



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

AGENDA

15th Meeting, 2018 (Session 5)

Wednesday 16 May 2018

The Committee will meet at 9.45 am in the Robert Burns Room (CR1).

1. **Decision to take agenda item in private:** The Committee will decide whether to take agenda item 3 in private.
2. **Universities:** The Committee will hear evidence primarily on widening access from—

Professor Sir Ian Diamond, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of Aberdeen;

Professor Craig Mahoney, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of the West of Scotland;

Professor Jeffrey Sharkey, Principal, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland;

Alastair Sim, Director, Universities Scotland; and

Susan Stewart, Director, The Open University in Scotland.

3. **Review of Evidence:** The Committee will consider the evidence it heard earlier.
4. **Review of Evidence in relation to the Attainment and Achievement of School Aged Children Experiencing Poverty inquiry (in private):** The Committee will review the evidence it has heard on its inquiry.

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The papers for this meeting are as follows—

Agenda Item 2

SPICe briefing paper	ES/S5/18/15/1
Submissions paper	ES/S5/18/15/2
Paper from the Clerk (private paper)	ES/S5/18/15/3 (P)

Agenda Item 4

Paper from the Clerk (private paper)	ES/S5/18/15/4 (P)
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Education and Skills Committee Universities and Widening Access

16 May 2018

BACKGROUND

On [15 January 2018](#) Committee members attended an informal meeting at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, where they met with a number of higher education institutions (HEIs) based in the west of Scotland about widening access to higher education. On [21 February 2018](#), the Committee then held a formal meeting with the Commissioner for Fair Access, Professor Sir Peter Scott (“the Commissioner”) about activity to promote and progress widening access to university in Scotland. And on [7 March 2018](#) the Committee heard from the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP (“the Minister”). At this session the discussion on widening access continued, although other relevant portfolio issues were raised via questions from the general public. All the questions received from the public were forwarded to the Minister on [19 March 2018](#); and her response was issued on [5 April 2018](#).

For the meeting on 16 May, the Committee agreed to hear from a range of Scottish HEIs to capture the diversity of different types of institution operating in Scotland. Present will be:

- Sir Ian Diamond, Principal at the University of Aberdeen (ancient)
- Craig Mahoney, Principal at the University of West of Scotland (post-1992)
- Jeffrey Sharkey, Principal at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (specialist)
- Susan Stewart, Director of the Open University in Scotland (distance learning)
- Alastair Sim, Director of Universities Scotland

The panel will offer an opportunity to continue the discussion on widening access, to look at retention at Scottish HEIs¹, and to consider other topical issues.

THEME 1: WIDENING ACCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

In March 2016 the Commission on Widening Access published its report [Blueprint for Fairness](#) (“the Blueprint”) which included 34 recommendations. Some of these recommendations were for HEIs to address, while others were for the Scottish Government, colleges, schools and other relevant bodies (Annexe A lists the recommendations and progress against each).

In November 2017 Universities Scotland published [Working to Widen Access](#). This report set out 15 actions being taken by HEIs to respond to the 13 recommendations in the Blueprint report that it was believed were directly or indirectly for universities to act on. The 15 actions are listed at Annexe B.

¹ For context, this [SPICE mini-briefing](#) from March 2018 provides published data for each Scottish HEI on non-continuation from first to second year and also on students returning to study after a year away

Finally, the Commissioner for Fair Access set out in [Laying the Foundations for Fair Access](#) (his first annual, published in December 2017), a further 23 recommendations, directed largely at the Scottish Government, the SFC and the university sector. Ten of the recommendations directly refer to action to be taken by universities. The full list of recommendations is listed at Annexe B.

CONTEXTUALISED ADMISSIONS

One of the four discussion papers produced by the Commissioner for Fair Access in his first year (June 2017) focused on [contextualised admissions](#). It noted several important points:

- HEIs have for many years been using contextual data in admissions to identify applicants with potential to success. The exception is the Open University which has always allowed entry to its programmes without prior qualifications.
- There are different contextual admissions processes in use e.g. guaranteed offers to those who meet certain eligibility criteria; and offers with conditions attached (e.g. attendance at summer school).
- There are also different contextual factors considered in any adjusted offer e.g. living in an SIMD20 or SIMD40 area; care experience, participation in an access programme (e.g. SWAP); attending a low progression school, etc.

