



Report on Widening Access Consultation Report



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

SFC Corporate Publication

Reference: SFC/CP/06/2026

Issue date: 16/07/2026

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Summary:	This document confirms plans for changes to our Report on Widening Access publication following public consultation.
FAO:	Principals / Chairs / Finance Directors / Board Secretaries of Scotland's colleges and universities and the general public.
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Table of Contents

Changes to Scottish Funding Council’s Report on Widening Access.....	3
Introduction.....	3
About the consultation.....	3
Important update on the upcoming 2024-25 publication	4
Summary of responses to proposals and changes to the 2024-25 publication onwards	5
Summary of responses to proposals and changes to the 2025-26 publication onwards	6
Summary of general feedback questions	10
What do you value in the Report on Widening Access currently?	10
What parts of it would you like to see improved or enhanced?	11
Is there anything you would like to see added?	13
What parts of it do you find less useful or could be removed?	13
Annex A	14

Changes to Scottish Funding Council's Report on Widening Access

Introduction

1. This document confirms plans for changes to our Report on Widening Access (RoWA) publication, following a public consultation.¹ We received comments from stakeholders during the consultation period 9 February 2026 to 4 May 2026.
2. Respondents were asked to provide general feedback on the publication and to provide their views on more than a dozen proposed changes put forward by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).
3. All proposed changes were positively received and will be implemented in future editions of the Report.

About the consultation

4. This was a public consultation in which stakeholders were invited to share their feedback on nine proposals related to the published statistics.
5. Respondents were also invited to share their feedback on a further four questions related to potential future developments to the publication, to help gauge levels of interest in further additions for SFC to explore.
6. Respondents were also invited to share general feedback on the current publication. SFC invited comments on what they value in the publication, any parts they would like to see improved or enhanced, and anything they would like to see added or removed.
7. Responses were submitted via an online form provided on the SFC website. A total of 31 responses were received, 29 via the form and two were received via email. Of these, 15 responses were from universities, eight were from colleges, six were from other organisations within the sector, one was from a specialist institution (Scotland's Rural College), and one was from an internal team at SFC. A full list of respondents is provided in [Annex A](#).
8. This document provides a summary of the responses received and confirms the decisions made by SFC about the future publication of the statistics.

¹ The original consultation can be found here: [Consultation on the Report on Widening Access – Scottish Funding Council](#)

Important update on the upcoming 2024-25 publication

9. The below summary outlines our plans for the upcoming 2024-25 publication being published on 28 July 2026:
 - The Report on Widening Access 2024-25 will be published largely in line with recent publications, with only minor changes made to the main report and Excel background tables. This ensures important data is released to stakeholders in a timely manner.
 - SFC will seek feedback on a 2024-25 Power BI dashboard in beta version in late 2026 to early 2027. This schedule will enable SFC to:
 - Fully incorporate feedback and proposed changes arising from the consultation.
 - Complete development of a secure dashboard hosting service.
 - Consider stakeholder feedback ahead of publishing the dashboard concurrently with the 2025-26 Report in 2027.
 - The 2025-26 Report will then be published with a Power BI dashboard alongside the main report, as detailed in the following sections.

Summary of responses to proposals and changes to the 2024-25 publication onwards

10. The following table summarises the responses to each proposed change SFC outlined in the consultation and the subsequent changes we will implement to the 2024-25 publication:

Item	Area ²	Summary of feedback and changes to be implemented
B	Publishing the background tables as a Power BI dashboard	We received strong positive support for introducing a dashboard. Users noted it would make the data much easier to navigate and interrogate to meet different needs. Users also noted it would reduce table duplication while aligning with publication standards in the sector. However, users emphasised the need to download the underlying data or background tables. Thus, users suggested adopting a 'phased transition' with both Excel and Power BI options available. A Power BI dashboard will be developed and added to the 2024-25 publication in late 2026 to early 2027. SFC will publish the background tables as normal for the 2024-25 Report. From 2025-26, SFC will continue publishing Excel background tables if we cannot provide data download functionality through the dashboard. See the section Important update on the upcoming 2024-25 publication above.
H	Removal of HESA PI Table 2023-24	We received unanimous agreement that this table can be removed. Feedback confirmed that this table is no longer necessary since the associated HESA benchmark is no longer published. This table will be removed from the 2024-25 background tables.
I	Removal of Background Table 12 (HESA Staff data)	We received widespread agreement that this table can be removed. Respondents noted that university staffing data is now more widely available from the HESA website and that staffing data is tangential to the RoWA's core student focus. This table will be removed from the 2024-25 background tables.

