

Bridging Programmes Advisory Group – Monday 24 June 2019

SFC Note

Frank Coton as Chair welcomed all members to the BPAG.

Due to the absence of Paul Hibbert (University of St Andrews) and Charlie Jeffrey (University of Edinburgh), a question was raised on how replacement members for the BPAG would be identified and whether new members should be invited from the same institution or if Universities Scotland should identify new members through the Learning and Teaching Committee.

UNIVERSITIES SCOTLAND WILL CONFIRM THAT PAUL AND CHARLIE ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO ATTEND BPAG AND WILL FIND REPLACEMENT MEMBERS FOR THE GROUP.

Bernadine Templeman (Govan High School) asked whether it would more appropriate if a member of Glasgow City Council was present to give a broader schools overview. However, the group felt it was more beneficial to have a practicing school teacher present to comment on barriers within schools in regards to WP and progression to HE, and how interventions being discussed may impact pupils and schooling.

Note/1 – Note of 7 March 2019 meeting

Members agreed that the note from the previous BPAG meeting was accurate.

Paper 19/03A – Definition of Bridging Programmes

Pamela Forbes introduced the recent mapping exercise which was conducted to gather feedback on terminology, definitions and to map current access and bridging provision to Higher Education within the landscape, as actioned in the previous BPAG meeting. Comments on the draft definition paper provided were invited.

It was agreed that there were clearly two different forms of what may be termed as 'bridging' programmes collected through feedback from the definition exercise and through programme mapping. These were;

- Programmes with a rigorous academic element which is recognised as credit in Admissions processes nationally.
- Programmes provided as an additional part of the admissions process to a specific university or programme.

It was agreed that there can be benefits to both types of programme within a national framework moving forward and that BPAG would consider both types of programme within its remit.

Lynn MacMillan emphasised that the reason Bridging was pulled out as a separate recommendation in the CoWA report was because of the rigorous academic element to such programmes and the currency this gives within Admissions processes across Scotland. It was felt that one of the main priorities for the group moving forward was creating a framework of bridging programmes offered at a range of institutions but which would still be taken into consideration in other universities admissions processes or offer making.

However, it was noted that this is not a one-size fits all approach and a framework should also include programmes which are relevant to specific institutions or courses. This is especially important for small, specialist institutions which are more likely to have focussed programmes due to size and resources.

It was recognised that this framework will include programmes which work pre-entry (e.g. Sutton Trust Summer Schools), post-entry (e.g. Dundee Summer School) and across both pre and post entry (e.g. Top Up). It was also noted that programmes will be crucial to providing learner support and preparation for study at a HE level.

In regards to terminology, members felt that 'disadvantaged and underrepresented' should be used to name the target group. It was recognised that some programmes may also be open to other learners, but the programme must meet the needs of underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.

Although it was decided that the definition would continue to use university as the 'destination', it was noted that many individuals worked with through access and bridging programmes may go on to study HN programmes in college and any credit gained through such programmes may also be used in college admissions processes. Lynn confirmed to the group that originally the Government wanted to look at bridging into HEI's, but agreed that it may be appropriate to begin the work of this group by examining universities, including specialist institutions. It was also felt that university provided better clarity for learners and key stakeholders, and that bridging to HN programmes may be picked up through conversations about the new HN format.

SFC WILL UPDATE THE DEFINITION TO INCLUDE 'DISADVANTAGED AND UNDERREPRESENTED'

Paper 19/03b – Access and Bridging Group Remit Overview

Pamela introduced the overview of the APSG and BPAG role remits, including accompanying infographic model, and asked members to consider if this was a true reflection of the groups remits.

The group re-emphasised that the key element which separates Bridging Programmes from Access Programmes was the inclusion of rigorous academic components.

There was some consideration given to the use of the word 'Access' and it's relation to adult returners. The group agreed that the word Bridging would be sufficient to cover all programmes under the remit of the group.

It was also felt that adult returners should be included in the infographic as a separate group, however, this would not fit into the remit of either the APSG or BPAG.

It was also felt that although the group was focussing on school to university bridging, there must be an understanding and consideration of other groups of learners who may participate in bridging activities; e.g. students completing Highers at college, mature learners etc.

SFC WILL UPDATE THE INFOGRAPHIC BASED ON MEETING MINUTES AND CIRCULATE TO MEMBERS OF THE APSG AND BPAG.

Paper 19/04 – Mapping Exercise

Pamela introduced the findings from the mapping exercise as described in the paper and asked for discussion around key themes arising.

Discussion began around the purpose of interventions. The strength of Bridging programmes was viewed as their recognition in Admissions processes. It was felt that Bridging programmes could play a major part in a pipeline of access activity, with access programmes feeding into bridging programme and these then supporting pupils into HE destinations. Due to this, there was an understanding that the work of both the APSG and BPAG will be transparent, with the groups working together to create clear channels of support.

