



Report on Widening Access 2023-24 Annex



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Summary: This document provides context and methodological information pertaining to the Report on Widening Access 2023-24 publication and background tables.

FAO: Principals and Chairs of Scotland's colleges and universities, Scottish Government, students, parents, guardians and the general public.

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Annex A – Scottish Government Targets and Related Measures

1. This section presents data for the Scottish Government access targets as recommended in the Final Report of the Commission on Widening Access. It should be noted that the Commission’s [final report](#) was not published, and the targets accepted by Scottish Government, until later during the 2016-17 admission cycle. This means the initial impact of the Commission’s recommendations and targets were not apparent in entrant data until 2017-18 and so that academic year was the first in which the impact of this work can be observed. Data from academic years prior to 2017-18 should be viewed as baselines for access targets.

COWA Recommendation 32

2. Recommendation 32 states that:
 - By 2030, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent 20% of entrants to higher education. Equality of access should be seen in the college and university sectors.
3. And that to drive progress towards this goal:
 - By 2021, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent, at least, 16% of full-time first-degree entrants to Scottish universities as a whole.
 - By 2026, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent, at least, 18% of full-time first-degree entrants to Scottish universities as a whole.
4. Relating to the COWA target for individual universities:
 - By 2021, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 10% of full-time first-degree entrants to every individual Scottish university.
5. The tables in this publication show national performance of these measures using the latest ten years of data. For the COWA targets, “all undergraduate HE” includes all entrants to undergraduate HE courses at college and university. The background tables show these figures broken down by institution.

Annex B – SFC Definition of Care Experience

6. SFC considers a wider group of individuals than the legal definitions of ‘looked-after’ and ‘care leaver’ when referring to care experience for data collection purposes in order to capture all age groups, all nationalities, and all those who have been in care or looked-after during their childhood even if it were for a short period of time. SFC defines ‘care experienced’ as anyone who has been or is currently in care or from a looked-after background at any stage of their life, no matter how short. This care may have been provided in one of many different settings such as in residential care, foster care, kinship care or looked after at home with a supervision requirement. This care may have been provided in one of many different settings, such as in residential care, foster care, kinship care or through being looked after at home with a supervision requirement. SFC has a national ambition for care experienced students to have equal outcomes with their peers by 2030. More information can be found in SFC’s [National Ambition for Care Experience Students](#) report.

Annex C: Report Contents and Coverage

University entrants

7. The Commission on Widening Access covers all higher education but pays specific attention to Scottish domiciled full-time first-degree (FTFD) entrants to university and is the main group of university students of focus in this report.
8. There is, of course, a variety of additional activity provided by universities to students out-with this group. Further details on these groups, where not shown in this report, are available in the background tables online or by request. This definition of sub-degree provision is used here in line with the provision included in the [SFC Outcome Agreement definition](#) of students. However, as this report covers all activity in the sector the numbers will vary from the reported [Outcome Agreement figures](#) as the data in this report includes the Open University whereas the Outcome Agreement measures do not.
9. “Sub-degree” for this purpose includes the following qualifications:
 - Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE).
 - Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE).¹
 - Higher National Certificate (HNC).
 - Higher National Diploma (HND).
10. Activity is measured in enrolments.

College entrants

11. College student activity can be measured in a number of different ways, and a full explanation of these measurements can be found in SFC’s [College Statistics Report for 2023-24](#). College data here are shown only in enrolments. The college data within this report includes Scottish-domiciled entrants only and are shown by full-time and part-time activity at HE and FE level.
12. In line with the definition used in the SFC [College Student Outcomes](#) National Statistics publication, the college entrants shown include only those students who completed 4 or more Credits.² This is an important addition on the college data when measuring entrant activity in enrolments as otherwise very short courses, of often only a few hours, are

¹ Including Diploma Higher Education (DipHE) leading towards obtaining eligibility to register to practice with a health or social care or veterinary statutory regulatory body.

² 1 credit equates to 40 notional hours of learning.

counted in the same way as courses with much longer durations.

