recommendations, specifically recommendations 4 and 15. These are both discussed further in paper 19_03.
12. **Members are asked to consider the Implementation Overview Report (IOR) and agree that it will function as the remit for the Bridging Programmes Advisory Group.**

Bridging Programme Advisory Group meetings and structure

13. BPAG is asked to note:
 - that we are late in starting this work as we aimed to align well with the work of Universities Scotland. We have reported this delay to the Scottish Government as part of their monitoring requirements to the Minister's Access Delivery Group. This delay is not problematic and will not impact on the overall delivery of the recommendation.

- the deadline of May 2020 for completion of BPAG's work (albeit members may wish to continue their involvement in the consultation and monitoring phases up to May 2022 outlined in Annex A)
- the SFC will provide an action note from each meeting.

14. The SFC suggests that BPAG meets four times up to May 2020 – March 2019, August 2019, December 2019 and April 2020. BPAG is asked to agree a timeframe, based on the IOR, for the life of the group as well as proposing any agenda items and other reporting that they feel may be required to supplement the output of the Group. In particular, members are asked to consider how they could support consultation with bridging programme practitioners and wider engagement on the work of BPAG with the rest of the sector.

Future meeting dates

15. The next meeting of BPAG is proposed for August 2019, with further dates in December 2019 and April 2020. If members agree to this, a trawl will be carried out for suitable dates.

Further information

16. For further information, please contact Fiona Burns, fburns@sfc.ac.uk, 0131 313 6517.

IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW REPORT	
Recommendation 7	<p>The Scottish Funding Council, working with professionals, should develop a model of how bridging programmes can be expanded nationally to match need.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given the clear benefits to the learner, the model should ensure that academic credit awarded through the completion of such programmes is transferrable between universities. • Successful completion of such programmes may form one of the conditions of the access thresholds to be developed in line with recommendation 11. <p>This model should have particular regard to the evidence that bridging programmes are especially beneficial when delivered earlier in the education journey.</p>
Lead Delivery Partner	SFC [information owner Fiona Burns]
Stakeholder(s)	<p><i>i.e. who are the key stakeholders in delivery of this recommendation?</i></p> <p>Scottish Universities and Colleges, schools, funders of existing summer schools and bridging programmes including – The Robertson Trust and Sutton Trust and students.</p>
What will successful delivery look like?	We will have a clear plan as to how bridging programmes can be expanded nationally to meet need. The model will ensure that academic credit awarded for completion of the programme is recognised at all HEI's in Scotland.
What are the 5 key milestones to implementation and when will they be completed?	<p><i>i.e. what are you going to do to deliver on the recommendation and when will you do it by?</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SFC will set up an advisory group including key stakeholders (as above). The advisory group will agree the scope of the project, which should align with the Commission's definition of a bridging programme as set out on page 31 of its final report. (first meeting by October 2018) 2. SFC will work with the current US Bridging Programme work

	<p>stream and implementation, and the Framework for Fair Access, to identify good practice i.e. what does an effective bridging programme contain and achieve. (by April 2019)</p> <p>3. The advisory group will develop a model for expansion of bridging programmes nationally in line with need. This will be referred to as the National Framework for Bridging Programmes and will include guidance on bridging programmes including their transferability and allocation of credit.</p> <p>Key priorities will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Consideration of a range of options to scale up delivery. b. Full alignment with the Framework for Fair Access c. Allocation of SCQF credit and/or currency in all Access Thresholds d. Transferability of programmes, including scope for agreement of 'core content'. <p>The model and guidance will be agreed by May 2020.</p> <p>4. SFC will consult on the National Framework with the aim of full implementation by April 2021</p> <p>5. SFC will monitor the impact of the National Framework. (by May 2022)</p>
When will/did implementation start?	February 2017 (start of US Bridging Programmes and admission work streams)
When will delivery be complete?	By May 2022