The mapping did not indicate many programmes which could at this point in time be classified as Bridging, however, there are programmes which had the potential to be

classed as Bridging if a credit bearing academic element was added. The Sutton Trust Summer Schools, for example, would already facilitate this framework.

There was further conversation on how regionalised programmes currently are – although programmes which may be considered as Bridging say that applications were considered from all regions across Scotland, there was an interest in gaining further understanding on where individuals applied from and who was offered places on these programmes. It was generally felt that more work had to be focussed on opening up programmes more nationally.

It was understood that in the future, the BPAG will have to define which groups will fall under the disadvantaged/under-represented heading. It was agreed a level of flexibility must be maintained around this so that programmes could support learners with barriers which may not necessarily fall under the traditional groupings.

It was felt that for the next meeting, it would be useful for the group to set out its overarching aims and objectives. Key themes to include were;

- The creation of a framework of academically rigorous programmes which take individuals from A to B. This will include or link to transition support.
- Enhancement and expansion of current good practice, as well as filling gaps in provision.
- Improved and increased partnership working between everyone in the sector (funded programmes, colleges, universities, agencies etc.)
- All disadvantaged or underrepresented learners should have an opportunity to participate in a Bridging programme regardless of where they live or which HEI they would like to attend.
- A learner-centred approach to creating opportunities.

In regards to recognition of credit, it was recognised that all institutions already have an obligation to recognise prior learning (RPL policies), but there needs to be a wider conversation around what Bridging programme credit translates into and how/to what extent it is recognised. It was agreed that there would have to be clarity to learners that participation was not a guarantee of a place, but the credit from Bridging programmes will be taken into consideration.

The group will aim to have all institutions engage with the framework, but it was recognised that the level and type of engagement would be unique to each institution and participation could mean different things; running a bridging programme, taking bridging programmes into consideration in the admissions process, offering support in tracking pupils etc.

Although conversation began on how to communicate Access and Bridging programme activity to the general public and make them aware of opportunities

available, Lynn updated the group on the work of the National Articulation Forum who are working on a similar project in relation to articulation and alternative routes. Work is also being completed through Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) and local authorities to identify one point of contact in each school who can consolidate information and relate this to appropriate learners. Therefore, focus on communication should be around making information understandable for schools, rather than a focus on how to pass on information to schools, as projects around this are being carried out throughout the sector which the group can link in to.

Mechanisms for effective evaluation of programmes will be discussed at further meetings when potential programme provision is mapped more clearly. Assessing if the framework is working will be key to the development process. This may also tie in with the work of SCAPP.

The group determined that they did not see any conflict between Bridging Programmes and access thresholds.

The group identified a distinction between entry support (gaining the minimum academic requirements to succeed) which bridging programmes will focus on, and transition support.

There were concerns that a universal offer of support to all disadvantaged or underrepresented learners may not be possible due to resource constraints. Although it was recognised that this may cause issues, it would be taken into consideration during mapping of scale up plans and would also depend on the type of national model adopted and the types of learning/assessment utilised.

SFC WILL COMPLETE AND CIRCULATE THE MAPPING DOCUMENT, SHOWING WHAT CATEGORY (ACCESS OR BRIDGING) PROGRAMMES WERE ORIGINALLY SUBMITTED AS AND WHERE THEY NOW LIE GIVEN THE APSG AND BPAG CONFIRMED DEFINITIONS. SFC WILL ALSO HIGHLIGHT PROGRAMMES WITH THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME BRIDGING PROGRAMMES.

SFC WILL CREATE THE GROUPS AIMS AND OBJECTIVES BASED ON THE MEETING MINUTES AND CIRCULATE AHEAD OF THE NEXT BPAG MEETING.

Any other business

It was felt that information from both the APSG and BPAG should be transparent, allowing other stakeholders to input into the conversation. It was also raised that key messages should be disseminated as they emerge and not through minutes. It was

felt that practitioners could be engaged through SCAPP but further thought should be given on how to engage with academics.

SFC WILL CREATE A SECTION ON THE WEBSITE FOR APSG AND BPAG WHERE MEETING AGENDAS AND MINUTES WILL BE AVAILABLE. STAKEHOLDERS CAN CONTACT PAMELA FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR TO INPUT INTO FUTURE MEETINGS.

SFC WILL MEET WITH KATIE, THE NEW SCAPP DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, TO DISCUSS HOW SCAPP WILL WORK WITH APSG AND BPAG MOVING FORWARD.

It was felt that how we work with schools to test thinking around the creation of a framework should be one of the themes for the next BPAG meeting.

SFC WILL ARRANGE THE NEXT BPAG MEETING FOR OCTOBER 2019