

Identifying Access Students

A report on the work of the Access Data Working Group in response to Recommendation 31 of the Commission on Widening Access

January 2019



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Executive Summary

Background and purpose of the working group

The Access Data Working Group (ADWG) was established by the Scottish Government in 2018. Membership includes representatives from the Scottish Government, the Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland, the National Union of Students and university practitioners¹. At the working group's first meeting, members agreed that the primary purpose of the group was to support delivery of Recommendation 31² of the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA):

The Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council, working with key stakeholders, should develop a consistent and robust set of measures to identify access students by 2018.

The Commission looked at access to higher education (HE) for people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Its work identified several key barriers faced by this group (including attainment, aspiration, parental experience and support, and cultural issues) and emphasised the importance of breaking “cycles of deprivation” and “entrenched patterns of advantage”.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is used to identify small areas in Scotland where the population faces multidimensional socioeconomic deprivation. The Commission focussed on those living in SIMD20 areas – the 20 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland – when looking at the relationship between deprivation and access. It identified a strong relationship between SIMD quintile and participation in HE, particularly participation at universities, and stated that SIMD “should continue to be used for tracking, monitoring and targets relating to fair access in the coming years”.

The Commission acknowledged, however, that some access interventions would benefit from a more sophisticated approach to identify the individual circumstances of learners.

The aim of the working group was to deliver Recommendation 31 by identifying which measures (in addition to SIMD) should be used to ensure widening access policy and practice is inclusive of learners who do not live in the most deprived areas of Scotland but face similar socioeconomic barriers. Ideally, any measures identified should be robust enough to help with decisions about individual learners and the support they require.

Approach

A range of measures are currently used by universities in Scotland³ to identify ‘access students’ who may benefit from support such as outreach activities or contextualised admissions. The working group agreed that each measure it considered would be assessed objectively and according to a clear set of evidence-

¹ A full list of members is included in Annex A.

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/blueprint-fairness-final-report-commission-widening-access/>

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/contextual-higher-education-admissions-discussion-paper/>

based criteria, provided in Section 1. These criteria were used to establish the suitability of the measure e.g. does it identify those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage; and its practical use to support fair access e.g. is it reliable and available for use by practitioners.

Conclusions

The working group considered a range of measures and examined more detailed analysis for those it identified as potentially suitable. Sections 2 to 5 of this report provide a summary of the work of the group and the evidence that supports its conclusions.

The key conclusions of the working group are:

- a) **A multiple-year Free School Meals registration measure should be included in the set of measures, subject to the quality and availability of data. This measure should be used to identify learners from low income households within schools and applying to higher education directly from school, or shortly after.**

- b) **A measure based on SAAS income data could be included in the set of measures, subject to the quality and availability of data. This measure could be used to identify older or independent students from low income households within colleges or applying to university from college. Further consideration would need to be given to the range of circumstances of older learners that could be captured by such a measure.**

- c) **The Scottish Government should explore the direct collection of income information at the point of application to Higher Education Institutions as part of a long-term solution to *directly* identify applicants' income *before* their application has been considered.**

Next Steps

Scottish Government officials will be discussing the findings of this work with stakeholders, including those working with learners in more rural areas, where the need for more individualised measures to identify socioeconomic deprivation has been raised. The paper will also be presented to the Access Delivery Group⁴ to allow strategic discussion of the implications of its findings on widening access policy and practice in Scotland.

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/groups/access-delivery-group/>

1 Approach to assessing measures

The working group considered the following questions when assessing the suitability of a measure:

- Are those identified by the measure likely to face barriers to access of a similar nature to the group considered by CoWA i.e. multidimensional socioeconomic disadvantage?
- Are those identified by the measure underrepresented in HE?
- Is there evidence that they also have relatively low attainment at school? This is relevant when considering if they might benefit from 'access thresholds' - one of the key CoWA recommendations¹.
- How would the use of this measure impact on the size of the group considered relevant to CoWA recommendations? i.e. are those identified already being picked up through the use of SIMD20; or might their inclusion extend the policy too far, beyond those who are in most need of support to overcome socioeconomic barriers to access HE?