² An outline of the original proposed changes can be found in the consultation under the heading 'What changes are we seeking feedback on?': [Consultation on the Report on Widening Access – Scottish Funding Council](#)

Summary of responses to proposals and changes to the 2025-26 publication onwards

11. The following table summarises the responses to each proposed change SFC outlined in the consultation and the subsequent changes we will implement to the 2025-26 publication:

Item	Area ³	Summary of feedback and changes to be implemented
A	Removing articulation reporting from the RoWA and publishing this separately as part of a new 'student journeys' publication	Responses were mixed but on balance were supportive. Respondents were supportive if moving articulation reporting would allow the RoWA to be published earlier. Many supportive comments said articulation is currently not explored in enough detail. A dedicated publication could give it more focus, space to explore the data and provide contextual narrative. Those not in favour of moving articulation reporting argued it could weaken the overall picture by separating access, progression and pathways. Several comments framed articulation as central to widening access in Scotland, particularly for recognising the role of colleges, and argued removing it from RoWA risks diminishing articulation's perceived importance. SFC plans to publish articulation data in the 2024-25 RoWA this year as normal. SFC will continue developing the student journeys publication for launch and consider this feedback when deciding whether articulation reporting is moved entirely into the student journeys publication or whether it should continue to be published in the RoWA, once the scope of the student journey publication is more closely defined.
C	Expanding university student data	We received strongly positive support to expand university population coverage beyond Scottish-domiciled full-time first-degree entrants (FTFD) and Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants (SDUE) to include more reporting on Scottish-domiciled entrants to all undergraduate courses. This would include students on access courses, upskilling courses, Graduate Certificates and others, of which tend to be delivered part-time.⁴ The dashboard will allow for a non-filtered setting whereby all levels of undergraduate qualification are included.

³ An outline of the original proposed changes can be found in the consultation under the heading 'What changes are we seeking feedback on?': [Consultation on the Report on Widening Access – Scottish Funding Council](#)

⁴ See Annex A in the consultation for an overview of the qualification types included in each population metric: [Consultation on the Report on Widening Access – Scottish Funding Council](#)

Item	Area ³	Summary of feedback and changes to be implemented
D	More reporting on part-time university students	We received strong positive support to include more reporting on part-time students at university and to add a new Scottish-domiciled part-time first degree (PTFD) measure. The consultation also posed the question of whether the inclusion of The Open University in Scotland (OUIs) should be able to be toggled as included or excluded in PTFD since the vast majority of PTFD provision is delivered by OUIs.⁵ Respondents noted that it would not be equitable to enable readers to isolate only one institution when others are not. The dashboard will allow for more reporting on part-time university students and a new PTFD measure will be introduced as a selectable population. We will not include a toggle to allow PTFD selection by individual institution but will include a footnote highlighting OUIs deliver a significant proportion of PTFD in the sector.
E	Allowing more disaggregation by SIMD decile.	We received strong positive support to include more disaggregation by SIMD decile.⁶ Users highlight SIMD0-20 quintile should remain the focus as per the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) targets, but that decile adds further depth and nuance that can better reflect local recruitment patterns and variation within deprivation. One respondent said they were not supportive but did not offer any comments as to why. The dashboard will allow for SIMD breakdowns by decile.

⁵ See Annex B in the consultation for a breakdown of how Scottish-domiciled part-time first-degree entrants are spread across institutions: [Consultation on the Report on Widening Access – Scottish Funding Council](#)

⁶ Most breakdowns only include SIMD quintile.