University retention

13. University retention measures whether a student, studying at first degree or sub-degree level university provision, stays in higher education after their first year of study. The full definition can be found in the [OA Technical Guidance](#).

College success

14. College success is reported in SFC's [College Student Outcomes](#) publication, which was renamed from the College Performance Indicators publication from 2023-24. The College Student Outcomes for 2023-24 were published on 1 July 2025 and contain data on successful completion for students from a range of access criteria including age, gender and disability. The intention of the Report on Widening Access is not to reproduce this data, but key success indicators and further breakdowns are provided.

University qualifiers

15. Figures relating to qualifiers from universities count those students successfully achieving a qualification at the stated level. It should be noted that the qualification achieved can differ from the initial level of study. It can take varying lengths of time for students to achieve a qualification, depending on length of course and individual circumstances. Qualifier figures for 2019-20 and 2020-21 are not comparable with prior years due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
16. The year-on-year decline in university qualifiers is in part due to a marking and assessment boycott in 2022-23, which prevented some HEIs from submitting qualifications within the reporting period. This led to the deferral of reporting for some qualifiers from the 2022-23 academic session into 2023-24. As such, figures should be treated with caution.

Articulation

17. In [A Blueprint for Fairness](#) the Commission on Widening Access made recommendations relating to articulation and these pathways are also a focus in Outcome Agreement negotiations with institutions. The definition of articulation for the purposes of this report includes students articulating from college with advanced standing via a Higher National (HN) route achieved in the three years prior to articulating. This is consistent with the approach taken in compiling SFC's National Articulation Database (NAD).
18. Articulation is a key route for access to education. Working with representatives of the universities and college sectors, SFC has recently rebuilt the National Articulation Database (NAD) on a more advanced statistical platform. The new platform enables more analysis of this data, and those affiliated to universities and colleges can interact with this data by contacting SFC and registering for the National Articulation Database,

on completion of a Data Sharing Agreement.

19. Information on the methodology applied in the building of the National Articulation Database can be found in the accompanying annex to this report.
20. Summary statistics for articulation will be added to the report later on in 2025.

University Graduate Outcomes

21. These tables present the number and proportion of Scottish-domiciled full-time first-degree qualifiers in positive destinations 15 months after graduation, where they responded to the [HESA Graduate Outcomes](#) survey. Those unemployed are treated as being in negative destinations, and those in other or not known destinations (e.g. travelling, caring or retired) are excluded.
22. Those in employment include those employed in locations outside of Scotland.

Data specifics

23. All counts of students have been rounded to the nearest five, to protect the confidentiality of individuals, in accordance with SFC policy and in line with HESA. Counts of one to seven are rounded to five, with zero reported as zero. Totals are based on unrounded values. Percentages are based on students who have known data for the characteristic reported. Percentages based on a population of 22.5 or fewer students have been suppressed to protect against over interpretation of small numbers.
24. When a college and HEI share responsibility for students, for example, when a HEI acts as the awarding body for a course that is partly delivered at college, these students appear in both the university and college data and are known as Associate Students. There were 1,330 Associate Students in 2023-24 who have been reported on in both sectors in this publication, following the practice of treating them in this way, decided in SFC's [HE Students and Qualifiers](#) publication.
25. The SIMD files are updated periodically to reflect changing levels of deprivation in areas and the SIMD data series in this report use the SIMD2012, SIMD2016 and SIMD2020 files. For academic years 2013-14 to 2016-17, SIMD2012 is used. For 2017-18 to 2020-21, SIMD2016 is used. For 2021-22 to 2023-24, SIMD2020 is used.³
26. The disability categories in Figure 3 and relevant background tables are sometimes shown under shortened titles. The full disability titles, giving examples of the specific conditions in each group are below:

³ Please note that SIMD figures can differ slightly from other sources, depending on when SIMD lookup files are created. New postcodes periodically come into existence (e.g. when new housing developments are created). As such the number of students to whom we are able to match to a SIMD ranking can vary from other sources, depending on timing.