The availability and quality of data for suitable measures was also considered by the working group, specifically:

- Whether the coverage and quality of the data is/could be good enough for it to be used to identify individuals; and
- Whether the data can/could be made available to the necessary people and organisations at the required time to support their work on access.

2 Initial Assessment of Measures

The Commission's recommendation referenced SFC-funded research from the University of Durham⁵. The research, published in 2017, provides an overview of the indicators currently used by universities in Scotland to contextualise admissions. It also provides a conceptual evaluation of the validity and reliability of several individual-level and area based measures of disadvantage. The group felt, however, that further work was required to explore the suitability of measures and practical issues relating to their use, as described above.

Subsequent research undertaken by the Commissioner for Fair Access³ also identified a range of measures currently used by institutions to identify access students in relation to contextual admissions.

Not all of the measures identified were considered in detail by the group. This section provides a summary of the main types of measures and the rationale for them being excluded or considered for further analysis.

2.1 Income

The Commission specifically recommended that the set of measures should include "a marker for income" as it was felt that those on low incomes were likely to face the financial, attainment and cultural barriers the Commission had examined. Household income is generally not collected by schools, colleges or universities at the point of application but there are a number of potential proxy measures that could be used.

The group identified two measures that could potentially be used for learners entering HE directly from school or shortly after. Members felt that these measures might be less relevant and less available for students who enter through college, especially older college students, so a third potential measure was identified for this group. The following income-related measures were considered:

- **Free School Meals (FSM)** - Eligibility for FSM is largely based on income and the receipt of income/unemployment related benefits⁶.
- **Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)** - Eligibility for EMA is based on income⁷.
- **SAAS HE bursary income data** – Eligibility for the Young Students' Bursary (YSB) and Independent Students' Bursary (ISB) is based on income⁸.

Members were also **keen to explore the direct collection of data on household income, at the point of application**. This was viewed by the group as a way to obtain data for older learners who are not entering via college, since there are no obvious alternatives available.

⁵ <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/access-inclusion/contextualised-admissions/evaluating-contextual-admissions.aspx>

⁶ <https://www.mygov.scot/school-meals/>

⁷ <https://www.mygov.scot/ema/can-i-get-an-ema/>

⁸ https://www.saas.gov.uk/forms/funding_guide.pdf

2.2 School environment (e.g. a school with low numbers progressing to HE)

The CoWA also suggested that “a measure for school environment” should be included in the set of measures. It recognised, however, that school-level measures in general were likely to be more “blunt” than those based on small areas, like SIMD⁹. The Commission considered attendance at a ‘low progression school’ as an indicator of school environment and found issues with the robustness of this measure. Furthermore, subsequent research from the University of Glasgow¹⁰ suggested that a pupil’s SIMD quintile was a stronger predictor of low attainment and progression to HE than whether the learner attended a low progression school.

The working group felt that the debate on the usefulness of a marker for school environment, in general, had moved on since the Commission reported and it did not feel that such a measure would add value to this work, which primarily aims to develop a more *individualised* way to identify access students. Members therefore **agreed not to consider any measures of school environment at this time.**

2.3 Care experience

The CoWA identified that care experienced learners face many of the same barriers as those experiencing more general socioeconomic disadvantage and that “many, if not all, of the recommendations [...] will help to support those with care experience”. The Commission also stated that “the challenges they face, both by their nature and magnitude, set this group of learners apart” from other access students. For this reason, the CoWA suggested that “a marker for care experience” should be included in the set of measures.

Working group members felt that the Commission had presented sufficient evidence on the underrepresentation and low attainment of care experienced learners. Furthermore, the group had no concerns over using a care experience marker *in combination* with SIMD and other measures, or the potential overlaps, due to the relatively small number of care experience learners and the fact that the area a young person resides in whilst in care could be in a different SIMD quintile from their original area of residence. The working group **agreed that care experienced learners should continue to be included, as recommended by CoWA.**

2.4 Other measures

Several other measures have been proposed by stakeholders over recent years or are currently used by institutions to contextualise admissions^{3,5}. Members agreed to exclude the following measures from consideration on the basis that the group’s work sought to identify *robust, individual-level* measures of socio-economic disadvantage (as described and explored by the Commission).

