



## Report on Widening Access 2024-25 Annex



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## Report on Widening Access 2024-25 Annex

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**Summary:** This document provides context and methodological information pertaining to the Report on Widening Access 2024-25 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.

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## Annex B – SFC Definition of Care Experience

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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, including adopted children who were previously looked-after. 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. 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).<sup>1</sup>
  - 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 2024-25](#). 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](#) publication, the college entrants shown include only those students who completed 4 or more Credits.<sup>2</sup> 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 counted in the same way as courses with much longer durations.

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

<sup>2</sup> 1 credit equates to 40 notional hours of learning.

## 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 2024-25 were published on 27 May 2026 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. Universities and colleges can interact with the data via a dashboard by contacting SFC and registering for the National Articulation Database, on completion of a Data Sharing Agreement.
19. For this publication, articulation measures for 2024-25 onwards are calculated using a new student matching methodology, replacing the previous matching approach. The new methodology improves the accuracy of linking student records across college and

university study by using an enhanced process developed from ten years of learner data across the FES and HESA returns.

20. As a consequence of the new approach, a small proportion of students with very long periods between college and university study (ten years or more) can no longer be matched, resulting in a very slight reduction in matched records in 2024-25. The improved matching identifies further students, so this reduction is balanced by improved identification over the ten-year period. In practice, this only affects Background Table 14d since this table does not use the Main Articulation Measure (MAM) or Wider Articulation Measure (WAM) indicators which limit to learners progressing within three years of qualifying from college. Background Tables 14a, 14b and 14c use the WAM and MAM indicators, and therefore are unaffected by the loss of matches associated with longer study gaps.
21. Where comparisons are made with previously published figures, users should be aware that any differences may reflect both underlying changes in student behaviour and the improved matching methodology.
22. Information on the methodology applied in the building of the National Articulation Database can be found in the accompanying annex to this report.

## University Graduate Outcomes

23. 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.
24. Those in employment include those employed in locations outside of Scotland.

## Data specifics

25. 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.
26. 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 1,275 Associate Students in 2024-25 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.
27. 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 2024-25, SIMD2020 is used.<sup>3</sup>

28. The disability categories for college students in background tables 5, 6 and 11 are shown under shortened titles. The full disability titles, giving examples of the specific conditions in each group are below:
- Long-term illness, disease or condition (a condition, not listed above, that you may have for life, which may be managed with treatment or medication).
  - Mental health condition (a condition that affects your emotional, physical and mental wellbeing).
  - Physical disability (a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, lifting or carrying).
  - Developmental disorder (a condition that you have had since childhood which affects motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills, and speech and language).
  - Learning difficulty (a specific learning condition that affects the way you learn and process information).
  - Learning disability (a condition that you have had since childhood that affects the way you learn, understand information and communicate).
  - Blindness or partial sight loss.
  - Deafness or partial hearing loss.
  - Full or partial loss of voice or difficulty speaking (a condition that requires you to use equipment to speak).
  - Two or more impairments/disabling medical conditions.
29. 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.
30. 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.

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

31. 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

32. 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:

- 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 from 2022-23, following EHRC guidance:

- Marital status<sup>4</sup>.

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

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<sup>4</sup> College sector only – HESA do not collect marital status for the university sector

## Metadata table

| Metadata Indicator               | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Publication Title                | Report on Widening Access, 2024-25                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Description                      | Includes up to twelve 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 2024-25 (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 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                  | College student and outcomes data: March 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                                  | HEI student data: March 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                  | College leaver destinations data: November 2025                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                  | HEI retention data: May 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Release date                     | Articulation data: July 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                  | 06 August 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Frequency                        | Annual                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Timeframe of data and timeliness | Trend data are presented over various time periods between 2013-14 and 2024-25, as appropriate.                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

| Metadata Indicator  | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                     | <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>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Continuity of data  | <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 <a href="#">SIMD2016</a> file for socio-economic analysis up to 2020-21, and the <a href="#">SIMD2020</a> file for 2021-22 and 2024-25.</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><b>Recalculation of college successful completion rates</b></p> <p>As part of the production of these statistics, extensive data quality checks were carried out on the 2024-25 data as well as earlier years' data included in the publication, which led to the reclassification of a small number of records per academic year. This means some percentages for earlier academic years may not exactly match what was published last year. The impact of these changes is minimal and should not have significant impacts on the overall successful completion rates.</p> <p><b>Change of funding qualifying date for college students in 2023-24</b></p> <p>The 2023-24 academic year saw the funding qualifying date for college students on courses lasting more than 20 weeks moved to earlier in the academic year. This change is still active for 2024-25 and means that more students are eligible for inclusion in our analysis, particularly SIMD20, care experienced and disabled students as these are more likely to</p> |

| Metadata Indicator                     | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                        | <p>withdraw early.<sup>[2]</sup> The Report on Widening Access continues to only consider college students that were studying after the funding qualifying date.</p> <p><b>Articulation's new student matching methodology</b></p> <p>Articulation measures for 2024-25 onwards are calculated using a new student matching methodology, replacing the previous matching approach. The new methodology improves the accuracy of linking student records across college and university study by using an enhanced process developed from ten years of learner data across the FES and HESA returns. As a consequence of the new approach, a small proportion of students with very long periods between college and university study (ten years or more) can no longer be matched, resulting in a very slight reduction in matched records in 2024-25. The improved matching identifies further students, so this reduction is balanced by improved identification over the ten-year period. In practice, this only affects Background Table 14d since this table does not use the Main Articulation Measure (MAM) or Wider Articulation Measure (WAM) indicators which limit to learners progressing within three years of qualifying from college. Background Tables 14a, 14b and 14c use the WAM and MAM indicators, and therefore are unaffected by the loss of matches associated with longer study gaps.</p> <p>Where comparisons are made with previously published figures, users should be aware that any differences may reflect both underlying changes in student behaviour and the improved matching methodology.</p> <p><b>Recalculation of college successful completion rates</b></p> <p>As part of the production of these statistics, extensive data quality checks were carried out on the 2024-25 data as well as earlier years' data included in the publication, which led to the reclassification of a small number of records per academic year. This means some percentages for earlier academic years may not exactly match what was published last year. The</p> |
| Revisions relevant to this publication |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |



| Metadata Indicator                         | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                            | impact of these changes is minimal and should not have significant impacts on the overall successful completion rates.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 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 <a href="#">Statistical Release Higher Education Student Data</a> 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 <a href="#">accessibility of the website</a> .                                                                                                                                                         |
| 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 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                                                      |

| Metadata Indicator                 | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                    | 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 <a href="#">Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics</a> undertaken in 2013 by UK Statistics Authority, as part of Assessment Report 255. |
| Last published                     | 30/07/2025                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Next published                     | 2027 – TBC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 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.                                                                                                                                    |
| Help email                         | <a href="mailto:datarequests@sfc.ac.uk">datarequests@sfc.ac.uk</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |