Bridging Provision

Purpose

1. This paper aims to use the recent Access and Bridging Programme Mapping exercise as a basis to suggest ways in which a coherent framework of bridging activity could be developed to meet CoWA Recommendation 7. The paper also identifies programmes which, with small changes, could fit the definition of Bridging and provide a trial group which assesses how programmes are considered in Admissions processes.

Background

2. A mapping exercise of access and bridging programmes was conducted by the SFC (in follow up from previous mapping exercises conducted by the Robertson Trust and Universities Scotland) between March and June 2019. This was sent primarily to university and agency/organisational contacts identified from previous mapping, who were also asked to comment on draft definitions of Access and Bridging.

3. In follow up to both the June APSG and BPAG meetings, SFC re-evaluated the categories which each of the submitted programmes fell under, based on the definitions agreed by each group, and re-categorised programmes. This identified programmes which would currently sit under the category of Bridging, or with small changes, could fall into this category. From this exercise, a larger conversation can progress on current good practice, any gaps in both knowledge and provision and how to create a coherent framework which meets the needs of CoWA Recommendation 7.

4. The agreed upon definition for Bridging Programmes was;

   "Bridging Programmes create a 'bridge' between an institution in one sector of the education landscape and another in a different sector.* In the context of school to university transition, bridging programmes are run during the senior phase (S5-S6) and are aimed at pupils from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds. They include a significant credit-bearing programme element of academic preparation which can be recognised as credit in admissions processes (usually at SCQF Level 7)."
   *Note: the focus of the SFC Bridging Programmes Advisory Group will be on the school to university transition at this stage.

Overview of Mapping of Bridging Programmes
(from 02_BPAG_19_04_Mapping_Exercises)

5. 28 examples of Bridging Programmes were submitted by partners through the original call for evidence. Re-categorising based on definition, and including programmes which with small changes could meet the definition of Bridging, has brought the total number of potential Bridging Programmes to 35. Of these, some are aspects of wider, national projects which taken together, could be looked at as one programme, for example; multiple institutions submitted their REACH or ACES programmes which should work collectively to develop national Bridging programmes under the Access to High Demand Professions banner, not as individual institutions.

6. Given that some of the programmes submitted by partners did not fit the current definition of Bridging, there is still some ambiguity in the sector over the wording and therefore it is important that the work of the group is as transparent as possible in its key aims and objectives when engaging with the wider sector. It is recommended that a second round of validation takes place with partners to ensure all potential Bridging programme activity is mapped and more information is gathered on these (e.g. what is included in SCQF credit-bearing programme elements).

The aspects making up the programme

7. As discussed previously, there are two main themes to programmes submitted as Bridging – those which aim to prepare students for study in Higher Education at any institution and those which prepare students to enter one specific university and are inextricably linked to recruitment and admissions policies.

Partnerships created to deliver the programme

8. Although there are some partnerships apparent in the delivery of Bridging Programmes, these tend to be linked to funding requirements (e.g. Reach partners) or between an institution and an agency/organisation (e.g. Sutton Trust). Programmes with more than two partners inputting into a specific programme, and those with more than one institution involved, are few.

Regional spread of a programme

9. At present, the majority of Bridging Programmes are targeted at disadvantaged learners within the HEI's local regions. As we know from the spread of SIMD20 areas across Scotland, this could severely limit the access to opportunities pupils from certain areas have, particularly those in rural areas.

Whether programmes at present were taken into consideration during institutional

admissions processes

10. Although it has been identified that the majority of programmes which view themselves as falling under the Bridging category include elements which are reportedly taken into consideration under admissions processes, these are often either only in the admissions process of the institution running the programme, a requirement of entry to a specific programme, or are national programmes like the Sutton Trust Summer Schools.

Targets and measures used for selection of programme participants

11. Mapping demonstrated that when target measures are used in selection for these programmes, these often link in to SFC or Scottish Government areas (e.g. SIMD20, care experience). However, it is recognised that there is a wider spectrum of contextual indicators which are commonly used across the sector and represent other disadvantaged/underrepresented groups (first in family, free school meal eligibility etc.).

Future Developments

12. As discussed above, fewer than 50% of programmes actively plan to expand in the coming year. With this, the pressure of CoWA and focus of the Scottish Government on creating more clearly communicated Learner Journey's, the present time creates an opportunity within the landscape for change.