The following area-based measures were not considered by the group as they do not capture individual circumstances:

- Participation of Local Areas measure (POLAR)

⁹ <https://gov.scot/publications/blueprint-fairness-final-report-commission-widening-access/documents/00496620.pdf>

¹⁰ https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_506587_en.pdf

- ACORN consumer classification
- Urban/rural classification

Although they are individual-level socioeconomic measures, the following measures were not considered by the group as they are self-declared and therefore difficult for institutions to verify:

- Parental education (first in family to attend university)
- Parental occupational classification

The following individual-level measures were not considered by the group as they identify a specific characteristic or experience of a learner rather than multidimensional socioeconomic disadvantage:

- Carer
- Educational disruption
- Refugee or asylum seeker
- Disability

The working group noted that, **following conclusion of this piece of work, it may be useful to consider specific data issues related to other groups of students such as those listed above**. It also noted the link with the remit of the Commissioner for Fair Access to identify access issues for groups of learners not considered by CoWA.

The remainder of this paper details the group's assessment of the measures it felt warranted further analysis:

- Free School Meals (FSM)
- Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)
- SAAS HE bursary income data.

3 Suitability of measures

3.1 Free School Meals and Education Maintenance Allowance

3.1.1 Representation - is the group underrepresented in HE?

In this section we present data for two different FSM registration measures. The first measure (FSM final) identifies pupils who were registered for FSM in their final year of secondary school. The second (FSM ever-6) identifies pupils who were registered in any year of secondary school.

There were several reasons for considering a measure which captures FSM registration across more than one academic year. Firstly, it is unclear at this stage whether FSM data for an ongoing academic year could be made available in time for the UCAS applicant deadline in January each year. It might be necessary, therefore, to rely on FSM data for previous academic years. Secondly, registration for FSM at any point in secondary school could be an equally suitable measure of disadvantage compared to registration in the final year of secondary school. Thirdly, FSM data shows a decline in registration rates in the later years of secondary school. It is unclear, however, whether this reflects a decrease in uptake (perhaps due to peer pressure/stigma or because senior phase pupils can access lunch options outside of school), a decrease in eligibility (perhaps due to the parents of older children being more able to return to work), or simply the lower attainment and continuation rates of FSM registered pupils.

The EMA measure used in this section identifies pupils who received EMA in any year of secondary school (although only pupils aged 16 or over are eligible) as school year is not recorded in the EMA dataset.

The data provided in Figure 1 shows how the two FSM measures compare with EMA in terms of the total number of pupils identified and the number progressing directly to HE.

Figure 1: Comparison of group size and representation in HE, FSM final, FSM ever-6 and EMA, S5 and S6 leavers, 2015/16

Source: Pupil Census and EMA datasets, Scottish Government

Measure	Size of group identified		Representation among leavers progressing to HE	
	No. of leavers	% of total	No. of leavers	% of total prog. to HE
FSM final	3,926	8%	842	4%
FSM ever-6	10,035	22%	2,394	11%
EMA	12,625	27%	4,761	23%

The data shows that pupils receiving FSM in their final year are underrepresented in HE, accounting for 4% of those progressing while comprising 8% of all S5/S6 pupils. With 842 out of 3,926 pupils progressing to HE, the

progression rate for this group was 21% (compared to 51% for pupils who were not registered for FSM in any year of secondary school).

The FSM ever-6 group is over twice the size of the FSM final group and is also substantially underrepresented in HE, accounting for 11% of those progressing while comprising 22% of all S5/S6 pupils. The progression rate for this group was 24%.

