

Bridging Programmes Advisory Group – Tuesday 11 February 2020

Attendees:

- John Blicharski (University of Dundee)
- Fiona Burns (SFC)
- Laura Cattell (University of Edinburgh)
- Frank Coton (Chair, University of Glasgow)
- Neil Croll (University of Glasgow)
- Karen Cullen (Queen Margaret University)
- Lynne Currie (Universities Scotland)
- Pamela Forbes (SFC)
- Rebecca Gaukroger (University of Edinburgh)
- Laura Houston (University of St Andrews)
- Graham Kirby (University of St Andrews)
- Ged Lerpiniere (LEAPS/SHEP/SFC)
- Shona Littlejohn (Open University in Scotland)
- Stephanie McKendry (University of Strathclyde)

Apologies:

- Rebecca Gaukroger (University of Edinburgh)
- Lynn MacMillan (Scottish Government)
- Bernadine Templeman (Govan High School)
- Valerie Webster (Glasgow Caledonian University)

Introductions

Roundtable introductions were given and there was a welcome to guest speakers; John Blicharski, Neil Croll, Laura Houston and Stephanie McKendry.

Note/2 – Note of 29 October 2019 meeting

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

Bridging Programmes – Current Activity Presentations

At the last BPAG meeting, members agreed that they would like to invite more practitioners from across the sector that have experience of the challenges, benefits and opportunities of running Bridging activity, to better inform how a national framework can develop to meet the above recommendation, and ensure programmes fit into contextualised admissions processes on a national level. Through the recent mapping exercise, eight programmes were identified which represented a broad range of activity, institutions and links to admission processes. Each representative (guests and current BPAG members) was asked to talk about their project for approximately five minutes, covering;

- A brief intro on the programme (including target participants, key aims and objectives etc.)

- Things which have worked well (and how is this evidenced)
- Things which have been difficult or which managers think there could be more of.

The note below summarises the project presentations and subsequent discussions from the meeting. Programme managers were also asked to provide any additional information for circulation; each heading below if clicked on will link you to relevant webpages and some email attachments have also been included in the circulatory email. Unfortunately, due to the fire alarm drill, we were unable to cover the Sutton Trust Summer School run by Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews, however, more information on these can be found in the following webpages:

General information: <https://summerschools.suttontrust.com/>

Edinburgh: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/undergraduate/access-edinburgh/high-school-students/sutton-trust-summer-school>

Glasgow:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/study/wp/supportingaspirationinschool/suttontrustsummerschool/>

St Andrews: <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/study/access/projects/sutton-trust/>

Dundee Access Summer School – John Blicharski

Dundee summer school is focussed on supporting students (who meet core contextual criteria) to enter the University of Dundee; therefore it is acknowledged that in its present format, it is not intended to be a multi-exit support programme. The programme is used as a condition of offer for applicants who are identified as needing further preparation support for their transition to university, and are in receipt of a contextualised ‘wider access level offer’. Approximately 200 students complete the programme each year – either in person or online (or a mix of both elements). The average tariff points of those entering the university are in the vicinity of 160, whereas those entering through the summer school are entering with around 140. At present, around 25-35% of SIMD20 entrants completed the summer school.

The programme has been running since 1993 and has a 95% completion rate.

Summer school participants will complete a transferable skills course over two and a half weeks, and then four weeks of up to four specific subject courses at SCQF Level 7. Free accommodation is provided if participants live more than 40 miles or over one hour commuting distance from the university.

In regards to what works well, a number of areas were identified, including;

- Improved progression rates: when compared to matched peers in the 140 tariff range who did not complete the summer school, summer school participants were around 10% more likely to progress into Year 2 of study.
- The current system of fitting the summer school around existing curricula.
- Student satisfaction and wellbeing is enhanced through individuals being given the opportunity to explore the campus, experience different learning styles and examination types, meeting staff, and make new friends who will progress to university with them.
- Pupils are given a checklist of activities they complete throughout the week which are aimed at building resilience and subsequent academic success.
- The focus on Bridging into a specific institution.
- Academics are very invested in the programme.

One of the biggest challenges recognised by the programme was getting individuals to participate during the summer, especially if they have work commitments. Capped numbers due to funding was also recognised as a limitation at present – the university is working at a 10: 1 application to offer ratio. There was also a question about how well this would work on a larger scale, as a multi-exit programme may not be able to be as bespoke as a specific institutional bridging programme, as well as develop beneficial 1-2-1 relationships.

