
NSP Core Eligibility, Targeting and Selection Taskforce

Terms of Reference

Background

The National Schools Programme (NSP) Core Eligibility, Targeting and Selection Taskforce (hereafter ‘the Taskforce’) will be a collaborative, short-life working group responsible for designing and proposing a consistent national approach to core eligibility criteria, pupil targeting and selection methodology for the NSP.

The establishment of this Taskforce responds directly to [Recommendation 6 of the 2024 NSP Review](#), which highlighted the need to address long-standing inconsistencies in eligibility markers, regional variation, and challenges relating to teacher-led nomination. The Taskforce’s work will underpin the development of a coherent national approach to eligibility, targeting and selection.

The Taskforce will be led by SFC staff and will provide progress reports, draft proposals and final recommendations to the NSP Strategic Advisory Group and the SFC NSP Coordinator for guidance, feedback and endorsement. Formal approval of the Taskforce’s proposals will be sought from the SFC Senior Management Team (SMT), with implementation taking place in line with the wider review timelines (2025-2028).

Where appropriate, the Taskforce will engage with external stakeholders including NSP delivery partners.

The Taskforce Chair is responsible for leading the meeting to reach decisions. Decisions of the Taskforce will normally be made on the basis of agreement by consensus, but where the Taskforce Chair believes it to be in the interest of the progress of a debate, or where it is proposed and seconded by two members present, a vote may be recorded by show of hands. Should a vote be required, this will be via a simple majority, with the Taskforce Chair having the deciding vote if an even number of members are present.

Purpose

The main purpose of the Taskforce is to establish clear national eligibility criteria for the NSP using reliable indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage and underrepresentation. This will be the main focus of the Taskforce’s work, with all other activities supporting this central aim.

Secondary Purposes:

- Provide national guidance to support consistent identification of eligible pupils. The Taskforce will develop practical, user-friendly guidance that explains how eligibility

should be promoted, understood and applied. Teachers will remain the primary route for identifying eligible pupils, and the Taskforce will work to improve the support they receive through clearer information, better awareness-raising and tools that help them recognise eligible pupils and direct them to appropriate opportunities.

- Create a fair and transparent selection methodology for use when capacity is limited, ensuring parity across regions and reducing reliance on variable local interpretations. This will include setting up ways for programmes to report where they face capacity pressures or unmet demand.

This information will help the NSP to:

- understand where eligible pupils cannot currently be supported,
- direct resources to the areas of greatest need, and
- build the case for additional funding where necessary.
- Improve national consistency by ensuring that eligibility criteria link directly to a clear and recognisable minimum offer for all eligible pupils. This alignment will also strengthen evaluation and monitoring by creating a shared national definition of “NSP Pupil”, supporting more reliable and comparable evidence of reach, equity and impact across regions.

Remit

Agree Core National Eligibility Criteria

- Review the current eligibility markers used across NSP delivery partners (21 markers identified in the 2024 review).
- Define a nationally agreed core set of mandatory criteria.
- Determine additional optional indicators to support regional flexibility.
- Produce clear definitions and guidance to ensure consistent implementation across all regions.

Develop Guidance for a National Targeting Approach

- Recommend how existing datasets (SIMD, FSM, EMA, SDS, UCAS, SEEMiS, and local authority data) can be used to identify or confirm eligible pupils.
- Explore mechanisms for secure and consistent data sharing, to enhance coordination across NSP activities and complement teacher nomination.

Develop a National Targeting Approach

- Establish transparent principles for prioritising pupils when demand exceeds capacity.

- Provide guidance on teacher nomination, self-referral, and cross-regional participation.
- Clarify how portability will be supported so that pupils are recognised across higher education institutions, regions, and progression pathways.

Contribute to a Baseline National Offer

- Collaborate with other groups to align eligibility criteria with a minimum baseline NSP offer, ensuring equitable access to core programme experiences.
- Consider supply and demand issues, drawing on programme reporting to understand where demand cannot be met.

Meeting Frequency

The Taskforce will meet approximately once every month, or as appropriate to fulfil their objectives.

Meetings will be held in person at the SFC offices in Edinburgh or, on a case-by-case basis at another location determined by the Taskforce, or virtually. In some cases, a hybrid option may be available, but members should be prepared to travel to in person workshops when necessary. SFC will reimburse the cost of travel in such cases.

Reporting

The Taskforce will report regularly to the NSP Strategic Advisory Group.

The Chair/ Co-Chairs will guide discussions, oversee drafting, and ensure progress.

Quorum

The quorum for a meeting will be one more than half the members. At least 50% of the quorum should consist of external members for a Taskforce meeting to proceed. However, when not quorate, the members present may decide to proceed with a meeting at which items on the agenda are considered and any recommendations reached are put to the next meeting for decision, if time allows.