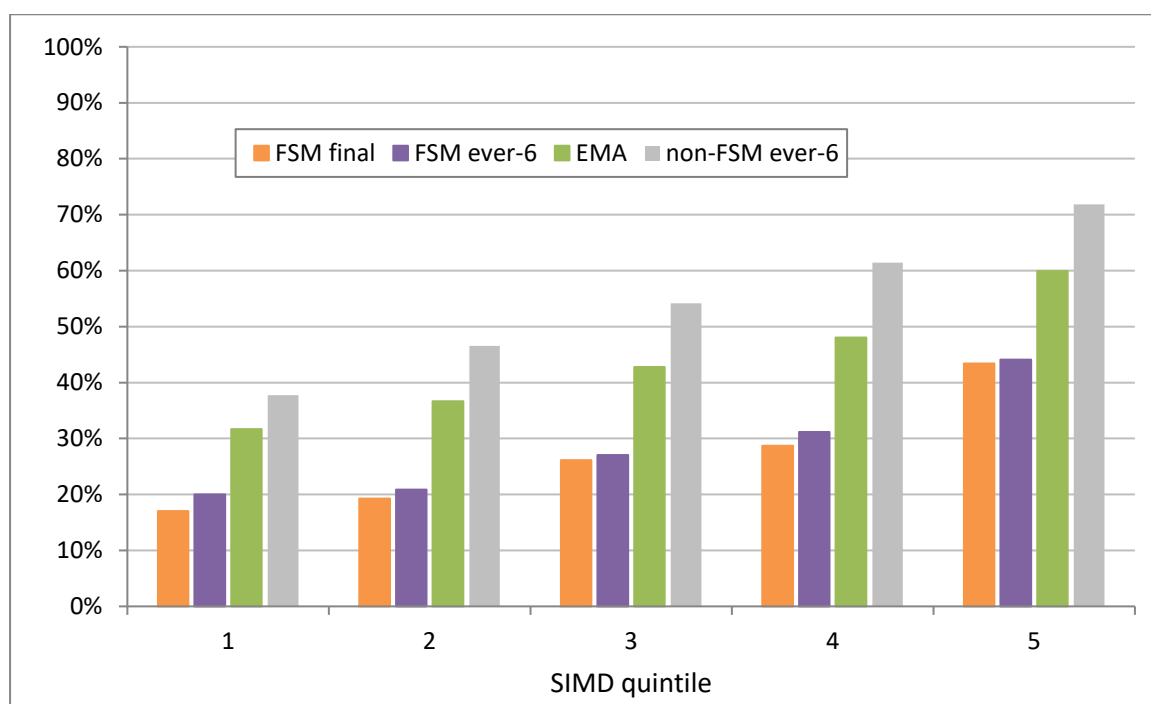
The EMA group is larger still, but **pupils receiving EMA are better represented among those progressing to HE**.

3.1.2 Attainment - is there evidence of lower academic achievement at school?

Figure 2 shows how the attainment of the two FSM groups compare with EMA recipients and those who were not registered for FSM. Members looked at the percentage of school leavers achieving at least three C grades¹¹ at Higher level. This level of attainment was chosen because universities where entry requirements are relatively lower generally require school leavers to have at least three Highers at grade C or better to have a chance of gaining a place.

Figure 2: Percentage of S5/S6 school leavers achieving at least three Highers at grade C or better, by SIMD quintile and FSM final, FSM ever-6, EMA, non-FSM ever 6, 2015/16

Source: Pupil Census and EMA datasets, Scottish Government



Attainment for the FSM groups was substantially lower than for the EMA and non-FSM groups. Furthermore, attainment was lower for the FSM groups in SIMD quintiles 1 to 4 than for non-FSM leavers in quintile 1. This suggests that the

¹¹ At least three C grades, or equivalent, based on UCAS tariff scores: <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/what-and-where-study/entry-requirements/ucas-tariff-points>

attainment of FSM registered pupils is as low as their non-FSM registered peers living in SIMD20 most deprived areas.

Comparing the two FSM groups, we see that attainment for the FSM ever-6 group is only marginally higher than for the FSM final subgroup. This suggests that **those registered for FSM at any point in secondary school face similar barriers in terms of attainment as the subgroup who were registered in their final year.**

Attainment for the EMA group was substantially higher than for the FSM groups. This suggests that **the EMA group as a whole does not face the same barriers in terms of attainment as pupils who were registered for FSM.**

It is also worth noting that for each of the measures considered, the percentage achieving three C grades is higher in quintile 5 than quintile 1 and increases gradually across the quintiles from most deprived to least deprived. This suggests that the non-income-related dimensions of SIMD account for a lot of the difference in attainment observed across quintiles. Indeed, as noted above, the non-FSM group living in quintile 1 have lower attainment than the FSM group living in quintile 5. This suggests that living within a SIMD20 area impacts on attainment levels regardless of household income.