- A long standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease, or epilepsy.
 - A mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder.
 - A physical impairment or mobility issues, such as difficulty using arms or using a wheelchair or crutches.
 - A social/communication impairment such as Asperger's syndrome/other autistic spectrum disorder.
 - A specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D.
 - Blind or a serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses.
 - Deaf or a serious hearing impairment.
 - Personal care support.
 - Development condition that you have had since childhood which affects motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills, and speech and language.⁴
 - A disability, impairment or medical condition that is not listed above.
 - Two or more impairments and/or disabling medical conditions.
27. Students at the former land-based colleges of Barony, Elmwood and Oatridge, which merged with the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) to form SRUC in October 2012, were still recorded through the college reporting until 2012-13. They are included in the figures for colleges for 2012-13 but are included with the SRUC and HEI related figures from 2013-14 onwards.
28. In 2023-24 Lews Castle College and North Highland College merged to form UHI North, West and Hebrides. Figures for 2022-23 and prior in COWA Tables 1A and 3A represent Lews Castle College.
29. A number of institution mergers happened across the university and college sectors over the time period shown in this publication. Full details of these are described in [Annex A: HE Students and Qualifiers 2020-21](#).

Other protected characteristics

30. Aside from breakdowns by care experience status, sex, age, disability status, and ethnicity shown throughout the background tables, SFC is also publishing information on enrolments to colleges and universities split by the following groups of specific interest:

⁴ New in the HESA Data Futures data for 2022-23 – covers university sector only.

- Student carers.
- British Sign Language users.
- Service leavers.
- Estranged students.
- Gender identity and trans status.
- Pregnancy/maternity (college sector only – HESA do not collect this for the university sector).
- Religion or belief.
- Sexual orientation.

Discontinued in the 2022-23 publication as the data was not collected from colleges in 2022-23, following EHRC guidance:

- Marital status (college sector only – HESA do not collect this for the university sector).

31. This information can be found in Background Tables 16 and 17.

Metadata table

Metadata Indicator	Description
Publication Title	Report on Widening Access, 2023-24
Description	Includes up to ten academic years of data on Higher Education students, entrants and qualifiers in Scottish Higher Education Institutions and Colleges presented as time series, covering selected periods between 2013-14 to 2023-24 (as appropriate)
Theme	Further and Higher Education, Widening Access
Topic	Student Information
Format	Web report, PDF and Excel Tables
Data Source(s)	This publication contains information on students from both colleges and higher education institutions (HEIs) who are attending Higher Education courses in Scotland. These statistics are collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) from HEIs and by SFC from further education colleges (colleges).
Date that data are acquired	University Graduate Outcome data: April 2025 College student and outcomes data: April 2025 HEI student data: March 2025 College leaver destinations data: November 2024 HEI retention data: June 2025 HEI staffing data: February 2025 Articulation data: TBC
Release date	30 July 2025
Frequency	Annual
Timeframe of data and timeliness	Trend data are presented over various time periods between 2013-14 and 2023-24, as appropriate.

Metadata Indicator	Description
Continuity of data	<p>This report has separate strands. The first, relates to the key Scottish Government targets and related measures considering full-time first degree students (at university) and all undergraduate higher education entrants (at both universities and colleges). The second considers broader analysis of access to further and higher education. These two strands overlap for some measures and, therefore, these areas are presented twice in this report in some cases.</p> <p>The data presented in each of these strands currently differ due to the data specification and focus used. However, changes have been implemented to ensure that the data specification of these strands is more aligned from 2017-18 entrants and onwards where both use the SIMD2016 file for socio-economic analysis up to 2020-21, and the SIMD2020 file for 2021-22 and 2023-24.</p> <p>Data from Scottish colleges continue to exclude those students who do not complete the first 25% of their course (the point at which they become eligible for funding).</p>
Revisions statement	<p>Following a stakeholder consultation SFC have amended how it calculates successful completion in the college sector. Figures for 2019-20 to 2022-23 have been recalculated accordingly, alongside the new data for 2023-24.</p> <p>In previous editions of the Report on Widening Access, early withdrawals — i.e. students withdrawing from their course before the funding qualifying date — were included in the calculation of the College Student Outcomes (previously called College Performance Indicators) showing the successful completion rate. Following stakeholder consultation, early withdrawals have been excluded from the main successful completion metric used in the College Student Outcomes publication and Report on Widening Access. Previous years' data has been recalculated accordingly, and therefore the figures presented in Background Tables 6 and 7 will not match previous publications.</p> <p>In 2023-24, the funding qualifying date for students on courses lasting more than 20 weeks was moved to earlier in the academic year. Up to 2022-23, full-time summer starts would have qualified for funding from 1st November; from</p>