Questions were invited from members and guests.

FB asked whether a bursary was available for students. It was confirmed that £60 per week was paid to all participants. This funding is provided by partner local authorities and organisations.

LCa asked why the summer school was made mandatory for some applicants when there was a peer group who had not completed the summer school. JB confirmed that entry was not only based on tariff points, but also on subject requirements (i.e. some pupils who have lower than the entry level in specific subject areas may be able to make up for this by completing the summer school).

FC enquired whether there would be appetite to expand the offer if funding was made available to support entry into other institutions. JB confirmed that funding for a national approach would be welcome and that the summer school has been designed in such a way that scale up would be possible in the current format (e.g. modules could be run twice).

SL asked for more information on the different modes of delivery. JB clarified that most participants will complete a mixture of both face-to-face activities and online modules. However, the final decision on subject choices and which delivery method is right for each participant is decided by Admissions and academics –for example, it

may be more relevant for students who have a low grade in a specific subject in school which there is a subject specific requirement for to enter a university course, to complete more face-to-face modules to best support them to achieve.

NC suggested that this format could potentially work with a national, multi-exit approach, where pupils can undertake modules on campus at a local host institution but then take other institutions online modules also.

Reach Scotland – Neil Croll

Reach has been running since 2010 with five partner institutions (Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews) to support disadvantaged or underrepresented school pupils to apply to highly competitive, professional degree programmes, including Medicine, Dentistry, Law and Veterinary Medicine. At present the programmes are moving from a school to pupil-targeted approach.

The programme aims to work seamlessly with contextualised admissions processes. As a national consortium, managers are working together to agree shared contextual indicators which are taken into consideration for entry to programme support based on the findings from the access data working group. However, there is recognition that although there can be specific indicators, an 'other' category will also be taken into consideration which allows pupils/teachers to report other forms of disadvantage or mitigating circumstances which may also be taken into consideration.

Evaluation and tracking has shown that entrants to specific degree programmes has increased over time and, in comparison to peers from more affluent backgrounds, entrants are performing at the same level.

FC questioned whether the move from a school to a pupil targeted approach has changed the number of pupils the programme can work with. NC confirmed that forecasts did not show a large increase, but the number would be higher during the transition stage (i.e. when phasing out full school cohorts, while starting to recruit target pupils from new schools). At present, the programme targets approximately 6000 pupils – this number is large because it includes S4 pupils as well as S5 and S6. Earlier engagement is needed to ensure pupils are on the right track to achieve requirements for entry into courses.

SM questioned why these subjects and institutions were chosen and whether this would be reassessed in the future. Originally funding supported entry to professional degrees (firstly, Medicine) which is why the institutions with medical schools were selected. FB added that the programme originally was not intended to be as long

term as it has been, therefore, programmes may not have been set up this way if the scale of the programme was evident from the start (although SFC recognises the success of the programme to date). NC was keen to emphasise that although not all institutions are involved, a large amount benefit as students may progress into degrees in other institutions. Some funding for programme activity comes from core budgets therefore this framework could be used by other institutions and other subjects.

SM also questioned whether there was national issue around students who performed well in STEM subjects in school being tracked into Medical degree programmes, having a knock on effect on entrant numbers to STEM subject such as Biology and Chemistry.

NC believes one strength of Reach is having Admissions officers involved – this allows them to track and influence offers being made.

Information on the Glasgow specific Reach programme can be found here:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/study/wp/professionalsubjects/reach/>

[Young Applicants in Schools Scotland \(YASS\) – Shona Littlejohn](#)

YASS has been operating since 2007 and supports S6 pupils, supporting just under 9000 young people during this time to prepare for the transition from school to university. At present, approximately 30 modules are offered at SCQF Level 7, allowing pupils to gain experience of HE level study and independent learning. In the current year, all 32 local authorities have signed up to the programme, with pupils from 48% of state schools participating; in 2019/20, 1246 pupils participated from across 156 schools (the largest cohort yet). The programme is open to all S6 pupils, however 30% of those participating are from SIMD20/40 backgrounds. However 30% of participants are also from a remote/rural area as compared to 9% of the Scottish school roll. 1/3 of pupils on the programme also choose a subject which is not offered in their school environment. The programme therefore addresses capacity issues and curriculum gaps; including remote/rural access, STEM, languages etc.

