



Consultation on the Report on Widening Access



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Summary: This document seeks to get feedback and get views on our plans for changes to the Report on Widening Access publication.

FAO: Principals / Chairs / Finance Directors / Board Secretaries of Scotland's colleges and universities and the general public.

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Consultation on the Report on Widening Access

Introduction

1. This consultation seeks feedback on the [Report on Widening Access](#) (RoWA), for SFC to understand which elements readers find most valuable, what they would like to see improved or added, and what parts you find less useful.
2. This consultation also seeks feedback on proposed changes for the upcoming publication.
3. The outcomes of this consultation will inform the next edition of the publication and beyond. The next Report on Widening Access is due to be published in the summer of 2026 and focus on study in the 2024-25 academic year.
4. We welcome comments from all stakeholders and anyone with an interest in widening access reporting for the tertiary education sector in Scotland. Our consultation period will run from **9 February 2026** to **4 May 2026**. Responses should be supplied by completing the [online form](#).

About the Report on Widening Access (RoWA)

5. The report presents statistics about Scottish-domiciled students across a range of widening access groups, including SIMD domicile, sex, ethnicity, disability, care experience and age, at the sector level for colleges and universities in Scotland. These breakdowns cover entrants, qualifiers, university retention rates, college student outcomes, graduate outcomes destinations, college leaver destinations, and university staffing. The university data is collected in HESA returns by Jisc, including graduate outcomes survey data. College sector data is collected by SFC via the Further Education Statistics (FES) return and College Leaver Destinations (CLD) return.
6. The publication also reports figures relating to the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) targets and receives strong sector, stakeholder and press interest for this reason. More details on the background to the CoWA targets are provided below:
 1. In September 2015, the then First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP, outlined a commitment that a child born today in one of our most deprived communities should have no lesser chance of entering higher education than a child born in one of our least deprived, and a long-term goal that 20% of university entrants come from the most disadvantaged 20% of society.
 2. This led to a Commission on Widening Access being set up to identify how to deliver that remit. One of the outcomes of this Commission was that the Scottish Government and SFC implement a set of targets to drive forward the delivery of equal access in Scotland including a commitment that by 2030, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent 20% of entrants to higher

education and that equality of access should be seen in both the college sector and the university sector.

Why are we consulting on this now?

7. The RoWA publication has not been reviewed for several years. The last formal consultation took place in 2017 after the Commission was set up in 2015. In 2019, an informal call for feedback was issued to stakeholder groups. Since then, the data needs of the sector have evolved. A consultation gives SFC the opportunity to make substantive improvements to the publication whilst ensuring it meets the needs of key stakeholders.
8. More sophisticated data reporting tools are now available which can help readers to explore and understand the statistics. Over time we intend to replace the publication's Excel background tables with an interactive Power BI dashboard, which will be published alongside the main report. This will enable readers to navigate the data much more quickly and easily for various student groups, while minimising duplication of charts and tables.

What are we **not** consulting on?

9. This consultation is focused on what and how data is presented in the RoWA. The following are out of scope of this consultation:
 1. Changing the CoWA targets or its policies.
 2. How we measure or define articulation for reporting purposes. Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland are currently running a consultation on revising these definitions. The outcomes from this will be reviewed as part of the consultation for SFC's new 'student journeys' publication.
 3. Scottish Government are investigating development of a Unique Learner Number and identifying students who have been receipt of free school meals. These are out of scope for this consultation.

What changes are we seeking feedback on?

10. The following table provides a set of proposed changes that we are looking for feedback on and could make for the upcoming publication:

Item	Area	Proposed changes	Reason
A	Articulation	Removing articulation reporting from the RoWA and publishing this separately as part of a new 'student journeys' publication. We plan to	This would enable SFC to publish the RoWA earlier in the year and stop articulation data being published as an addendum, which was required

		launch a separate consultation for this new publication later in 2026.	for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 publications. It would also enable the articulation data to have a stronger focus.
B	Background tables	Over time, the information currently in the Background Tables data could be published via an interactive Power BI dashboard instead. This change would be made over several editions, to enable readers to adapt to the new presentation and become comfortable with the dashboard.	Allows readers to navigate and filter the data much more easily. Allows for more breakdowns, presentation options (charts and tables), and reduces table duplication.
C	University student data	Power BI dashboard to show Scottish-domiciled students at all undergraduate levels of study at university. Most background tables currently only show Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree (FTFD) and Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrant (SDUE) populations at university. The latter of which only includes HNC, HND, DipHE and CertHE at the 'other undergraduate' level. See Annex A for a breakdown of this data.	This could allow readers to see the total number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants and qualifiers across more breakdowns. Only CoWA Tables 1A and 3A, and Decile Table 1A currently show those on all undergraduate university study.
D	Part-time university students	More reporting on part-time students at university and adding a new part-time first degree (PTFD) measure. Consideration will be given to allow readers to toggle the inclusion of The Open University in Scotland (OUiS). See Annex B for further explanation and a data overview.	Stakeholders have expressed a desire for more reporting on part-time university students. The OUiS deliver the vast majority of part-time study, so the ability to focus on other provision is important for understanding sector diversity.
E	SIMD breakdowns	Allowing more disaggregation by SIMD decile.	SIMD quintile is currently provided in the RoWA, however there is demand to also show SIMD decile.

F	College students	Adding filters to include college students on courses less than 160 hours in duration.	These are currently excluded from many of the background tables (apart from CoWA Tables 1, 1A, 3 and 3A).
G	Widening access groups	More reporting on other widening access groups, such as estranged students and veteran status (service leavers).	There is demand for other widening access groups to be included.
H	HESA PI Table 2023-24	We suggest removing this from the background tables.	This table was introduced to supplement a table HESA table which is no longer published.
I	Background Table 12 (HESA Staff data)	We suggest removing this from the background tables. This will mean that university staff data is no longer included in the RoWA.	Removing duplication. HESA now publish this and other staff data in Table 4 , Table 5 and Table 27 .

Long term changes to reporting

11. At present, university retention figures are derived from a dataset which Jisc supply to SFC, on the same basis as the now deprecated UK Performance Indicators. This dataset allows SFC to calculate the number and proportion of university undergraduate entrants retained into the next academic session. This includes those who entered directly into year two or year three of a programme (for example via articulation) and were retained into the next year.¹
12. However, the dataset does not allow SFC to calculate retention rates beyond entrants continuing into year two. Retention beyond year two is important for understanding the longer-term study outcomes of widening access students.
13. SFC is currently developing a record matching process which will allow us to calculate these more advanced and longer-term retention measures. It will also enable SFC to produce the current retention metric in-house and remove our reliance on Jisc producing it for SFC, enabling us greater control of publication timelines.
14. We plan to continue to report retention using the Jisc non-continuation calculation in our next RoWA publication, which is scheduled for release in summer 2026. However, we plan to, at some point, either fully or partially move retention reporting from the

¹ Students who qualify having entered university the year before are also counted as retained. This may include first degree qualifiers who transferred from a diploma course, or students who qualified with an 'other undergraduate' level qualification.

RoWA to a new 'student journeys' publication. This has provisionally been given verbal support from stakeholders in Education Analytical Services at Scottish Government and the Commissioner for Fair Access. We plan to run a separate consultation later in 2026 to get sector feedback on the content of this new publication.

15. We are working with Jisc to start collecting data on a contextual admissions flag in the HESA returns, potentially from the 2027-28 academic year. We plan to incorporate this reporting in the Report on Widening Access when that data becomes available. A separate briefing note will be sent to the sector on this in late January or early February 2026.

Feedback on other possible measures

16. The response form also contains questions looking to gauge feedback on:
 1. Limiting tables and chart time series to 10 years, with the exception of CoWA tables.
 2. Introducing disaggregation by undergraduate qualifications types, such as integrated masters, first degree with honours, Graduate Apprenticeship, HNC, etc.
 3. The level of interest in reporting degree outcome classifications (first, upper-second class, etc.)
 4. The level of interest in adding reporting on student remoteness and rurality as two separate entities.