Item	Area ³	Summary of feedback and changes to be implemented
F	College reporting to be expanded to include students on courses less than 160 hours in duration.	This received the most mixed response of all proposals. Users in favour noted it would remove 'blind spots' in reporting by providing recognition of short courses often used as a stepping stone for those returning to education and undertaking adult learning, and who are often from more deprived areas. Respondents caveated that filtering to include these students should be optional and not necessarily 'on' by default. Users also advised a minimum threshold to exclude very short training. Others pointed out short courses are often aimed at professional upskilling and therefore may not relate directly to widening access to education. The dashboard will allow for college students on courses less than 160 hours in duration to be included but only when explicitly set by the user. SFC will look at including incremental duration filters within the under 160 hours group to allow users to filter out shorter courses. Additional footnotes or explanation for these types of very short courses may be necessary.
G	More reporting on other widening access groups (estranged, service leavers, etc.)	This received very strong positive support. Respondents welcomed the RoWA reflecting a wider set of learners facing distinct barriers. Institutions are increasingly engaging with and supporting these groups, but they are not consistently visible in reporting. SFC will look to include breakdowns for other widening access indicators, for example estranged students, veterans (service leavers), carers, refugees/asylum seekers and British Sign Language users.

12. SFC also asked stakeholders to gauge their level of interest in other potential additions to the future publication:

Item	Area ⁷	Summary of feedback and changes to be implemented
1	Limiting tables and charts to a 10-year time series (excluding CoWA tables)	We received strong positive support. Those in favour noted 10 years is a 'standard' review horizon and helps improve comparability due to fewer methodological changes over time. Users viewed the exception for CoWA tables as logical. There was a single respondent disagreeing, noting that they often need to report further back than 10 years. However older publications will still be accessible on the website for those seeking to review historic years. SFC will adopt a 10-year time series for tables and visualisations. CoWA tables will be excepted from this.
2	Allowing additional disaggregation by undergraduate qualification type ⁸	All respondents were interested in adding this functionality. Better visibility of Graduate Apprenticeships and other work-based routes were noted as a particularly welcome addition to widening access reporting. Respondents also noted it would give a more 'whole system' picture of tertiary education and how they interact with widening access measures, such as SIMD0-20. SFC will introduce disaggregation by qualification type.
3	Including reporting on degree classification outcome (first, upper-second class, etc.)	This received more mixed feedback. Stakeholders noted that not all programmes have degree classifications, such as medicine and non-honours routes. It was also noted that care would need to be taken to control for factors which influence classification outcomes, such as mode of study and the higher and lower presence of widening access students in different subjects. SFC will continue to explore the feasibility of including reporting on degree classification outcome.

⁷ These other possible measures we solicited feedback on were listed under the heading 'Feedback on other possible measures' in the consultation: [Consultation on the Report on Widening Access – Scottish Funding Council](#)

⁸ Such as integrated masters, first degree with honours, Graduate Apprenticeship, HNC, etc. Not limited to university qualifications.

Item	Area ⁷	Summary of feedback and changes to be implemented
4	Including reporting on student remoteness and rurality as two separate entities	This received strong interest overall, with some uncertainty about definitions and purpose. There is a widespread view that SIMD does not fully capture rural barriers. Users noted rurality and remoteness is a meaningful lens for access and participation. Its inclusion would add balance to widening access discussions that are often SIMD-centric. Stakeholders stressed that establishing the right definitions is critical, with suggestions to use the Scottish Urban-Rural Classification. SFC will continue to explore the options available for reporting on rurality and remoteness.

Summary of general feedback questions

13. Respondents were also invited to share general feedback on the publication to-date. This helps SFC gather intelligence on the elements of the Report on Widening Access that are valued and should be retained, and any areas which could be improved or added that were not captured elsewhere in the consultation.

What do you value in the Report on Widening Access currently?