3.1.3 Overlap with SIMD

When assessing how suitable indicators are for inclusion in the set of measures, it is important to consider how they overlap with SIMD20. A degree of overlap suggests that there is a relationship between the two measures. We would expect low income to be correlated with living in a deprived area, for example. A very high degree of overlap, however, suggests the measure is capturing something very similar to a SIMD-based measure and might not improve our ability to identify disadvantaged learners.

Figure 3: Comparison of group size and overlap with SIMD20, FSM final, FSM ever-6 and EMA, S5 and S6 leavers, 2015/16

Source: Pupil Census and EMA datasets, Scottish Government

	Size of group (% of S5/S6 leavers)	Overlap (% of group living in SIMD20)	Combined group (% of S5/S6 leavers in group or SIMD20)
FSM final	8%	44%	24%
FSM ever-6	22%	42%	32%
EMA	27%	33%	38%

Figure 3 shows how the three measures compare in terms of the size of the group identified, overlap with SIMD20 and size of combined group. The overlap with SIMD20 was similar for the two FSM measures. In 2015/16, 42% of S5/S6 school leavers were registered for FSM at secondary school in any of the six years up to and including 2015/16, and lived in a SIMD20 area.

While there is a clear relationship between low income and living in a deprived area, the fact that over half of FSM registered pupils did not live in the 20% most deprived

areas of Scotland suggests that **a FSM measure would identify many additional disadvantaged students that SIMD alone would not.**

Of the three measures, EMA recipients accounted for the largest percentage of S5/S6 school leavers and had the lowest overlap with SIMD20 (around one third of recipients). As a result, the combined group included almost 40% of S5/S6 leavers – arguably too large, if the aim is to target those most in need of support.

Findings & conclusions:

- **Members noted that school pupils who were registered for FSM were underrepresented in HE, and generally had lower school attainment.**
- **Additionally, over half of FSM registered pupils did not live in the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland. So, whilst the two measures are related, a FSM measure would identify many additional disadvantaged students that SIMD alone would not.**
- **The group also noted the similar patterns of attainment and underrepresentation for the FSM final group and the FSM ever-6 group, which suggest that the multiple-year measure is an equally valid measure of disadvantage.**
- **The group therefore concluded that a multiple-year FSM measure was suitable for inclusion in the set of measures.**
- **Attainment and representation in HE was shown to be considerably higher for EMA recipients than those registered for FSM, perhaps owing to the higher income threshold for EMA eligibility.**
- **Members felt that EMA would not identify the most disadvantaged learners as effectively as FSM and as such EMA was not considered to be suitable for inclusion in the set of measures.**
- **Members noted, however, that there would still be some value in sharing individual-level EMA data, if possible, to help with contextual admissions more generally.**

3.2 HE bursary income data

SAAS offers bursaries to full-time HE students in college and university. The Young Student's Bursary (YSB) is available to students aged under 26 who are not financially independent, not married and have no dependent children. The Independent Student's Bursary (ISB) is available to students who do not meet all of the YSB criteria (around one third of ISB recipients are aged under 26).

Students' bursary awards are determined by which household income group they are in⁸. For the purposes of our analysis we defined students in the lowest income group used by SAAS (£0- £19,000) as students from 'low income households'. Eligible students in this income group receive a full bursary.

At this stage, it is important to consider what 'household income' means in the context of identifying older or independent learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. For students who are married or living with a partner, 'household income' will generally reflect their partner's income. For older or independent students who are not married or living with a partner, however, 'household income' refers to their own individual income but excludes earned income and some benefits, meaning the majority will be eligible for ISB. So, while their income is likely to be low or negligible as a result of entering full-time HE (indicating a need for financial support), this does not necessarily reflect their financial circumstances prior to entering HE. This means older learners with low household income will not necessarily face the same socioeconomic barriers as younger learners living in low income households whilst at school. Policy makers and institutions would need to consider the range of circumstances of older learners that could be captured by income based measures and the different levels of support they might require.

3.2.1 Course completion and progression to university - is there evidence of low academic achievement at college?

For school pupils we considered attainment and representation among those progressing to HE. For college students, however, we looked at rates of course completion and progression to university.

Using data from SAAS, we estimated the number of students progressing to university the next year by identifying students who received support in college one year and in university the following year. Students who paused their studies were counted in the non-completion group.