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	<p>2023-24 onwards they will have qualified for funding in week five. This means that students who withdrew between week five and 1st November would be classified as early withdrawals in previous years, but from 2023-24 are classified as non-completions. The impact of this change is that the numbers of students reported as completing or not in 2023-24 increased, while the numbers reported as either early withdrawals or not decreased. The threshold date change may have influenced decisions by students or college staff, so it's not possible to know how much of the year-on-year changes in early withdrawal and non-completion statistics resulted from this or were related to other issues. This must be considered when reviewing the trend across academic years.</p>
Revisions relevant to this publication	<p>Following a stakeholder consultation SFC have amended how it calculates successful completion in the college sector. Figures for 2019-20 to 2022-23 have been recalculated accordingly, alongside the new data for 2023-24.</p> <p>In previous editions of the Report on Widening Access, early withdrawals — i.e. students withdrawing from their course before the funding qualifying date — were included in the calculation of the College Student Outcomes (previously called College Performance Indicators) showing the successful completion rate. Following stakeholder consultation, early withdrawals have been excluded from the main successful completion metric used in the College Student Outcomes publication and Report on Widening Access. Previous years' data has been recalculated accordingly, and therefore the figures presented in Background Tables 6 and 7 will not match previous publications.</p> <p>In 2023-24, the funding qualifying date for students on courses lasting more than 20 weeks was moved to earlier in the academic year. Up to 2022-23, full-time summer starts would have qualified for funding from 1st November; from 2023-24 onwards they will have qualified for funding in week five. This means that students who withdrew between week five and 1st November would be classified as early withdrawals in previous years, but from 2023-24 are classified as non-completions. The impact of this change is that the numbers of students reported as completing or not in 2023-24</p>

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Relevance and key uses of these statistics	HESA – which merged with Jisc in October 2022 – is the official UK agency for the collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative information about higher education at higher education institutions. SFC collects data on provision at colleges in Scotland through the Further Education Statistics (FES) data collection.
Accuracy	The procedures followed by HESA to ensure quality of the data are provided on the HESA website. The guidance issued by SFC for the submission of the Scottish college records is on the SFC website.
Comparability	HESA collects student enrolment data from all publicly funded UK HEIs, so comparison with other countries within the UK is possible. The Statistical Release Higher Education Student Data provides information on this topic although not all tables in this report are directly comparable, due to differences in student populations used.
Accessibility	SFC has a style guideline which sets out options to make all publications as accessible to potential readers as possible. More information relating to accessibility of the website .
Coherence and clarity	This statistical publication is pre-announced and then published on the SFC website. It is accompanied by more detailed tables available in Excel format on the website only which is a freely available resource.
Value type and unity of measurement	Number, percentage, percentage points.
Disclosure	In all tables in this release, figures have been rounded to the nearest 5. Numbers from 1-7 have been rounded to 5. Counts

Metadata Indicator	Description
	of 0 are reported as 0. Figures may not sum to totals due to rounding and the inclusion of unknown values. Figures and percentages in the text and charts are calculated from rounded values. This is to mitigate the risk of identification of individuals.
Official Statistics designation	Official Statistics
UK Statistics Authority Assessment	This publication has not been assessed by the UK Statistics Authority. However other Scottish Funding Council publications were assessed as part of the Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics undertaken in 2013 by UK Statistics Authority, as part of Assessment Report 255.
Last published	30/07/2025
Next published	2026 – month and date to be confirmed.
Date of first publication	The Scottish Funding Council first published the Report on Widening Access in 2017. This is the successor publication to ‘Learning for All’, which was published annually between 2007 and 2016.
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