

Bridging Programmes Advisory Group – Tuesday 29 October 2019

Attendees:

- Fiona Burns (SFC)
- Frank Coton (Chair, University of Glasgow)
- Karen Cullen (Queen Margaret University)
- Lynne Currie (Universities Scotland)
- Pamela Forbes (SFC)
- Rebecca Gaukroger (University of Edinburgh)
- Graham Kirby (University of St Andrews)
- Ged Lerpiniere (LEAPS/SHEP/SFC)
- Shona Littlejohn (Open University in Scotland)
- Valerie Webster (Glasgow Caledonian University)

Apologies:

- Lynn MacMillan (Scottish Government)
- Bernadine Templeman (Govan High School)

SFC Note

Roundtable introductions were given and there was a welcome to new members; Karen Cullen, Rebecca Gaukroger and Graham Kirby.

Note/2 – Note of 24 June 2019 meeting

Members agreed that the note from the previous BPAG meeting was accurate and questions were invited, in particular, from new members.

A question was raised around the credit bearing element of Bridging programme activity; is the purpose of this for additionality in applications/admissions processes, or is credit meant to count towards credit gained by students whilst at university (therefore, part of RPL agreements). Members agreed that the focus and level of SCQF credit-bearing elements would be to add additionality to students applications, therefore likely to be at SCQF Levels 5, 6 or 7, however it was not ruled out that the framework could look at university level credits at a later stage. It was also agreed that the content of Bridging programmes should also aim to provide students with skills which will assist them with transition to studying in HE courses.

There was a recognition by the group that these programmes will not be suitable for all disadvantaged or underrepresented learners wishing to progress into Higher Education; interventions must be appropriate to learners, and access to programmes should be given if need is demonstrable (e.g. an applicant with straight A's who wants to study a particular course at a particular institution, may gain more benefit from participating in another access based intervention like shadowing, rather than a national bridging programme). Bridging programmes should not be a conditional part

of entry for all pupils who tick a box; due care and consideration should be taken in determining an applicant's needs and signposting to other relevant opportunities may be appropriate. This will also mitigate for overburdening limited resources.

Paper 19/05 – Relevant Updates

Pamela Forbes introduced the paper on relevant policy updates. It was emphasised that this does not include all SFC-funded works relating to access and participation, however, is an overview of areas where there has been significant development over the past six months.

Ged Lerpiniere gave an update on the development of a Bridging element being incorporated into the current LEAPS programme. This will be incorporated into the school year rather than taking the traditional summer school format, taking its influence from programmes like Top Up. This has proven to be a popular idea in schools where there is room in senior pupils' timetables (for example in travel columns) so work can be developed and delivered around these. Pupils will complete this alongside their Highers in S5 and S6. LEAPS hope to offer 14 courses with delivery partners twice per year. LEAPS hope to begin testing delivery in 2020 with development continuing over the subsequent three years.

Shona Littlejohn provided an update on the YASS programme. YASS is already being delivered successfully alongside the school curriculum (working with school coordinators) and is a universal offer (not targeted at access students). At present, the programme is working with all local authorities except one across Scotland. Positive feedback has been provided by stakeholders on the skills preparation offered by YASS which is said to enable easier transition into university study. At present, YASS is looking at potential future developments and is talking to SHEP managers about developing a pipeline to avoid duplication. YASS is also looking at curriculum development opportunities to fit the needs and interests of pupils.

Paper 19/06 – Group Aims and Objectives and Paper 19/07 – Bridging Provision

Frank Coton introduced the Aims and Objectives paper to the group and asked for feedback. While discussing this paper, elements of the Bridging Provision paper were also addressed when determining future actions, therefore key themes relating to both papers are discussed below.

Clarifying and communicating the framework

The group emphasised that there is a need to visualise the framework and the objectives of the different elements. It is also necessary that provision has to be able to evolve within the framework; it will not be static.

It was raised that it would be useful to set mapping against the definition of the issue we are trying to address, for example; is this addressing gaps in access provision?; recognising that pupils are not getting qualifications that enable access? It was felt it would be useful to come up with around three examples of issues we are trying to work on or overcome and then map mapping and actions against this. There are also questions about the provision itself: how much should be about depth and specificity in relation to subject content, and how much should be about broad academic skills? It was recognised that content must be appropriate to what we are trying to achieve. It was suggested that the group should determine what success looks like through the lens of different key stakeholders, perhaps by using a personas approach (for teachers, pupils etc.)