In addition, it set out the different contextual factors being used by individual Scottish HEIs when making an adjusted offer. These indicated that most HEIs use a basket of measures – including but not exclusively focused on SIMD - to assess contextual admissions eligibility, and to recognise a broad range of disadvantage among applicants.

In [Working to Widen Access](#) six of the actions focus on admissions (see Annexe B). The Commissioner welcomed the actions on admissions that were presented by Universities Scotland. However, he noted a critical issue around admissions generally, and around contextual admissions specifically, around a lack of transparency in how applications decisions are being taken by different HEIs.

In the contextual admissions discussion paper, the Commissioner argues that anyone making an application for a place on a degree programme should be able to understand how applications are dealt with and decisions made. This is particularly important for people who may benefit from contextual admissions given that this is the group “often the most lacking in informed support and guidance, with family and peers unfamiliar with applications processes and requirements”.

The Commissioner’s commentary accompanying the discussion paper raises a number of questions for HEIs around consistency, transparency and impact of contextual admissions.

Consistency

- Could a set of key principles underlying contextual admissions in general, and for each of the models, be developed by the sector? For example, in what circumstances is it appropriate to make an offer conditional on attendance at a summer school? Are there costs involved and how might these be overcome for disadvantaged learners? Might it be possible to undertake transition / preparation aspects of pre-entry or summer programmes as online modules?
- Could a common terminology be agreed upon and employed by the sector to allow applicants, family and guidance staff better understand the process and how it can facilitate entry to HE for under-represented groups and disadvantaged learners?

Transparency

- Could a sector wide statement or kite marking system be developed to signpost applicants, family and guidance staff to information on contextual admissions?
- How can the sector and individual institutions ensure their contextual admissions processes are understood by prospective applicants and those supporting them?
- Would it be helpful to develop an interactive eligibility map for applicants and, if so, who is best placed to take forward that project?

Impact

- How should the sector best evaluate the impact of contextual admissions processes? How should individual institutions measure and report on impact and progress?
- Are institutions clear about the rationale underpinning their eligibility criteria for contextual admissions and do these relate to their institutional targets and priorities in relation to equality?

The Committee may wish to discuss with witnesses:

- **How the sector is responding to the relevant recommendations from the above reports, including coordinating its response with actions being taken of other partners; and how it is working to share best practice across the sector.**
- **The steps HEIs are taking to address issues of consistency, transparency and impact of contextual admissions raised by the Commissioner for Fair Access.**

THEME 2: ARTICULATION

[Colleges Scotland](#), in its submission to accompany the Minister attending Committee on 7 March 2018, suggested that articulation is “the jewel in the crown of Scottish education” – offering a route to degree level study that is unique to the Scottish education system:

“Underpinned by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), articulation is the process by which students finishing college with an HN qualification progress directly onto the next level of study at university, so a graduate with a Higher National Certificate (HNC) at SCQF level 7 would be able to progress directly to Year 2 at a partner university, while graduates with Higher National Diploma (HND) qualifications at SCQF level 8 would be able to progress directly to Year 3 of their degree. This mechanism allows students to make the most efficient and streamlined journey through their education whilst also delivering value to the public purse.

Currently, the majority of articulation is done by the five post-92 universities which have traditionally been recruiting institutions rather than selective. Colleges Scotland is working with Universities Scotland on a National Articulation Forum, with the aim to expand articulation and ensure learners can progress with full credit for their qualifications.”

The Commissioner at this Committee on 21 February 2018 stated that articulation offers opportunities not just to widen access to degree level study but has the potential to make better use of the limited number of funded places for degree level study offered at Scottish HEIs:

There are also opportunities to make savings in terms of what I call smarter articulation - giving higher national students more credit if they transfer to degree programmes. There are other reasons why [this is] desirable, but one of the effects would be to release more funded places.

A study on fair access published by the [Sutton Trust](#) in May 2016 made the same point about articulation typically happening between colleges and post-92 institutions, so “limiting access to high-status courses and routes into certain professions such as law and medicine”. The Sutton Trust research did, however, point out that barriers to articulation emerge from differences in the approach to teaching and learning as these are generally pursued in colleges and HEIs:

“In addition, the type of teaching and learning which takes place in some college sub-degree programmes is based on developing practical and vocational skills, and students may struggle with the pedagogical and assessment demands of a university degree, making them more likely to drop out.”