Membership

The Taskforce will be composed of up to 14 members from SFC and external partners. Members of the Taskforce are not appointed as representatives of individual organisations. The role of chair will be confirmed at the first meeting of the taskforce.

Category	Role	Summary of Contribution
SFC Members	NSP Coordinator	Oversees the work of the Taskforce, ensuring coordinated progress and alignment with the deadlines, milestones and expectations set out in the NSP Review implementation plan.
	NSP Policy Officer and Secretariat	Drafting, coordination and policy support including specialist knowledge of regional variation and understanding of evidence needs
	SFC Data Specialist*	Analytical insight on data feasibility, indicator reliability and modelling
	SFC Evaluation and Impact Specialist*	Advises on alignment with national monitoring and evaluation requirements
Scottish Government Members	Scottish Government Data and Research Specialists	Expertise on national pupil level data including FSM, SCP and SIMD, research insight on socioeconomic indicators and alignment with equalities and wellbeing policy and legislative requirements
SAAS / UCAS Expertise	Financial Eligibility Evidence Specialist	Advises on verification of low-income indicators, financial evidence processes and interaction with UCAS contextual flags
University Sector Members	University Widening Access Lead (Institution A)	Institutional experience of contextual admissions and school to HE transitions and/or institutional insight including regional variation and progression pathways
	University Widening Access Lead (Institution B)	
NSP Delivery Partners	SHEP Programme Representative	Expertise on school-facing outreach and pupil identification practice
	AHDP Reach Programme Representative	Expertise in senior phase outreach and subject specific progression pathways

Category	Role	Summary of Contribution
	AHDP ACES Programme Representative	Expertise into creative industries pathways, portfolio-based progression and subject specific access challenges
School Sector	School Sector Representative	Frontline insight on teacher nomination, data access and operational feasibility within schools

*participation may be provided on a periodic basis, depending on availability and operational priorities.

In addition, other members of SFC’s staff may attend meetings as required for agenda items for which they are presenting information, to be available to respond to questions on matters arising from papers, to hear the debate where the Group’s discussion will inform their work, or as part of their ongoing professional development.

The Taskforce will provide updates to, and engage with, all NSP partners throughout the development of the national approach to eligibility, targeting and selection.

The Taskforce may invite SFC or external members to attend meetings as required for agenda items for which they are presenting information, or to provide feedback or expert advice.

Duration

The anticipated duration of the Taskforce is one year, with the potential for extension should the Strategic Advisory Group or NSP Coordinator identify further objectives in line with responding to the recommendations of the 2024 NSP Review.

Agenda and Papers

Agenda and papers, where relevant, will be circulated at least a week in advance of meetings. Members who are unable to attend may submit written feedback in advance to be raised by the Chair and recorded in the minutes.

Outputs

The final output of this project will be a set of national proposals for core eligibility criteria, pupil targeting, and selection methodology, accompanied by supporting guidance and implementation resources. These proposals will be submitted to the NSP Strategic Advisory Group for review and to the SFC NSP team for final approval. Implementation timelines will be determined by the Strategic Advisory Group, in line with the wider Review timescales (2025-2028).

The detailed content of these proposals will be developed collaboratively by the project lead and the Taskforce, drawing on the NSP Review's findings, regional practice, and evidence relating to socioeconomic disadvantage. The proposals will include elements such as:

- A nationally consistent set of core eligibility criteria, based on verifiable indicators of disadvantage and underrepresentation.
- A national pupil-targeting methodology, outlining how individual and school-level data should be used to identify eligible pupils.
- A transparent selection methodology, including principles for prioritisation where demand exceeds capacity, and guidance for teacher nomination and self-referral.
- Supporting operational guidance, to enable implementation across regions with differing contexts, demographics and delivery models.

In developing these proposals, the project lead and Taskforce should also consider and recommend practical ways to address challenges identified in the review, including inconsistent access to data, variation in current eligibility markers, and barriers to data sharing. This may include suggestions for data-sharing arrangements or improved working practices to support fair and consistent targeting and selection.

The Taskforce will report progress to the NSP Strategic Advisory Group through interim updates as elements of the national approach are developed, and members may be invited to attend meetings to present and discuss emerging recommendations.

Contact Information

For any queries regarding this document or the work of the Taskforce, please contact:

- Erica Russell-Hensens, Deputy Director, Student Interests, Access & Quality
(erussellhensens@sfc.ac.uk)

These Terms of Reference have been reviewed and approved by the above representatives.

Version: 1.0 Date of Issue 09 February 2026