Creating a Coherent Framework

13. It was agreed that the work of this group would focus on school to university 'bridging' activity given the nature of Recommendation 7. However, it has been raised by SFC colleagues that Bridging from college to university is also a potential area of future development, providing support to students who progress through this route (the given example was HNC Care and Administrative Practice, which NHS Education for Scotland is recommending creates a Bridging programme to better support student transition and retention). Such mechanisms would be different to articulation, in that they would provide additional support to students over the transition period to ensure individuals were prepared for future study. It is felt that, although this may not be the focus of the BPAG at this time, that recognition should be given to these types of programmes in a Bridging framework moving forward, and opportunities for colleges to liaise with universities through existing models should be considered. Bridging into college may also be a pertinent aspect to explore in the future due to the recommendation that Bridging programmes may be beneficial earlier in the learner journey.

14. Although the group recognised that there were two forms of 'Bridging', it is

recommended that the group focus in the first instance on the first definition;

- **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.

15. Through the mapping exercise and previous discussions of the BPAG, it was recognised that there were three main objectives of the group;

- Research and Alignment
- Delivery Model
- Academic Benefit and Transferability
- Size of Scale Up and Development

Research and Alignment

16. With the mapping exercise now conducted, and programmes re-categorised based on the definitions agreed by APSG and BPAG, a clearer picture has emerged of how Bridging activity can be developed and enhanced within the landscape. It was recognised that there was very little, if any, programmes which currently feel under the definition we will be focussing on, but there are many which, with small changes and development, could meet this definition and therefore better support learners.

17. Bridging programmes must align with other work currently being conducted in the sector, falling between access/targeted outreach programme provision and individual and national transitional support programmes. Each of these three elements will play a critical role in supporting a learner throughout their journey from school to Higher Education, but all three must align to create the most benefits for the learner. This will also tie in with the work of the Schools Engagement Framework. When a Bridging Framework is developed, it must demonstrate how it ties in with current national and regional activity without unnecessary duplication.

Access / Targeted Outreach
(All points of learner journey)

Bridging
(Specifically S4-S6)

Transitional Support
(at transitional stages)
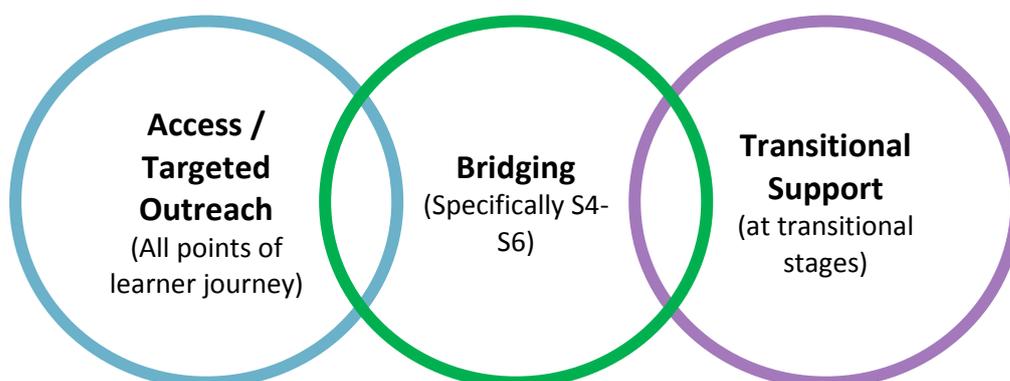
18. It is recognised that although the BPAG will contribute through the Schools Engagement Framework to the conversation around appropriate contextual indicators/measures, that in the first instance, a Bridging Framework will work with programmes in their current format (including pre-existing selection criteria). However, as the framework develops over time, it could potentially facilitate aligning of measures used nationally, in recognition of all relevant policies.

Delivery Model

19. As there are pre-existing national programmes which are already seeking to add a Bridging element to their pipeline of access activity (for example, SHEP, AHDP and Sutton Trust Summer Schools) it is recommended that the first round of development of Bridging focusses on working with such programmes to ensure they meet the needs of Recommendation 7, in particular, building programmes into S5 and S6 (preoffer) and working with pipeline programmes which support pupils over a number of years leading up to the senior phase.

20. This development, however, should take into consideration and be shaped by the wide variety of good practice which is evidenced through the pre-existing institutional Bridging programmes. Although the Bridging Framework will initially work with programmes which already have a national scope, an important element of the framework moving forward will be creating opportunities for individual programmes to integrate into this, for example individual institutional summer school programmes.