The research found that expansion of higher education participation, particularly for students from poorer backgrounds, has been driven by the expansion of higher education provision in colleges. As such: “colleges are very important in terms of opening doors to previously excluded groups, but the danger is that students from less advantaged backgrounds are diverted away from more selective universities.”

The Committee may wish to discuss with witnesses:

- **The measures that can be taken to increase opportunities for full articulating from higher education at college to a degree programme at an HEI.**
- **To what extent the issue raised by the Sutton Trust, about differences in teaching and learning approaches at colleges and HEIs, has a bearing on opportunities to facilitate full articulation (into second or third year of a degree) – particularly at older HEIs where full articulation is less commonly pursued.**

THEME 3: FUNDED PLACES

In discussions with both the Commissioner and the Minister, Committee members have highlighted concerns about the impact of the cap on the number of funded places available to Scottish domiciled students². Universities Scotland’s written submission notes that “demand for well qualified applicants far exceeds the supply of places available at undergraduate level in Scottish higher education.” This has raised two issues for Committee members: concern about displacement; and the impact of increased competition for places.

DISPLACEMENT

The cap on the number of funded places at Scottish universities, and the interaction of this with the current target to increase participation among people living in the 20 per cent most deprived areas, has raises concerns about displacement. As the Commissioner said when giving evidence to this Committee on 21 February:

“On the question of a cap, there has been quite an important debate about the issue of displacement and whether, in a capped system, when more students from disadvantaged backgrounds are recruited, other students may potentially be squeezed out by that. The evidence so far about whether that is happening on any significant scale is relatively unclear; nevertheless, there is a strong perception that it is happening. Therefore, it is an important issue.”

The issue was raised again when the Minister gave a [statement on widening access](#) in the Chamber on 6 March 2018 and also when she attended Committee on 7 March 2018:

² The funded places available to Scottish domiciled students are also shared with eligible EU nationals who are entitled to the same tuition free arrangement offered to Scottish domiciled students

“As I said yesterday in the Chamber, there is no evidence of displacement at the moment, but there is a fear of displacement, as the Commissioner has said...”

In her statement, the Minister pointed out that UCAS data on acceptances at Scottish HEIs showed that the total number of Scots from the most deprived communities getting a place to study at a Scottish HEI had increased by 13 per cent. On the issue of displacement, the Minister told the Committee that the response to concerns about the cap on funded places is not to continually expand the availability of places:

“When it comes to widening access, we need to change the system. You can extend a system to infinity, but that does not necessarily make it fair. We have an unfair system at the moment and unfair displacement when it comes to publicly funded university places. That is why we need to look at making systemic change...”

I hear the concerns about displacement, and I understand that they will be raised. However, the way to deal with them is not continually to look at tinkering with the system but to make that system fair. I hope that we all want a system for university places that is fair for every young person or adult returner. We are looking at using the publicly funded places that we have fairly, creating a level playing field that will ensure that everyone has the opportunity of getting to the university of their choice”

In its written submission, Universities Scotland responds to the Minister’s comments saying that “university admissions is a fair system. Fairness for every student is a guiding principle of the admissions process.” It points out that contextualised admissions offer one way of indicating fairness through the reduction of barriers to applicants. “To say otherwise discredits the hard work and achievement of other successful applicants.”

To inform this briefing, SPICe approached Scottish HEIs to ask if there was any research or other relevant evidence to indicate displacement effects / unintended consequences from the current policy focus on SIMD20 applicants. Several HEIs responded to confirm the Minister’s comment that there is currently no substantial evidence of any negative / unintended consequences emerging from this policy development. This may well be an accurate reflection of the fact that HEIs have been pursuing various activities under the banner of widening participation, including as noted earlier the use of contextual admissions measures, prior to the introduction of the current policy targets.

However, as [Lucy Hunter-Blackburn](#) has argued, young people who live in the most affluent areas seem to be the most resilient when it comes to any risk of displacement resulting from the current policy focus on increasing the participation of people living in SIMD20 areas. Her analysis of applications and acceptances among 18 year olds in Scotland between 2010 and 2016 suggested that the groups that are most at risk of displacement are young people in the middle quintiles (quintile 3 in particular). In a [separate blog](#), she suggested that Scottish HEIs were responding to the widening access targets not by

displacing Scottish applicants from other areas of Scotland, but rather by reducing the offer rate to applicants from EU countries.