It was recognised that the framework definition would need further fleshing out to make it engaging and clear to stakeholders (not the Aims and Objectives document). The initial framework will be evolutionary with building blocks to grow beyond this initial point – this must be emphasised to stakeholders to ensure no one feels like their programmes are being missed out.

It was felt that the current Aims and Objectives document must be developed to manage expectations, by; including further information about the launch and when it can be expected that initial Bridging activity in the framework will be recognised in Admissions processes, the implementation pathway and timelines.

There was recognition that this group would focus primarily on the framework at a strategic level with less discussion of what programmes are doing on the ground, as there is a trust in practitioners to ensure programme activity fits strategic need.

There was also recognition that moving forward, the framework may also want to take into consideration subject specific issues (for example, barriers to accessing particular subjects in school) by identifying need across the sector and tailoring programmes to fit this need.

Understanding the parameters of scale up and development

There were also questions around what development and scale up looks like in regards to Bridging programme activity. It was felt that more data was required to understand the student base which bridging programmes activity may be the most appropriate for. There needs to be a clearer image of potential users of bridging programmes and what 'scale up' may look like in regards to this. It was suggested that SFC contact Scottish Government to produce data which gives an image of the pipeline of appropriate learners coming through schools which would then influence scale of activity. It may be that there is already enough capacity in the sector and development must focus on making existing provision appropriate and clearly communicated to learners. This may include groups who are applying to university

and are not being placed by the end of the cycle, or applicants who have not applied at all but have the potential to access HE. Bridging should ensure it is creating robust pathways which achieve success for the most appropriate learners.

Admissions recognition and partnerships

It was recognised that there needs to be dialogue around national Bridging programme activity with admissions officers to establish what is already effective and what may be needed from institutions perspective. Creating a framework which works for national bridging programme activity which is transparent to all stakeholders requires a certain degree of trust from all institutions and clarity in how institutions are viewing which Bridging programmes in admission processes.

A conversation began around agreements and ensuring transparency and clarity in involvement of institutions in Bridging programme activity. All institutions have published entrance requirement information and outcome agreements detailing access provision, therefore it was suggested that compliance with the framework could be evidenced through either or both of these mechanisms. It was emphasised that in order to be applicable in the applications process, credit gained through Bridging programme activity had to be achieved through work and not just acquired through participation; the value-added element will then be more easily recognised by institutions. It was felt that for efficiency and practicality, using existing channels of evidencing recognition and participation in the Bridging Framework is the most beneficial for moving forward, as opposed to new Memorandums of Understanding or partnership agreements. It was also emphasised that incentives to institutions for taking part in the framework should be explored and made clear. This may encourage more collaborative working which we see few examples of with multiple institutions across the sector.

Governance of the framework

Questions were also raised around the governance of the framework, especially in relation to control over what was added and this was evaluated. It was felt that a governance structure should be developed at an early stage which may be vested in a practitioner group. Governance should then create a clear process and timeline on when and how programmes develop and are included under the framework.

Progressing the framework

It was determined that SFC would select approximately 5 programmes from the recent mapping exercise to create a small focus group which can discuss best practice in the sector currently and lessons learned from challenges in the development of these programmes. The five programme should represent; a programme with online elements and one without, one with SCQF credit bearing element and one without, and one with a summer school programme focus and one with a different format. Admissions representatives should also be included on this

group. Representatives from this group should also meet with SCQF to look at the implementation of credit bearing elements into programmes. From this discussion, the framework would then be further developed and lead in to a wider consultation across all institutions.

There was a suggestion that the innovation school at GSA could perhaps facilitate this conversation.

Summary of next steps:

The following actions were agreed as next steps for the group;

1. SFC will continue to develop documentation around the framework and recirculate edited papers in Dec 2019/Jan 2020. This will include;
 - a. Recognition of the issues we are trying to resolve within the sector through the Bridging Framework.
 - b. Editing some of the existing wording to recognise and clarify that Bridging
 - i. may not be appropriate to all disadvantaged and underrepresented learners
 - ii. framework and governance, where possible, will be based on existing structures and procedures
 - iii. framework will include all relevant programmes but a phased approach to inclusion will be undertaken while development of the framework is tested. The timescales for this will be made clearer.
2. SFC will approach the Scottish Government, UCAS and other relevant data holders to pull together data evidence for the scale of learners which may benefit from Bridging programme activity.
3. SFC and Universities Scotland will work together to create a briefing plan for the sector.
4. SFC will select five programmes to be represented in the small focus group, set a date for this first meeting and send out invitations, in consultation with BPAG members. Dates will also be set for subsequent meetings to August 2020.