Alongside the points above, when identifying what works well, the following areas were also identified;

- The equity of the offer on a national scale.
- The programme benefits the wider sector – only 138 pupils have gone on to complete degrees with the OU – the vast majority of participants complete courses with other providers.
- 82% of participants believed that the programme had enhanced their application, therefore pupils are seeing the benefit during the application process.

- Although students are likely to be those who are academically achieving well already and will progress to university, it provides them with valuable subject experience and support for the transition.

Challenges recognised included;

- Short term funding restricts activity.
- There is no universal recognition of the programme in admissions processes.

The programme would welcome an integrated approach to development of a national bridging programme.

GK asked how pupils find out about the programme. SL confirmed that information is sent out to a recognised school coordinator each year.

JB asked about the impact of the DYW agenda on numbers participating. SL confirmed that this does not seem to have impacted YASS numbers which have continued to increase. This may be down to the different mix of schools engaged with.

NC raised a question around whether the programme would be targeted at specific learners moving forward as this may help with recognition in contextualised admissions processes. Despite SM raising that as a qualification, it would be recognised regardless, John suggested that it could be used more as transferable credit if targeted.

FC asked whether the programme identified if pupils were engaged in any other WP programme work. SL confirmed that at present, this was not the case. Neil and LCa agreed that this would be beneficial. It was felt that because of the structure of this opportunity, it would allow for pupils to take part in other programmes too, increasing engagement and likelihood to progress and succeed.

[Accelerate – Stephanie McKendry](#)

The Accelerate summer challenges are concentrated, discipline specific, one week programmes aimed at pupils at the end of S5. The programme has run for 11 years with 2500 pupils participating in this time. This past year there were 105 pupils from 11 local authorities who completed challenges in five different subject areas.

Previously programme participants were made up of 'access' pupils (meeting specific contextual criteria) and paying pupils. However, after receiving a significant donation, the programme will now target only access pupils from 2019, with links to contextualised admissions processes through targeting methodologies.

Challenge subjects change each year depending on university admissions and sector needs (e.g. they may be based on subjects with low levels of entrants from targeted backgrounds, or subjects with low levels of applications, or there may be a particularly popular subject for pupils).

The programme includes a variety of activities with a final group presentation given to sector experts. There is an opportunity after the formal summer programme to take set assessments at SCQF Level 7 for five credits – over 90% choose to complete this and pass.

Benefits of the programme included;

- Being able to introduce students to a campus environment and try different subjects.
- Those who have completed the programme are invited back as junior members in S6 before starting university creating a pipeline of support and opportunities for participants.
- Pupils confidence increases as they see they are able to perform at an equivalent to first year of university level of study.
- A select number of students who are interested in pursuing a course at Strathclyde are matched with a mentor to support academic attainment and provide longer term support.

Challenges faced by the programme were identified as;

- Funding – although there has been a donation, this is time limited.
- Deciding on the balance of subjects (those most in demand by pupils are often those with high levels of applicants; e.g. Law, Sports Science).
- Although there are currently some challenges which have SCQF credit bearing elements, this is not consistent and is not uniformly recognised in admissions processes.
- It is difficult to do longitudinal tracking, especially if students do not move on to Strathclyde (SM believes this is a key area to look into moving forward).

FC asked about recognition of programme in Strathclyde's own admission process. SM answered that this was not formal as until recently, you could pay to come onto the programme – formalisation of recognition will now be worked on as all participants are WP.

JB acknowledged that many programmes use previous participants as mentors and that this was a real success.

NC compared this type of activity to others like the Sutton Trust Summer Schools and suggested that, subject to national agreements, a bridging framework may have different levels, with each level offering similar support. Each level would take into consideration length, content etc.

LCa raised that it would be useful to create a list of 'approved' providers to make a framework more understandable to learners.

First Chances Fife – Laura Houston

First Chances Fife is a partnership programme between The Robertson Trust, Fife College, University of St Andrews and SFC (through Reach). First Chances Foundation supports pupils from P7 to S2 and First Chances Senior Phase supports pupils from S3 to S6. This has developed, with funding support, from a one year programme focussed on S3 to a seven year pipeline programme, and consolidated all of St Andrews pre-existing intervention programmes to create one large programme. Pupils must complete a required amount of activities to progress into the next year and benefit from continued support. At present, the S3-S6 programme work with 16 of the 18 high schools in Fife and hopes to expand to all in coming years. At present, the programme engages with 1200 pupils per year. An external review is planned to start this summer.