Universities Scotland in its written submission picks up on an emerging issue around the limited number of people from SIMD20 areas who are applying to study at university level. The submission notes that, without addressing the actions needed to expand the number of SIMD20 applicants (including action to reduce the attainment gap) there is a real risk that universities will all be competing to offer places to a relatively small cohort of applicants – with students “simply making different choices about which institutions in which to study without actually, or significantly, increasing the number of SIMD20 students studying in the university sector as a whole.”

INCREASING COMPETITION FOR PLACES

On 7 March when the Minister attended Committee, Johann Lamont raised an issue about increasing competition for available funded places:

“There is a danger of conflating two separate issues, the first of which is about the consequence of actively choosing to address the situation whereby some young people are not operating on a level playing field. I see the widening access process as being about restoring the balance and making it fair for those young people. The other issue is not about displacement because young people are unfairly getting access to a place; it is about the fact that there is competition for certain courses, as a consequence of which there is rationing by qualification. People can no longer access courses that they would have been able to access five or 10 years ago, simply because of the cap. Is the Scottish Government prepared to look at that?

The Minister’s response highlighted concern about ‘grade inflation’ before saying that the use of minimum entry standards and contextualised admissions offer mechanisms to ensure that the funded places that are available are open to all learners, with current activity to widen access providing a framework to achieve this. The Minister, in answer to a follow up question from Oliver Mundell, also suggested that improvements in the transparency of decision making would be helpful.

The Committee may wish to discuss with witnesses:

- **The steps being taken by HEIs to meet the current target around SIMD20 entrants while being aware of perceived risks of displacement of other learners.**
- **Whether more fundamental change in the approach to admissions is needed to address the issues of ‘fairness’ highlighted by the Minister.**

THEME 4: SCOTTISH INDEX OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION (SIMD)

The policy focus on widening access to degree level study among people living in SIMD20 areas has raised significant debate on the use of SIMD as the way to prioritise widening access. [SIMD guidance](#) points out that as an area measure, SIMD uses a range of indicators to identify concentrations of deprivation in particular places in Scotland. However, this guidance recognises that there are significant numbers of people living in poverty who do not live in the 20 per cent most deprived areas of Scotland.

The use and limits of SIMD was raised with the Commissioner at the meeting 21 February. Richard Lochhead, for example, asked if HEIs “will automatically focus their efforts on certain parts of Scotland because it is easy to do that because of the index they use”. In response, the Commissioner noted that the current system obliges HEIs to focus on recruiting students with a particular marker: “even though a student with the same degree of disadvantage who lives two streets away somehow is not as attractive to them because they do not help them meet the target. I suppose that might happen at the margin.”

Concern about the limits of SIMD was raised with Committee members at the visit to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland on 15 January 2018:

“Other participants noted that SIMD does not capture the full extent of an individual’s circumstances that may limit someone from reaching their full potential... [as] some students face domestic violence, family breakdown, disability or poor health, which can have a major impact on their studies.”

Participants noted that SIMD is currently used as the main measure for obtaining funding to support widening access. The suggestion from participants was that the policy focus should extend to recognise relevant other issues that affect fair access.

A research project led by [University of Durham](#), and funded by the SFC, reported on the operation of contextualised admissions at Scottish HEIs. The research recommended that HEIs do not rely exclusively on a single area-based or school-level measure, such as SIMD or attendance at a low attaining school. These measures are thought to be more likely to correctly identify disadvantaged applicants if they are used in combination with other measures of disadvantage.

The Committee may wish to discuss with witnesses:

- **How HEIs are reconciling the policy focus on SIMD20 with the view that widening participation relies on recognising a potential variety of indicators of disadvantage.**
- **Whether HEIs are aware of particular barriers to access facing people living in rural Scotland; and, if so, what measures they may be taking to address these.**

THEME 5: DATA ON LEARNERS

Two separate but related issues discussed with the Commissioner and the Minister were: (a) data on attainment of school leavers; (b) and plans to develop a unique learner number to track people through learning into employment.

ATTAINMENT DATA

In its submission for the meeting with the Commissioner on 21 February 2018, Universities Scotland drew attention to work it was attempting to pursue to model potential minimum entry requirements for SIMD20 applicants. To do this it said that it needed access to data on the level of achievement at Higher by pupils at S6. Publicly available data are not detailed enough and they noted at that time that the Scottish Government had not yet provided access to these figures.