14. Respondents say the publication is a trusted, reliable and accurate source that people feel confident referencing. It is important that SFC maintains trust and accuracy in the RoWA as it developed following the consultation.
15. Stakeholders value the ability to benchmark institutions against other providers as well as seeing the Scottish sector-level context. One institution mentioned that this allows them to interpret their own figures and identify progress they are making. The institutional breakdowns in the CoWA tables will remain as the publication is developed.
16. Feedback also provided useful evidence that the publication is used widely across institutions and teams for various purposes, such as:
 - Internal planning and target-setting within institutions.
 - To inform sector policy discussions.
 - To support discussions with SFC under the Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model (OFAM).

17. One of the most consistent messages was the value of the RoWA providing longitudinal reporting. This supports strategic planning, senior leadership briefing, and avoiding overreaction to year-on-year volatility. Following feedback gauging interest in limiting reporting to a 10-year time series, SFC will limit tables and visualisations to 10 years with the exception of the CoWA tables, where a longitudinal view of more than a decade is vital to see progress before and after the launch of the CoWA targets in 2016.⁹
18. Respondents also value the RoWA providing coverage of students beyond entry. The inclusion of retention, university qualifiers, college student outcomes, graduate outcomes destinations and college leaver destinations measures broaden the widening access narrative from 'getting in' to 'getting through and beyond'. SFC is planning to launch a new student journeys publication later in 2026, which will examine journeys through and out of education in more detail. Decisions about which measures of student progress and outcomes remain in RoWA and which will be moved to the new publication will be made once the scope of the new publication is further refined.
19. Respondents frequently mentioned the value of breakdowns for widening access groups such as SIMD0-20, care experienced and disabled students, and the ability to compare these groups with the wider population. SFC will retain this ability when the publication is developed.
20. A distinctive strength people value is that the RoWA covers both colleges and universities plus articulation between the two, offering a tertiary system view. Articulation pathways were singled out as particularly important for some stakeholders, with a clear message that this should remain visible and not be deprioritised.
21. SFC also received positive feedback from respondents valuing the length of the main report for its brevity and use of charts and tables to highlight key trends quickly.

What parts of it would you like to see improved or enhanced?

22. A very strong theme from respondents was that the background tables are rich in data but hard to navigate, with users describing the formatting as dense and sometimes difficult to compare figures. Users also suggested improving navigation and findability of figures by using clearer headings and a thematic structure. SFC are keen to improve the publication in this area by launching a RoWA Power BI dashboard which will address many of these issues.
23. Multiple responses caveated that even with a dashboard, it is important to have simple download options so that teams can extract the data and share internally. We will carefully consider this feedback and continue publishing Excel tables if we cannot provide this functionality through the dashboard.

⁹ See 'A Blueprint for Fairness: Final Report of the Commission on Widening Access': <https://www.gov.scot/publications/blueprint-fairness-final-report-commission-widening-access/>

24. Respondents would also like to see more intersectionality across protected characteristics and SIMD. Currently the RoWA is mostly limited to single-factor breakdowns. For some respondents this was the highest priority for improvement. This is something SFC are also keen to address in the design of the upcoming Power BI dashboard. Dashboards are better suited to this sort of interactive analysis and data reporting than Excel tables.
25. Another strong recurring theme was the importance of highlighting the role of the college sector and keeping the 'tertiary' or 'whole journey' story central. Users mentioned their interest in seeing greater granularity of college student outcomes, articulation and college leavers destinations. We will carefully consider this feedback. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to signpost users to other publications for this information.
26. A recurring ask was for more clarity on student population definitions, for instance 'first degree student' and 'other undergraduate'. Users also wish for consistency of definitions between SFC and HESA where possible, with explanations and caveats of where they differ. Ongoing improvements to the publication have been made in this area in recent years, with population groups more fully explained and SFC aligning its definition of Scottish domiciled full-time first-degree entrants and qualifiers with that used by HESA in their Open Data reporting. Work will continue in this area as we develop the publication over the coming years.
27. There were many responses asking to strengthen university retention measures beyond those entering year 1 retained into year 2 of a first degree.¹⁰ Feedback also included more meaningful journey measures that recognise non-linear and flexible study paths such as pauses, part-time patterns and credit accumulation. Several also note that leaving before graduation can be a positive outcome for an individual (e.g. entering new employment), and that the narrative should better reflect that complexity. SFC is working towards launching a learner journeys publication later this year which will address some of these gaps in analysis. SFC have developed a new record matching algorithm which will enable us to better track students in their student journey. This will enable SFC to remove reliance on HESA's non-continuation calculation, which is where current retention statistics are derived from and are no longer published for the UK overall.

