



Guidance for the Associate Student articulation places scheme between universities and colleges



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

SFC Guidance

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Guidance relating to Associate Student articulation places

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Summary: This report provides guidance to universities and colleges on the use of funded places allocated to universities for the associate student articulation scheme.

FAO: Principals and Finance Directors of Scotland's colleges and universities, assurance and outcomes contacts, and the general public.

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Guidance relating to Associate Student articulation places

Purpose

1. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has reviewed its allocation of additional funded places for articulation. Following that review we will continue, at least in the short-term, funding these places and the associate student articulation scheme. As a result of this decision, we have refreshed our guidance in relation to this scheme.

Background

2. The SFC definition of articulation, for the purposes of these places, is set out below:
 - Articulation is defined as a student gaining entry into the second year of a degree with a Higher National Certificate (HNC) gained at college, or into third year with a Higher National Diploma (HND) gained at college.
3. SFC allocated additional funded student places to universities from AY 2013-14 to support articulation routes. The guidance that accompanied these funded places outlined that these places are to be used to support provision based on the '2+2' model of articulation, where the 1st/2nd years are delivered in a college through Higher National Qualifications (HNQs) and 3rd/4th years of degree in a university. SFC also published guidance to accompany these places. This guidance was outlined as a minimum expectation for partnership and coordination.
4. The use of these places was monitored through Outcome Agreements which were replaced by the Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model in 2024. In late 2024, SFC reviewed the use of these places. Universities who are in receipt of these places provided feedback via a questionnaire issued by SFC. Following that review, we will be continuing with the scheme, at least in the short term.
5. These places are still part of the funding offer to universities and SFC expects them to be implemented in accordance with the guidance.

Key points

- Institutions must use these places in accordance with this guidance which includes passing on at least 75% of the funding to colleges for the years the students are studying in college.
- Universities must use the funding retained in those years (whilst the students are at college) to benefit students on these routes.
- Institutions can opt to give up these additional funded places. This would result in changes to their teaching funding allocations.
- The original articulation baseline associated with these additional funded places has been removed.

- Institutions benefiting from these additional funded places should commit to articulation beyond these additional places.
- Universities must consult colleges and provide adequate notice before making significant changes to the routes provided with these places, and they should commit to a reasonable transition period for colleges and applicants.
- Institutions should work collaboratively to meet the requirements of students and this guidance. This should be outlined in an articulation agreement between the college and university.

Funding for places

6. SFC will allocate the funding for the additional places to the university. As a condition of grant, the university must pass on at least 75% of this funding to the college for those years in which activity is delivered in colleges, i.e. to teach the students on the Higher National (HN) part of the programme.
7. Any funds retained by the university should be used for quality assurance of the degree programme, aligning curriculum to achieve ease of transition, and providing support for these 'associate students'. The benefits for the students in all years of the programme, including those achieved by the funding retained by the university, should be clearly outlined to students in the information, advice and guidance relating to the scheme.
8. The funds that should be passed to the college should be at least 75% of SFC's gross teaching subject prices (this includes the assumed SAAS fee). These subject prices are provided in the [published](#) university final funding allocations (the current prices for AY 2025-26 are shown under paragraph 23). Students should apply to SAAS for tuition fee and student support in the normal way.
9. The funding allocated by SFC for this scheme assumes that the students apply through UCAS for a place on a degree programme from year 1 and consequently attract a tuition fee of £1,820. We recognise, however, that students may apply through the college process thereby attracting a fee of £1,285, which would result in reduced overall funding. Universities should give due regard to the tuition fees being received, and the difference between the two fee levels can be claimed by the university through SFC's Fee Anomalies Grant if required.
10. The funded articulation places allocated to each university are shown in Annex C of the Technical Guidance.
11. Universities who wish to change the current subject price groups of these funded places to enable them to use the places for certain subject areas should contact their Outcome Managers in the first instance, who will notify relevant SFC colleagues to take forward any requests (See [Annex](#) for details on the additional articulation funded places and their current subject price groups at individual institutions.) Please note this may impact on your future funding.
12. Similarly, universities who no longer wish to participate in the scheme, in accordance with this guidance, should contact their Outcome Managers in the first instance to

discuss their intention to exit the scheme. Further conversations with SFC colleagues may be required. Please note this may result in a reduction of future funding.