General feedback from stakeholders

17. The RoWA has not been formally reviewed since 2017 after the Commission on Widening Access was set up in 2015. In late 2023 SFC undertook a review of its statistical publications to better understand how they can be modernised and streamlined for audiences. Following the review, SFC began publishing the main report of its statistical publications as HTML reports embedded in the SFC website instead of a PDF. In doing so, SFC drastically reduced the written length of its publications and introduced embedded charts and tables as interactive elements within the main report. However, aside from this change in publication format and reduction in length, the RoWA has been published in its current form for almost a decade, with the background tables largely unchanged during that time.
18. Since the 2017 review the sector's needs for widening access reporting have evolved. There has been a natural turnover of stakeholder staff working within widening access for tertiary education in Scotland, of whom may not have had a chance to give feedback on the publication. The consultation presents an opportunity for stakeholders to give input which will inform the development of the publication, some of whom may have had the opportunity to respond to previous consultations. It also allows SFC to better understand its readers' needs and learn what they value in the publication.
19. The response form therefore also asks readers the following general questions:

1. What do you value in the RoWA currently?
2. What parts of it would you like to see improved or enhanced?
3. Is there anything you would like to see added?
4. What parts of it do you find less useful or could be removed?

Annex A – Breakdown of university populations

20. The below table shows the breakdown of Scottish-domiciled university entrants covered by the Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree (FTFD) population, the Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants (SDUE) population, against the total population of Scottish-domiciled undergraduates.²

Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants 2023-24, population measure overview

Population measure	Level of study group Qualification aim	Full-time	Part-time
		FTFD	SDUE
	First Degree	32,810	5,625
	First degree with honours	27,010	5,080
	Ordinary (non-honours) first degree	3,785	485
	Integrated UG/PG taught masters	1,920	60
	First degree with honours at level H	100	
	Other Undergraduate	2,240	13,665
	Higher National Certificate (HNC)	1,610	445
	Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)	125	710
	Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)	110	440
	Higher National Diploma (HND)	330	95
	Credits at level C	30	5,355
	Credits at level H	5	2,550
	Credits at level I	25	2,460
	Certificate at level J		445
	Credits at level J	5	300
	Other qualification at level J		275
	Graduate diploma/certificate at level H	5	145
	Professional qualification at level H		85
	Certificate at level C		75
	Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) 4		65
	Professional qualification at level I for schoolteachers		65
	Other qualification at level C	5	45
	Other qualification at level I	5	35
	Graduate diploma/certificate at level I	5	25
	Other qualification at level H		25
	Professional qualification at level I		20
	Foundation degree		10
	Diploma at level J	5	
	Certificate at level H		5
	Diploma at level H		5
	Grand Total	35,055	19,290

Values of 1 to 7 are rounded to 5, with values greater than 7 rounded to the nearest 5.

² The full coding frame for each of these populations can be found in the Notes sheet of the Background Tables for the [2023-24 publication](#).

Annex B – The Open University in Scotland and part-time first degree

21. The below will be taken into consideration when presenting part-time first degree entrant data broken down by SIMD:
 1. The vast majority of part-time first degree (PTFD) entrants at university study at The Open University in Scotland (OUiS), at 81% in 2023-24.
 2. If looking at those from SIMD20 areas only, 84% of PTFD entrants study at OUiS.
 3. PTFD entrants from SIMD20 are more highly represented at OUiS than they are at non-OUiS institutions as a whole: 19.7% of these entrants at OUiS are from SIMD20, compared to 16.3% being from SIMD20 at non-OUiS institutions.
 4. This means that the inclusion or exclusion of OUiS in the PTFD population can have a large impact on statistics for widening access groups, such as SIMD20. For example, when including OUiS, 19.1% of PTFD entrants are from SIMD20, whereas when excluding OUiS, this figure for SIMD20 drops to 16.3%.
 5. See table below:

Part-time first degree (PTFD) SIMD20 entrants by provider, 2023-24

Provider	SIMD20	Total known SIMD	% SIMD 20
Abertay University	5	5	
Edinburgh Napier University	5	50	10.0%
Glasgow Caledonian University	15	100	17.2%
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	5	15	38.5%
Robert Gordon University	10	100	8.2%
SRUC Scotland's Rural College		10	
The Open University in Scotland	900	4,575	19.7%
The University of Edinburgh		20	
University of Aberdeen	5	55	10.9%
University of Dundee	10	50	18.8%
University of Glasgow	20	80	25.6%
University of St Andrews	5	20	
University of Stirling	10	80	13.9%
University of Strathclyde	30	95	30.2%
University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)	30	275	10.6%
University of the West of Scotland	30	105	28.6%
Grand Total	1,075	5,620	19.1%

Values of 1 to 7 are rounded to 5, with values greater than 7 rounded to the nearest 5. Percentages are calculated from unrounded values.

Annex C – Response form

Section 1 – Respondent information

Responses should be supplied by completing the [online form](#).

Please note that we are subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and would, therefore, have to consider any request under the Act for information relating to responses made to this consultation exercise. We will make all responses available publicly. If you ask for your response not to be published. You should clearly mark any parts of your response that you wish to be treated as confidential, subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

Name:	
Organisation:	
Position/job title:	
Does your response represent the views of a specific organisation or are you writing in an individual capacity?	

Section 2 – General feedback

What do you value in the RoWA currently?
Are there any parts you would like to see improved or enhanced?

Is there anything you would like to see added?

Are there any parts of the RoWA you find less useful or could be removed?

Section 3 - Changes we are proposing to make for the upcoming 2024-25 publication onwards

Do you support proposal A?

Removing articulation reporting from the RoWA and publish this separately as part of a new 'student journeys' publication (we plan to launch a separate consultation on this later in 2026)?

Yes No Not sure

Further comments on proposal A (optional):

Do you support proposal B?

Over time, moving the information from the background tables into an interactive Power BI dashboard.

Yes No Not sure

Further comments on proposal B (optional):

Do you support proposal C?

To include data showing Scottish-domiciled students at all undergraduate levels of study at university, in addition to the Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree (FTFD) or Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants (SDUE) populations. The latter only includes HNC, HND, DipHE and CertHE at the 'other undergraduate' level. Annex A contains a breakdown of this data.

Yes No Not sure

Further comments on proposal C (optional):

Do you support proposal D?

Including more reporting on part-time students at university and adding a new part-time first degree (PTFD) measure.

Yes No Not sure

Further comments on proposal D (optional):

Do you support proposal E?

Allowing more disaggregation by SIMD decile. At present, almost all reporting is at the SIMD quintile level.

Yes No Not sure

Further comments on proposal E (optional):

Do you support proposal F?

Adding filters to include college students on courses less than 160 hours in duration.

Yes No Not sure

Further comments on proposal F (optional):

Do you support proposal G?

Adding reporting on other widening access groups, such as estranged students and veteran status (service leavers).

Yes No Not sure

Further comments on proposal G (optional):

Do you support proposal H?

Removing HESA PI Table 2023-24 from the background tables.

Yes No Not sure

Further comments on proposal H (optional):

Do you support proposal I?

Removing Background Table 12 (HESA Staff data)

Yes No Not sure

Further comments on proposal I (optional):

Section 4 – Gauging interest in other potential changes**Do you agree/disagree with the keeping all charts and tables limited to a 10-year time series, with the exception of CoWA tables?**

Yes No Not sure

Please add your reasoning below (optional):

To what extent would you be interested in seeing additional disaggregation by undergraduate qualification types, such as integrated masters, first degree with honours, Graduate Apprenticeship, HNC, etc.

Very interested Interested Neither interested nor disinterested Not interested
Not sure

To what extent would you like to see statistics added for degree classification outcome (first class, upper-second class, etc.)

Very interested Interested Neither interested nor disinterested Not interested
Not sure

To what extent would you be interested in seeing statistics added on rurality and remoteness?

Very interested Interested Neither interested nor disinterested Not interested
Not sure

Please let us know if you have any further comments or concerns about these proposed changes

Section 5 – Final question

Are there any other comments you would like to make?