SAAS data for students who were supported in college in 2013/14 to 2015/16 shows that:

- 88% of students from low income households completed their course (compared to 92% of other students)
- 18% of completing students from low income households progressed to university the next year (compared to 21% of other students)

This suggests that **there was a difference in performance between college students from low income households and their peers** that warranted further investigation.

Breaking the data down further, we see that both the completion and progression rates for students receiving the ISB (all of whom are in the low income group) were worse than for other students. YSB recipients from low income households, however, performed more similarly to other students (Figure 4). This suggests that **those in receipt of the maximum YSB may not be experiencing barriers when progressing to university compared to their peers.**

Figure 4: HE college students supported by SAAS, 2013/14 to 2015/16

Source: Scottish Government analysis of SAAS data

	Low income (< £19,000)			£19,000+ income	All students
	YSB	ISB	All		
Total (incl. non-completions)	20,110	24,710	44,820	57,035	101,855
Completions	18,105	21,380	39,485	52,520	92,005
Percentage completed course	90%	87%	88%	92%	90%
Progressed to university	3,750	3,540	7,290	10,785	18,075
Percentage of completions progressed to university	21%	17%	18%	21%	20%

The lower percentage of ISB recipients progressing to university is broadly consistent with SFC statistics for full-time students (including those in FE), which show that older learners are generally less likely to enter further study upon completing a course¹².

The lower rate of course completion, however, is not consistent with SFC figures for older learners generally (including FE and part-time learners), which show retention rates are generally similar for younger and older learners^{13,14}. This suggests that older or independent learners from lower income households did not perform as well at college compared to their peers and that **HE bursary income data could be used to identify older or independent students facing socioeconomic disadvantage and in need of support to access university.**

3.2.2 Overlap with SIMD

SAAS data for students who were supported in college between 2013/14 and 2015/16 (excluding students who did not complete) shows that:

- 37% of students from low income households lived in SIMD20 areas (compared to 18% of other students)
- The overlap percentages for the YSB and ISB subgroups were similar (36% and 37% respectively).

On one hand, the fact that nearly two thirds of YSB and ISB recipients do not live in the SIMD20 areas suggests that, although there is a relationship between low income and living in a deprived area, a HE bursary income based measure would identify disadvantaged college students that SIMD alone, would not.

On the other hand, the relatively low overlap with SIMD20, compared to the FSM measures, might suggest that some of the students identified using HE bursary

¹²http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/statisticalpublications_sfcst072017/SFCST072017_College_Leaver_Destinations_2015-16.pdf

¹³http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/statisticalpublications_sfcst022018/SFCST022018_College_Performance_Indicators_2016-17.pdf

¹⁴<https://stats.sfc.ac.uk/infact/>

income data do not necessarily face the same socioeconomic barriers as younger learners living in low income households identified using FSM data.

Findings & conclusions:

- **Members did not find HE bursary income data to be a suitable measure for younger college students.** The retention and progression rates for YSB recipients in the lowest income group used by SAAS (£0 to £19,000) were broadly similar to their peers. Members felt, moreover, that receipt of FSM whilst in secondary school would be a relevant, and reasonably available, measure for younger or dependent college students applying to university.
- **In contrast, robust FSM data is less likely to be available for older learners; however, a measure based on HE bursary income data was found to be suitable for identifying older learners from low income households.**
- **Further consideration should be given, however, to the range of circumstances of older learners that could be captured by a measure based on HE bursary income data.**
- **The retention and progression rates for ISB recipients, all of whom are in the lowest income group used by SAAS, were lower than their peers.**
- **Additionally, nearly two thirds of ISB recipients do not live in the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland.**
- **This suggests that although there is clearly a relationship between low income and living in a deprived area, an income based measure would identify disadvantaged college students that SIMD alone, would not.**
- **The evidence presented here illustrates the potential of a measure based on SAAS income data by focussing on the lowest income group used by SAAS when determining bursary awards. If implementing a measure based on SAAS income data, consideration should be given to what the appropriate income threshold is and how this aligns with other measures such as Free School Meals.**

4 Data quality and coverage

Information on the quality and coverage of EMA data has been excluded from this section as FSM measures were shown above to be more suitable for identifying disadvantaged students.