¹⁰ Articulating students entering directly into year 2 or 3 are captured in this data. This is because the retention metric captures those entering the first academic session and retained into their second academic session, regardless of what year of programme that might be. Students entering their first session and qualifying before the second are also counted in retention metrics.

28. Many highlighted the time lag between data collection and publication. SFC has developed a matching process so that it is no longer reliant on HESA producing the non-continuation calculation for us, which can lead to delays. Delays in receiving HESA data after the transition to Data Futures and the additional quality assurance checking that was required in developing the National Articulation Database (NAD) from this has caused delays in the past but should be less of an issue in future, especially if progression data are moved to the new student journeys publication.
29. Users also requested stronger narrative interpretation and contextual commentary. This is an area SFC has developed in recent years, with clearer 'so what' interpretation. There is a balance here between maintaining the brevity of the main report and providing full context and interpretation.

Is there anything you would like to see added?

30. Many respondents were keen to see data that highlights the role of colleges in widening access across entry, progression, and outcomes, not just university entrants. This is included in the RoWA but could be better signposted and further developed. There was also strong interest in college routes into university and to include articulation reporting beyond advance standing. Users also suggested clearer visibility of SWAP and other access routes.
31. Multiple responses asked for stronger 'pipeline' context incorporating school pupil attainment and comparator data. SFC does not currently hold school pupil or school leaver data. The development of the student journeys publication may provide a suitable avenue for exploring the addition of analysis on this topic.
32. Users also reported wanting to see more subject-level breakdowns cross-referenced with protected characteristics. This is currently provided in the RoWA using SIMD, ethnicity and disability for university students, but could be explored as part of the RoWA dashboard development.
33. Several respondents would like to see reporting on postgraduate taught students. This is not currently under consideration but may be incorporated in due course into the new student journeys publication.
34. There were also strong calls to report on Graduate Apprenticeship students and where possible, Modern Apprenticeship students. This is something SFC are keen to develop into the RoWA.

What parts of it do you find less useful or could be removed?

35. Most respondents would remove little or nothing. A strong through-line was that the RoWA is broadly valuable as-is, with several comments emphasising that the current data is 'very valuable' and should not be reduced in a way that harms accessibility or transparency.
36. The consultation proposed changes to remove the HESA PI Table and Background Table 12 (HESA Staff data) from the publication, which received strong support.

Annex A

37. Below is a list of respondents, the institution they responded from, and whether their response was given in an individual capacity or whether their response represented the views of a specific organisation.

Institution type	Institution name	Responding in an individual capacity or representing the views of a specific organisation
University	Abertay University	Individual
	Edinburgh Napier University	Organisation
	Glasgow Caledonian University	Organisation
	Glasgow School of Art	Organisation
	Heriot-Watt University	Organisation
	Robert Gordon University	Organisation
	The Open University in Scotland	Organisation
	University of Aberdeen	Organisation
	University of Edinburgh	Organisation
	University of Glasgow	Organisation
	University of St Andrews	Organisation
	University of Stirling	Individual
	University of Stirling	Organisation
	University of the West of Scotland	Organisation
College	Ayrshire College	Individual
	Ayrshire College	Organisation
	Borders College	Organisation
	Edinburgh College	Organisation

	Glasgow Kelvin College	Organisation
	North East Scotland College	Organisation
	South Lanarkshire College	Organisation
	West Lothian College	Organisation
Specialist	Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)	Organisation
	Colleges Scotland	Organisation
	HUB for SUCCESS	Organisation
Other organisations	Scotland's Community of Access and Participation Practitioners (SCAPP)	Individual
	Scottish Government	Organisation
	Skills Development Scotland	Organisation
	Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe)	Organisation
SFC Internal	Student Interests, Access and Quality Team	Individual