The baseline

13. The original guidance provided a baseline that was set by SFC for measuring growth in articulation activity in AY 2013-14. This was monitored through Outcome Agreements and will now be monitored through the Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model. However, we appreciate that significant time has passed since the baseline was originally set. It is not our intention to re-set this baseline, but we do expect the places allocated to you through this scheme to be used in accordance with this guidance and for both the universities and colleges benefiting from these places to make a commitment to articulation beyond these places.

Collaboration and partnership

14. Universities and colleges should work in partnership to decide which articulation routes will be supported by these funded places. If college partners have articulation places from more than one university partner, effort should be made to coordinate planning and development to ensure consistency in the experience of learners, and efficiencies and consistencies in marketing, recruitment, guidance and transition support, and reporting. The university and college partnership must collaborate to ensure both the HNQ course and degree course are appropriately mapped together to ease transition for articulating students.
15. Universities and colleges should work together to agree marketing of routes and published guarantees. The marketing must make explicit that students will be on a university route whilst at college and will be entitled to enter the later stages of the degree if they satisfactorily complete their HN studies and meet the published course-level requirements (such as graded units conditions, etc.) at the college.
16. Universities and colleges must co-ordinate all information, advice and guidance (IAG) for the students who declare an interest in using the articulation route to the degree programme. IAG should include, but not be limited to, matters such as the structure of the route and the benefits of the Associate Scheme for students (it is our expectation that universities use any funding retained for this model to provide an enhanced experience for students) such as student financial, mental health and wellbeing and academic support.

Making changes to pre-existing arrangements

17. Should the university decide to make changes to the degree courses being offered through these places that would impact on their articulation arrangements, the university and college should discuss the implications of this before a final decision is taken by the university.
18. The university must ensure that the college, current and potential students are given sufficient notice to transition and plan, should the university decide to change

partnerships. Any such decision should be provided to the college in writing and the Outcome Manager should be informed.

Pre-entry

19. Places provided using this scheme must provide guaranteed articulation to the student where the 1st and/or 2nd years of a degree programme are delivered in a college, with guaranteed progression on successful completion into years 2 and/or 3 of the degree at a university. This type of programme fully utilises the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and is considered to be the most robust in terms of guarantees. It is also straightforward to understand from the student point of view and provides multiple exit and entry points for the students. Importantly, for the student, this model provides movement with a cohort, enabling peer support, which should aid retention in years 3 and 4.
20. Entry and progression criteria must be made clear to the student in their acceptance offer, with any conditions on graded units and other entry requirements being explicit and communicated to the student through marketing and recruitment. It is our expectation that this model provides multiple exit points and qualifications.
21. An articulation agreement should be drawn up between the university and college partnership outlining the subjects that are included in both institutions in the agreement, the number of guaranteed places available and any entry requirements for the degree.
22. The agreement should also include what benefits the student will receive under Associate Student status and any learning and teaching support the university will provide.

Entry to the course

Student recruitment

23. Recruitment should be to a guaranteed place, subject to any conditions outlined in the offer of a place, on a degree course at the university. **It is recognised that for initial entry, applications may be made through the college process**, but we would also encourage models where the student applies through UCAS for a place on the degree programme from year 1. The university and college partners are expected to work in close partnership to co-ordinate recruitment activities, and the application and recruitment process must be clear to students.

Recording articulating students

24. While a student is studying at college, they should be recorded in the HESA returns as having 100% of their course year being taught by the college. They should also be included in the college's Further Education Statistics (FES) returns as non-fundable students in the FES records.

Student experience

Associate Students

25. Associate Student status must be available to students studying an HNQ as part of this scheme. This means the student should be a student of both institutions and be aware that they have guaranteed progression onto a degree (subject to any criteria laid out in their offer of a place). This status should enable the student to become familiar with university life prior to entering the campus. Benefits should include (but are not necessarily restricted to):
 - Ongoing communication with the university whilst attending HNQ at college, including information, advice and guidance relating to university life and study;
 - Access to facilities such as library, gym, union, etc. while still at college; and
 - Provision of information on intended degree course requirements (meetings with potential lecturers/tutors, if possible) as part of the planned and guaranteed articulation place.
26. Where possible, institutions within the same region should share their individual Associate Student status guidelines to enable potential alignment, thereby making it a more equitable process for the students who may choose to progress to a neighbouring university.

Access to student support funds

27. Students will be able to apply for student support funding (HE Discretionary and Childcare) at the college as normal¹. Under this scheme, students studying for their HNQ as part of a guaranteed articulation place will not be eligible to also apply for University Discretionary funds. Upon articulation to the degree and studying at university, these funds will then be open to them.

Deferment of guaranteed articulation place to degree programme

28. There should be some scope for a student who successfully completes an HNQ to defer entry to the later stages of the degree programme at the university. A student should not be returned in the HESA records as having left until the student has indicated that he or she is not continuing with their degree studies. For deferment, the onus is on the student to request this.
29. In all other circumstances where places are not filled by college entrants, the default position should be for the university to fill the place with another articulating student from a college.

¹ Please note that responsibility for FE student support will transfer from SFC to SAAS from AY 2026-27.

Assurance processes

Recruitment, retention and attainment of students

30. The partnership is expected to take joint responsibility for the recruitment, support, retention and attainment of students throughout the articulation route. Where existing resources and measures are already in place to maximise retention, these should be applied to students on articulation routes as well – at both college and university. SFC will monitor compliance with the scheme.
31. The HESA records will indicate which students chose to exit with an HNC or HND. A university will not be penalised for this. If students do drop out early, the place should be offered to another articulating student.

Quality assurance of provision

32. The college is responsible for the quality assurance of the provision they deliver, with oversight from the appropriate awarding body (Scottish Qualifications Authority in the case of HN awards) and SFC through Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF), which provides assurance on the High Quality Learning and Teaching outcome of SFC's Outcome Framework and Assurance Model (OFAM). As part of the TQEF, the Quality Assurance Agency is responsible for undertaking periodic Tertiary Quality External Review (TQER) of both universities and colleges, and as part of this will consider the assurance and enhancement of all collaborative activity.
33. The partnership is responsible for ensuring the curriculum from HNQ to degree aligns effectively and provides a smooth academic transition from college to university utilising existing internal quality procedures.

Consequences for universities not providing articulation places for qualified HNQ students

34. If universities are awarded additional guaranteed places for articulating students and then subsequently fail to deliver the place or change the degree programme, thus creating a curriculum mismatch between the HNQ and the degree, they will be subject to clawback of the number of places they have failed to deliver.
35. It is expected that the partnership model and expectations around the student experience (outlined above) will enable the university to plan which students will and will not progress onto the degree, thus enabling the university to offer unfilled places to other articulation students.

Annex

Additional Funded Student Places for Articulation

Institution	Subject Price Group / Funded Places						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	(FTE)	(FTE)	(FTE)	(FTE)	(FTE)	(FTE)	
Aberdeen, University of	-	-	35.0	-	-	-	35.0
Abertay University	-	-	72.9	50.9	15.0	21.2	160.0
Dundee, University of	-	-	96.0	96.0	-	8.0	200.0
Edinburgh Napier University	-	-	216.0	212.0	-	-	428.0
Edinburgh, University of	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glasgow Caledonian University	-	80.0	80.0	80.0	80.0	308.0	628.0
Glasgow School of Art	-	-	86.0	-	-	-	86.0
Glasgow, University of	-	-	-	-	-	44.0	44.0
Heriot-Watt University	-	-	139.4	19.9	-	79.7	239.0
Highlands & Islands, University of the	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Open University in Scotland	-	3.6	80.4	20.4	31.6	104.0	240.0
Queen Margaret University	-	-	32.5	113.2	12.1	117.2	275.0
Robert Gordon University	-	-	144.4	-	-	155.6	300.0
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SRUC	-	-	200.0	-	-	-	200.0
St Andrews, University of	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Stirling, University of	-	-	160.0	128.0	64.0	60.0	412.0
Strathclyde, University of	-	201.0	201.0	-	-	-	402.0
West of Scotland, University of the	-	-	60.0	260.0	128.0	352.0	800.0
Total	-	284.6	1,603.6	980.4	330.7	1,249.7	4,449.0