4.1 Free School Meals

Quality of historic data

The data considered by the group was individual-level FSM data collected as part of the Pupil Census. The data includes everyone who registered for FSM during the academic year and provided evidence that their household was in receipt of the relevant benefits or had an income below the threshold. The individual-level FSM data from the Pupil Census is not currently the Scottish Government's main source of FSM information - schools provide an aggregated return as part of the Healthy Living Survey. The Healthy Living Survey figures are published in a National Statistics publication¹⁵ and inform the allocation of the Pupil Equity Fund¹⁶. **The individual-level data is unpublished, so is not designated as Official or National Statistics and has historically not been quality assured in the same way as other data collected as part of the Pupil Census.** Scottish Government statisticians are currently quality assuring the individual-level FSM data from the September 2018 collection with a view to publishing it in 2019.

Registrations vs eligibility

The data reflects *registrations* for FSM, not eligibility and it is difficult to quantify the number of pupils who are eligible but not registered.

Extended eligibility criteria

There will also be pupils registered for FSM and recorded in the individual-level data who do not necessarily meet the national eligibility criteria. Some local authorities extend the eligibility criteria, for example, by including all pupils in certain special schools. There is also universal entitlement in Primary 1 to Primary 3 with some local authorities now extending this to Primary 4.

4.2 HE bursary income data

Data Quality

Students who apply for a bursary are generally asked to provide evidence of their household income for a complete tax year before the start of their course e.g. P60s, March payslips or Tax Credit Award Notice. Students with household income above £34,000 a year are not eligible for a bursary and are not asked to provide any income evidence. Some other groups, such as those eligible for the care experience bursary, are also not asked to provide any income evidence. Overall, SAAS has income data for around one third of supported HE students.

¹⁵ <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/Pub-SS-ALM>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-equity-funding-school-allocations-2018-2019/>

Receipt vs eligibility

The SAAS bursary data reflects the number of students who successfully applied for and received a bursary. It is possible that there were students who met the household income criterion but chose not to apply.

Findings & conclusions:

- **Members acknowledged that there were data quality issues that would need to be resolved before these measures, particularly FSM, could be successfully implemented and used for making decisions about individuals at the admissions stage.**

5 Data availability

When assessing the availability of data, the working group considered three broad aspects of access work where data could be used to support learners or assist access practitioners and policy makers.

Targeting outreach activity

Potential access students need to be identified, often years before they apply, to ensure university and college outreach programmes are targeted appropriately. Universities and colleges have generally targeted schools in the first instance rather than target individuals directly. It might not be deemed proportionate, from a data protection and privacy perspective, to share the individual-level data considered by the group for the purposes of targeting outreach; however, institutions often liaise with schools to ensure outreach is delivered to those most likely to benefit and schools could consider low income as part of the criteria for inclusion, without disclosing individual-level data.

Admissions

Applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds need to be identified at the point of application to maximise the effectiveness of contextual admissions policies. This would require individual-level data to be made available to institutions or an intermediary in time for the main application deadline in January, and earlier for medicine, veterinary medicine and dentistry courses. It is important, therefore, to be aware of the practical and legal requirements to allow the sharing of individual-level data for this purpose.

Monitoring of representation, retention, outcomes etc.

Access students need to be identifiable in official university and college statistics to allow the impact of policies and interventions to be monitored. If data was available to identify access students at the admissions stage then an appropriate marker could be included in university and college datasets used to produce official statistics. Monitoring could also potentially be done retrospectively using data linkage if data was not available at the admissions stage.

Findings & conclusions:

- **Members acknowledged that further work would be required to establish the legal and practical means by which the measures identified could be shared for the purpose of supporting individuals at key stages.**