Benefits of the programmes include;

- With College involvement, there is better retention of pupils through the course of the programme as previously pupils who did not want to progress to university dropped out – now they are happier to continue and be supported into FE and HE routes at college.
- The programme explicitly is not aimed at progression into degrees at St Andrews and takes a more national approach.
- Additional funding has allowed for this expansion (it would not happen otherwise)
- Because of the selection criteria used, all pupils can apply for a Robertson Trust scholarship – at present, everyone who has participated in First Chances and applied has received one.

Identified challenges are;

- Some schools are less supportive than others and may require specific, tailored provision.
- There is a drop off in S6 when pupils have received offers to further study.

NC asked how this is viewed in the admissions process and LH confirmed that pupils were eligible for a minimum or gateway offer.

St Andrews Gateway Programmes – Graham Kirby

There are five Gateway programmes at St Andrews which offer a supported entry route into certain subject areas. Gateway to Physics was the first of these and has

run from 2012. Applicants with grades lower than the minimum entrance requirements from specific contextual backgrounds are given an offer for this route.

Students complete a mixture of modules which are specific to the degree programme alongside bespoke additional support modules which are partly subject specific and partly generic study skills. There is less flexibility in choosing subjects out with the main degree areas than entry onto a traditional degree programme for this reason, however this is for students who may not have had any other way of entering the subject area. Programmes have developed differently over time. For example, although Computer Science may be seen as quite similar to Physics, this Gateway programme has more flexibility than Physics at present (however this programme will be phased out).

Gateway to Medicine is more distinctive in its structure; picking pupils up who have not scored the minimum entrance requirements for full Medical degree entry in S5 in the summer and bringing them to university to complete one year of science modules (Biology, Chemistry and usually Psychology), instead of returning to school for S6. If they successfully pass these modules and score a minimum in the UCAT, they enter the full Medical degree programme the following year. FC asked if this added another year to their studies however it was clarified that this was in place of S6 therefor students are with the university for a year longer but it does not add on additional education to this stage in life.

Gateway to Arts and Gateway to Science are targeted more generally. Entrants to this route enter the university on a General Degree route which is extremely flexible, and can continue on to a named degree path if they meet the course requirements.

LCa asked whether students who enter on these routes end up using them to enter other institutions. As far as LH was aware only two students have moved from Gateway to Medicine year one on to Pharmacy at University of Strathclyde.

[Top Up – Neil Croll](#)

Top Up is a University of Glasgow programme which has been running since 1999. Around 2000 pupils participate in the programme each year, with approximately 300 progressing into University of Glasgow, 1000 progressing into other universities and 500 into Further Education courses.

One of the key things which works well for the programme is the partnership agreement, which unlike the intensity of memorandums of understanding, provides light touch but formalised agreements. This is sent to contact teachers and made available to pupils so they have an understanding of how Top U is recognised by partners.

JB asked about the funding of the project and Neil confirmed this has some funding through SFC (since 1999, originally as part of GOALS), local authorities and University of Glasgow core funding. By consolidating different pots of funding, they have been able to increase resources and impact.

General Discussion

FC questioned how we may progress the work of BPG moving forward. He suggested that one of the themes arising from the discussion was negotiated admissions agreements between different institutions, in order to provide bridging programmes with a form of recognition during the application process – this will not necessarily be an offer of a place.

It was suggested that we work with current programmes with a national scope to develop a Framework, with institutions then bidding to come into that framework. This framework would provide better clarity around availability of different programmes and how they related to each other to create different potential entry routes to learners. It was emphasised that one of the key aims should be greater clarity for school leavers. It is understood that the Framework would not seek to include every programme as this would risk undermining institutional autonomy and competition. SM suggested that a Framework like this would link to similar work aimed at demystifying the landscape to learners (e.g. Universities Scotland work on vocabulary used across the sector). LCu supported the idea that the framework be opt-in in nature in order to encourage rather than enforce involvement. JB emphasised that if students met particular contextual indicators, universities would want to work with these groups of learners anyway.

Scoping Need

It was agreed that the *Scoping Need* paper did not contain enough data information for it to be an accurate representation of need at present. NC offered to share Scottish Government data he had permission to use. LCa also suggested using research from the [Growing Up in Scotland](#) project to find more trend information.

Summary of next steps:

- A) Arrange another workshop to discuss the basis of a future framework.
- B) The *Scoping Need* paper will be rewritten using more data sources and expanding the description of pupils who may benefit.
- C) A shared space should be created to share documents for editing etc. Microsoft Teams was suggested.