

## **[Paper 8/2] Update on Access Programmes Steering Group (APSG) and Bridging Programmes Advisory Group (BPAG)**

### **Purpose**

1. This paper provides an update on the work of the Access Programmes Steering Group (APSG) and Bridging Programmes Advisory Group (BPAG) from their initiation in early 2019 to present day. Key stakeholders from across the sector are represented on both groups, including; colleges, universities, local authorities, schools, early year providers, access programme managers, funders, Scottish Government, Universities Scotland etc.

### **Background**

2. The Commission on Widening Access published its final report, [A Blueprint for Fairness](#), in March 2016. Since that time, Scottish Government, SFC, colleges, universities, and other key stakeholders have been working to implement the 34 recommendations contained within it.
3. Of those 34, SFC has lead responsibility for 16 recommendations, of which the Access Programmes Steering Group was created to prioritise and take forward the implementation of Recommendation 4 and the Bridging Programmes Advisory Group was created to prioritise and take forward implementation of Recommendation 7.
  - Recommendation 4: *Universities, colleges, local authorities, schools, SFC funded access programmes and early years providers should work together to deliver a coordinated approach to access which removes duplication and provides a coherent and comprehensive offer to learners.*
  - Recommendation 7: *The Scottish Funding Council, working with professionals, should develop a model of how bridging programmes can be expanded nationally to match need.*
4. At the Scottish Government's request, the SFC has created Implementation Overview Reports (IORs) for both recommendations, which function as a remit for both groups. In the third meeting of each group an update was provided on progression towards these deadlines. These are provided in Appendix A & B.
5. Both groups are designed to work collaboratively to provide a holistic approach to offering disadvantaged and underrepresented learners support throughout the learner journey. Both groups will focus on:

- Identifying where unnecessary duplication exists across the current landscape
- Establishing the steps that are required to remove this duplication
- Proposing ways to align all access and bridging programmes to the Toolkit for Fair Access
- Promoting 'what works' via the Scottish Community of Access and Participation Practitioners (SCAPP)
- Identify areas for expansion/development
- Explore transferability and allocation of SCQF credit

## **Definitions and mapping the current landscape**

6. The first meeting of the APSG was held on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019, and the first meeting of the BPAG was held on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019. At these meetings members noted the need for clarity as to what constituted an access/bridging programme and a need to gain a greater understanding of the access and bridging landscape at that present point in time. Although mapping exercises have previously been conducted by other organisations; Robertson Trust, Universities Scotland etc., it was felt that with the fast-paced changes in the landscape in response to CoWA, a snapshot of current provision was essential to ensuring the APSG and BPAG had relevant and up-to-date information to feed into Group discussion.
7. A sector wide consultation was conducted. A programme mapping template was sent to all university contacts as well as other relevant stakeholders across the sector (e.g. MCR Pathways, the Robertson Trust, ICAS) to gain a better understanding of programme activity, and draft definitions of what was meant by an 'access' programme and as a 'bridging' programme were also circulated for comment. The mapping exercise was shortened to ensure minimal time commitments on those completing the templates, and only sought to gather information on key areas which both groups had described as essential to understanding to progress with CoWA Recommendations 4 & 7. This included;
  - Partnerships created to deliver the programme
  - Regional spread of a programme
  - Targets and measures used for selection of programme participants
  - The aspects making up the programme (e.g. mentoring, summer schools, skills workshops etc.)
  - The use of programme participation within Admissions processes
  - Whether any future developments are planned.
8. A total of 54 individual Access Programmes and 24 Bridging Programmes were submitted as part of the mapping exercise. These detail a range of programmes which have a total of 84,735 engagements (there is likely crossover on

individuals participating in one or more of these programmes, therefore the number does not represent the total number of pupils engaged with) with primary school pupils through to adult returners/mature learners across Scotland.