Figure 5 - Availability of Free School Meals and HE bursary income data

Stage	Free School Meals	HE bursary income data
Targeting outreach	<p>The aggregate school-level FSM data published by the Scottish Government could be used by universities to target outreach activity towards schools with high numbers or percentages of pupils registered for FSM. This would increase the chance of engaging pupils with a low household income.</p>	<p>College-level data on HE bursary uptake could be produced from the SAAS dataset. This could be used to target outreach and increase the chance of engaging pupils with a low household income.</p>
Admissions	<p>Pupil Census data is currently collected for statistical and research purposes. Using the Pupil Census data for service delivery would require a new legal gateway to be established.</p> <p>Data on individual FSM registrations is collected in September but the Pupil Census dataset is not available for use until the following March at the earliest. The main application deadline is in January so further work would be required to ensure timely data was available at key stages.</p>	<p>SAAS currently collects income data for the purpose of assessing eligibility for student support. Using the data for another purpose would require a new legal gateway to be established.</p> <p>Currently, the use of contextual admissions, and access thresholds in particular, centres on applicants with school level qualifications. If universities wanted to use household income to contextualise college attainment, then the SAAS data discussed here would, in theory, allow them to do that. Further work would be required to ensure timely data was available when required.</p>
Monitoring	<p>In the absence of a suitable marker at the point of entry, representation could potentially be monitored retrospectively by linking Pupil Census data and university or college data. The viability of this option would depend on the success rate of the data linkage. The coverage of the Scottish Candidate Number is relatively high for full-time first degree university entrants (91%) and for entrants to full-time HE courses at colleges (99%) so the match rate with school records is likely to be good. There would be a substantial time lag in producing the retrospective data, however, as work could only begin once HESA make university data available - currently the January after the end of the academic year, although this will improve over the coming years.</p>	<p>Representation could be monitored retrospectively using SAAS data i.e. building on the methodology used to calculate progression rates in this paper. SAAS data could also be linked to university data to monitor retention, degree outcomes, etc. The viability of this option would depend on the success rate of the data linkage. If linking to university data, there would be a substantial time lag in producing retrospective monitoring data as work could only begin once HESA make university data available.</p>

6 Conclusions

Based on the evidence presented, the Access Data Working Group agreed on the following conclusions:

- a) **A multiple-year Free School Meals registration measure should be included in the set of measures, subject to the quality and availability of data. This measure should be used to identify learners from low income households within schools and applying to higher education directly from school, or shortly after.**
- b) **A measure based on SAAS income data could be included in the set of measures, subject to the quality and availability of data. This measure could be used to identify older or independent students from low income households within colleges or applying to university from college. Further consideration would need to be given to the range of circumstances of older learners that could be captured by such a measure.**

In relation to the conclusions above, the group acknowledged that:

- there were data quality issues that would need to be resolved before these measures, particularly FSM, could be successfully implemented and used for making decisions about individuals at the admissions stage.
- work would be required to establish the legal and practical means by which the measures identified could be shared for the purpose of supporting individuals at key stages

As noted previously, members were also keen to explore the possibility of collecting data on household income directly, at the point of application. This could provide individual data for older learners where there are no proxy measures available. Members also felt that the direct collection of income data could facilitate a move away from reliance on proxy measures in the long term. It is important to note, however, that this would not negate the need for proxy measures to identify those living in low income households during their school education. Careful consideration would need to be given to how the collection and use of income data is aligned with existing proxy measures to ensure a coherent package of support is available throughout the learner journey.

- c) **The Scottish Government should explore the direct collection of income information at the point of application to Higher Education Institutions as part of a long-term solution to *directly* identify applicants' income *before* their application has been considered.**

Members suggested that because SAAS already collects income data for students who apply for financial support, this would provide a suitable source of income data if collected earlier in the cycle, at the point of application. Initial discussions with SAAS highlighted that earlier collection would require fundamental changes to SAAS operating practice and procedures. ADWG members were keen for this to be looked into further and suggested that the Scottish Government or SAAS commission work to explore the feasibility of this option.

Scottish Government
January 2019

Annex A – Membership of the Access Data Working Group

Lynn MacMillan	Scottish Government
Ryan Scott	Scottish Government
Alasdair Anthony	Scottish Government
Elisabeth Boyling	Scottish Government
Ewan Mackenzie	Scottish Government
Fiona Burns	Scottish Funding Council
Cathy Mitchell	Scottish Funding Council
Alastair Sim	Universities Scotland
Terry Shevlin	Universities Scotland
Vonnie Sandlan	Colleges Scotland
David Livey	National Union of Students
Neil Croll	University of Glasgow
James Dunphy	Robert Gordon University
Ester Ruskuc	University of St Andrews