21. It is recognised that good practice is shown in existing institution specific programmes which aim to both provide additionality to an applicant's academic credentials and support them in the transition to study in Higher Education; for example, the University of St Andrews Gateway programmes, and Dundee's Online and On-Campus Summer Schools. These programmes are particularly beneficial to learners who do not meet the necessary requirements to directly enter highly competitive subjects and therefore, are offered an alternative route (for example, Gateway to Medicine) which boosts skills or as a way of providing additional transition support to an institution as part of an applicant's offer (Dundee Summer School). Institutional specific programmes such as these greatly support students who have an inherent focus on what they would like to do and are supported by an institution to enter a named programme. Although some of these programmes do state that they are multi-exit, more exploration may need to be conducted into what extent this is true; i.e. to what extent do pupils progress to other institutions, whether this is actively encouraged and to what extent is this taken in to consideration by other institutions in admissions processes?

22. It is also recognised that Bridging Programmes can take many forms, and although the majority of potential or current practice focusses on summer school formats, bridging can be conducted in many different formats (e.g. during weekends and evenings, online throughout the year etc.) The format of the Bridging programme will be dependent on how it fits into and aligns with other access activity in the sector.

23. As evidenced by the difficulties of the Toolkit for Fair Access in collecting data and evaluation from access programmes which was appropriate for use, there is a shortage of reliable information on what 'good practice' may look like. Therefore, based on the evidence we do have, and the aims of the group, good practice for bridging programme activity could be;

- Targeting specific groups which relate to Government and institutional key priority areas (e.g. SIMD20, care experienced etc.). However, in order to have the most benefit to learners, this should reflect as far as possible groups which are targeted through current national access programmes and contextual admissions policies.
- Programmes which provide a clear SCQF credit-rated element, providing evidence of academic capability.
- Provide additionality which is considered in admissions processes nationally – evidenced by Memorandums of Understanding or similar recognition.
- Do not detract from participant's schoolwork.
- Provide relevant academic and transitional support for the learner.
- From the outset, have clear evaluation methods which contribute to the overall understanding of the Learner Journey and link in to other student tracking processes.

Academic Benefit and Transferability

24. There are a number of programmes identified through the mapping exercise which include credit bearing elements (primarily SCQF Levels 6 & 7), including;

- Dundee's Access Summer School
- Advanced Higher Hub
- Discover Learning at Dundee
- St Andrews Gateway to Arts
- Lift Off 2 Success Summer School
- SRUC Schools Provision
- Strathclyde STEM Summer School
- Aberdeen Summer School for Access
- Glasgow's Top Up

25. A number of other programmes also noted that they are currently investigating the implementation of SCQF credit bearing elements into their programmes for 2019-20.

26. The mapping exercise determined that although some programmes exist which report to provide 'currency' in a number of institutions admissions policies; however, we cannot at present determine to what extent this is the case.

27. When determining how to progress a Bridging Framework, consultation must be sought with current programme managers to determine how credits have been added to programmes and to what extent these have been transferable across the sector, and with institutions to determine what realistically would be taken into consideration during admissions processes. Programmes for development must then be identified and consultation must be sought with SCQF to determine how a process is put in place. Memorandum's of Understanding or similar agreements must be drawn to ensure transferability is agreed and the process is transparent to all stakeholders, including the learners themselves. Academics should also be included to determine the skills which would be most beneficial to implement into such programmes which may have additional benefits in supporting learners on entry to Higher Education.

28. BPAG must ensure that the framework and any actions resulting from recommendations must be realistic within the current landscape and should not place additional burden or seek unrealistic additional funding especially during a time of economic uncertainty. The aim of the Framework is to align current practice in the sector nationally, ensuring that recommendations are made which align existing activity to the outcomes looked for in CoWA Recommendation 7.

Outline Proposal of Action Points

In summary to the information provided above, the following action points are raised for consideration;

- BPAG should consider and discuss 'best practice' in relation to Bridging Programme activity in line with the information provided above *(at meeting)*

- BPAG should discuss whether MoU's are a feasible and realistic option for institutions recognising programmes in admissions processes or whether there are other options which could facilitate the transferability of programme credit *(at meeting)*

- A second round of validation where partners will be consulted on the re-categorisation of programme profiles will take place and more information will be sought on these programmes.

- Consultation with SCQF to determine the process and procedures involved with implementing SCQF credit-bearing elements into existing programme activity.

- Consultation with academics to consider what programme elements they feel would be most beneficial to learners in their transition to HE.

Further information

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