9. Following on from feedback provided on terminology at the second meeting of each group, both APSG and BPAG agreed on the definitions for 'access' and 'bridging' as outlined in Appendix C and D.
10. Key themes to emerge from the mapping exercise were;
  - There are some partnerships apparent in the delivery of access programmes, but these tend to be linked to funding requirements (e.g. Reach partners) or between an institution and an agency/organisation. Programmes with more than two partners inputting into a specific programme, and those with more than one institution involved, are few.
  - The availability of access programmes seems to correlate in most cases to access to HEI's in the area. This creates difficulties in more rural areas where individuals are distanced from a 'local' institution. However, the mapping has shown that there is access to at least one programme in all regional areas of Scotland, therefore there is a basis from which provision can be consolidated and built on in all regions.
  - Targets and measures used for the selection of programme participants varied greatly. The most commonly used indicator was attendance at a low progression school (61% of programmes), although conversations from both groups shows a move away from using this as a sole indicator and looking at more forms of individual indicators. The next most commonly used were SIMD20 (59% of programmes) and care experience (56%), but a range of different indicators were also utilised including carer status, estranged, free school meal status etc. Some programmes which provided information did not use any form of targeting currently but still viewed themselves as access or bridging programmes.
  - Programme availability from S3-S6 is particularly strong, with early years, primary and mature student/adult returners needing further development in some areas to create a strong pipeline of activity.
  - Although it has been recognised that regionally, different barriers may necessitate different programme delivery models, the underpinning format of access programme delivery has many commonalities. This is proven by the low differential range between the percentage of programmes embedding each mentioned element; although the range covers summer schools (28% of programmes) to specific subject based workshops (61%), all other programme elements fall within a range of 30% (academic based project work) to 46% (study skills workshops). Similar programme elements are being run across all regions.
  - As discussed above, over one third of programmes actively plan to expand

in the coming year. With this, the pressure of CoWA and focus of the Scottish Government on creating more clearly communicated Learner Journey's, the present time creates an opportunity within the landscape for change.

### **Current Progress – APSG**

11. The latest APSG meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> October focussed the conversation on what coherent support looks like. The key themes provided from answers were;
  - Ensuring programmes link in effectively with Admissions policies and Outcome Agreement targeting.
  - A broader, national scope to activity (with some regional variance) with key stakeholders working together on provision, which should include both general and subject specific support, and have clear strategic goals.
  - Recognition of different learner's journeys and parity of esteem for these.
  - Any models must be coherent to learners, and developments should include learner and teacher feedback.
12. The group are currently working on a paper which outlines a draft framework for access activity nationally based on programmes submitted through mapping, and used the themes and gaps recognised in the mapping exercise above to suggest future development areas to provide coherent support.
13. SFC will also invite SCQF to present on ways in which credit bearing elements can be incorporated into intervention programmes and the benefits this brings, as well as Anna Wallace to present on the theme of adult engagement..

### **Current Progress – BPAG**

14. Similarly BPAG will work on a paper which outlines the current landscape in Bridging Programme activity, and where potential areas for development and greater partnership may lie. In order to do this, the group will seek information and data from Scottish Government, SFC and Universities Scotland to further understand the need for this activity (i.e. who and how many individuals will benefit from such programmes existing) and scale up.
15. Ahead of the next meeting, five programmes represented in the mapping exercise will be selected to create a small focus group which can discuss best practice in the sector currently and lessons learned from challenges in the development of these programmes. The five programme will represent; a programme with online elements and one without, one with SCQF credit bearing element and one without, and one with a summer school programme focus and one with a different format. Admissions representatives will also be

included on this group. Representatives from this group will also meet with SCQF to look at the implementation of credit bearing elements into programmes. From this discussion, the framework will then be further developed and lead in to a wider consultation across all institutions.

### **Further information**

16. Contact: Pamela Forbes, Senior Policy/Analysis Officer, tel: 0131 313 6501, email: [pforbes@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:pforbes@sfc.ac.uk).

## Appendix A – APSG Implementation Overview Report Deadlines and Actions

<u>IOR Priorities and Deadlines</u>	<u>APSG Actions</u>
SFC will establish and chair a steering group which will bring together all relevant parties to deliver recommendations 4 and 4a (by <b>Dec 2018</b> )	<p>Membership was drawn and first meetings were scheduled.</p> <p><b>Complete</b></p>
SFC, in partnership with key stakeholders, will agree the scope of the recommendation. This will include determination of what constitutes an access programme in the context of these recommendations. (by <b>March 2019</b> )	<p>A draft definition of Access and Bridging Programmes was circulated to APSG and BPAG members, universities and other key stakeholders for feedback. A final definition was then agreed.</p> <p><b>Complete</b></p>
<p>SFC, Universities Scotland and the Robertson Trust will review relevant access programme mapping exercises which have already been undertaken and will establish what, if any, further mapping needs to be done in the context of the scope of this recommendation. They will provide advice on this and, if appropriate next steps, to the Steering Group. (by <b>May 2019</b>)</p> <p>The Steering Group will establish an understanding of the current landscape informed by the work of the SFC, US, Robertson Trust working group. (by <b>June 2019</b>)</p>	<p>A mapping exercise was conducted by the SFC into the current landscape in access and bridging programme activity. As this was circulated with the agreed definitions, this allowed us to pick up on key relevant programme activity.</p> <p>It was acknowledged that there were limitations to this in particular that it did not include college activity.</p> <p>Key areas for development were highlighted by the SFC and circulated to members. This included Early Years and Primary School Engagement, regional disparity in provision, improving the use of online tools and delivery.</p> <p><b>Complete</b></p>
The Steering Group will agree the principles of what coherent support is and how it will be assessed and monitored. (by <b>Sept 2019</b> )	<p>Members will discuss what coherent support is and how it will be assessed and monitored at the APSG meeting in Oct 2019. An overview will be written up and circulated by December 2019 for member's comment.</p> <p><b>Ongoing</b></p>
The Steering Group will establish the steps required to remove duplication, align programmes to the Framework for Fair	SFC will produce a recommended model of national access programme activity based on FfFA, additional evidence, the recent mapping

<p>Access, and promote 'what works'. (by <b>Dec 2019</b>)</p>	<p>exercise and the conversation around what coherent support is, for discussion at APSG in Jan/Feb 2020. From Jan/Feb 2020 the group will put together recommendations based on each of the six SEF key themes; priorities and targets, expectations, engagement, individual programmes, intersectionality and funding and targeting.</p>
<p>The Steering Group will agree the mechanism to support transferability of programmes and credit rating of programmes, as appropriate, on the SCQF Framework. (by <b>April 2020</b>)</p>	<p>The use and transferability of SCQF credit-bearing programmes will be discussed at the January 2020 meeting. Members will also discuss how programmes fit into admissions processes for all learners at all stages – should programmes be taken into consideration as part of admissions processes? What are the barriers to this?</p>
<p>The Steering Group will agree how best to take the work forward across Scotland i.e. regionally, nationally and who is best placed to lead this. (by <b>April 2020</b>)</p>	<p>A draft paper on recommendations of the APSG will be circulated ahead of the April 2020 meeting for feedback. The redrafting process will be discussed at the April meeting. Recommendations should be given clear ownership and feasibility must be taken into consideration.</p> <p>A timeline will also be discussed alongside the given recommendations.</p>
<p>The Steering Group will develop a timetable for roll out. (by <b>May 2020</b>)</p>	<p>A final draft of the groups recommendations/actions will be presented and circulated.</p>

## Appendix B – BPAG Implementation Overview Report Deadlines and Actions

<u>IOR Priorities and Deadlines</u>	<u>BPAG Actions</u>
<p>SFC will set up an advisory group including key stakeholders. The advisory group will agree the scope of the project, which should align with the Commission’s definition of a bridging programme as set out on page 31 of its final report. <b>(first meeting by October 2018)</b></p>	<p>Due to internal delays, BPAG did not meet until March 2019. The scope of the project and definitions were discussed over the course of the first two meetings. And align with the work of APSG.</p> <p><b>Complete</b></p>
<p>SFC will work with the current US Bridging Programme work stream and implementation, and the Framework for Fair Access, to identify good practice i.e. what does an effective bridging programme contain and achieve. <b>(April 2019)</b></p>	<p>Across the past three meetings, the topic of what makes an effective Bridging programme has been discussed at length and points agreed (e.g. rigorous academic element, transparent pathway to HE etc.). This will be further progressed through discussion of the points below.</p> <p><b>Complete</b></p>
<p>The advisory group will develop a model for expansion of bridging programmes nationally in line with need. This will be referred to as the National Framework for Bridging Programmes and will include guidance on bridging programmes including their transferability and allocation of credit.</p> <p>Key priorities will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration of a range of options to scale up delivery.</li> <li>• Full alignment with the Framework for Fair Access</li> <li>• Allocation of SCQF credit and/or currency in all Access Thresholds</li> <li>• Transferability of programmes, including scope for agreement of ‘core content’.</li> </ul> <p>The model and guidance will be agreed by <b>May 2020</b>.</p>	<p>This is the key focus of the BPAG at present, with data being requested to inform level of potential scale up activity, best practice being assessed through current programme activity to inform the type of scale up, and creating a sub group of programme coordinators and admissions officers to discuss potential core content, transferability and links to admissions processes.</p> <p><b>Ongoing</b></p>
<p>SFC will consult on the National Framework with the aim of full implementation by <b>April 2021</b> and SFC will monitor the impact of the National Framework. <b>(May 2022)</b></p>	<p><b>Ongoing</b></p>



## **Appendix C – Access and Bridging Terminology**

### **Definition of ‘Access’ (Targeted Outreach) Programmes:**

“Targeted outreach programmes are tailored programmes of activity which are designed to encourage individuals from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds to understand, make a competitive application to and support them to succeed in gaining a place in Higher Education. Typically these are sustained programmes of activity which include more than one point of intervention or continuous support. Skills gained on targeted outreach programmes are transferable across the sector and are not specific to one institution. These programmes will usually include activities based on one or more of the following;

- Aspiration building
- Attainment raising
- Academic development
- Information, advice and guidance on HE admissions and the application processes
- Build individuals knowledge of the Higher Education environment”

### **Definition of Bridging Programmes:**

“Bridging Programmes create a ‘bridge’ between an institution in one sector of the education landscape and another in a different sector.\* In the context of school to university transition, bridging programmes are run during the senior phase (S5-S6) and are aimed at pupils from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds. They include a significant credit-bearing programme element of academic preparation which can be recognised as credit in admissions processes (usually at SCQF Level 7).”

\*Note: the focus of the SFC Bridging Programmes Advisory Group will be on the school to university transition at this stage.

## Appendix D – Access and Bridging Infographic

### Targeted Outreach Programmes

Programmes falling under the current 'access programmes' definition; including generalised HE information, support and guidance and aspiration raising, as well as programmes which do not have rigorous academic elements.

Activity may include any learner at any stage of the learner journey but the approach must be targeted at the most disadvantaged/underrepresented

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S  
G

### Bridging Programmes

Programmes with a rigorous academic element which is delivered pre-application and is recognised in Admissions processes.  
AND  
Programmes provided as an additional part of the admissions process to a specific university, also displaying rigorous academic content.

Although learners may be any age, these programmes will primarily target senior phase pupils with specific criteria denoting disadvantage/underrepresentation

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Widening Participation Programmes (post-entry)

Not dealt with within either group but there needs to be awareness of how programmes feed in

Transition Support Programmes (Articulation Support)

Not dealt with within either group but to be aware of (CoWA 8-10)