Universities Scotland has argued that access to richer data about attainment by S6 is important to inform the commitment to introduce minimum entry requirements in 2019. However, the response from both the Commissioner and the Minister was that the lack of granular level data should not prevent HEIs from progressing action to establish minimum entry standards. While Universities Scotland still does not have the data it requested, it notes in its written submission for this meeting that data will be made available via the newly created Access Data Working Group. The group next meets on 24 May “and we very much hope to be able to draw on the data as a useful source from that point forward.”

UNIQUE LEARNER NUMBER

An issue that was raised initially with this Committee by Petra Wands on [25 January 2017](#) was the potential to allocate a unique learner number (ULN) to every child in Scotland. Recommendation 29 in the Blueprint report focused on this issue, suggesting that a mechanism like this would offer currently unavailable opportunities to track tracking learners throughout their education and beyond. As an individualised mechanism, it has the advantage of allowing a focus on the specific situation of each learner rather than (or as a complement to) proxies like SIMD.

The Scottish Government in its [first progress report](#) on the Blueprint recommendations noted that it was progressing activity in this area:

“The implementation of a unique learner number (ULN) is another significant, long-term commitment, likely to require changes to administration and IT structures across the education sector. The Scottish Government is currently conducting a feasibility exercise with IT specialists and key stakeholders to determine the most suitable approach.”

At present there is no single system in Scotland for tracking learners through all stages of compulsory schooling, post-16 education, training and employment. While public bodies that are involved in different stages of learning, training and employment will hold records,

the data collected is not consistent; nor is it shared across agencies. On this point, the Minister when attending this Committee noted some of the sensitivities associated with development of a unique learner number:

“We are committed to looking very seriously at that issue...However, this is a very sensitive issue, and we are looking at considerations around the data that is collected and who it is seen by. After all, we are talking about data sharing across the education sector, which should never be done lightly; we need to be very aware of the sensitivities in that respect.”

In the [15-24 Learner Journey Review](#) (published on 10 May 2018) plans to develop a system of identifying and following the progress of individual learners. This is work that is to be taken forward by the Scottish Government with input from others such as the SFC, SDS, local authorities, colleges, universities, Education Scotland and the SQA.

The Committee may wish to discuss with witnesses:

- **Progress on development of a minimum income standard.**
- **Views on the potential value of having unique learner numbers to track learners throughout their education and progressing into employment.**

THEME 6: RETENTION

“Fair access is not just about ensuring more people from deprived backgrounds enter higher education, it is just as important to ensure that they can maintain their studies and successfully graduate” ([Blueprint report](#))

Widening access policy³ is about both gaining the opportunity to participate in higher education and also being able to progress through to completion of that programme of study. The Blueprint report refers throughout to the need to focus on retention as well as access:

“Institutions are already alert to the need to support retention for this group of students and many are providing tailored support. Specific funding is also provided from the SFC to support retention. The Framework for Fair Access, which should cover all learning from early years to graduation, should help to identify and provide guidance on the activities that have the most impact on supporting retention.”

Statistics produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) report on “non-completion” of studies. These non-completion statistics offer institution level figures on full time students who start their studies in one academic year but do not continue that programme into year 2.⁴ The most recent HESA non-continuation statistics also looked at

³ For this reason, it is referred to by many HEIs as “widening participation” rather than widening access.

⁴ For part time students the measure is those who are still participating two years after they started their programme.

data on those who returned to their studies a year later. The figures for [non-continuation after first year](#) and separately for [returns a year later](#) are presented in two recent SPICE blogs. The figures show differences between individual HEIs in the rate of non-continuation after first year and in returns to study after a year away, with notable differences between older and post-1992 institutions and between young and mature students – young students and those at older institutions being far less likely to drop-out at the end of first year and when they do, more likely to return to their studies after a year away.

In its written submission for this session, Universities Scotland highlights the important role that ‘mature’ students will play in enabling Scotland to reach the Blueprint targets. UCAS applications from all age learners from SIMD20 areas increased (by 170) in 2018 at the same time as applications from 18 year olds slightly fell (by 10). With the HESA data suggesting a higher risk of non-completion affecting adult returners, an increase in applications raises important issues about tackling retention among adult learners.

The HESA statistics offer two things:

- Information on numbers not continuing their studies from first to second year – which is when most full time degree students withdraw from their studies.
- An overview across all and at each individual Scottish HEI.

What they don't capture is: (a) why people leave their studies at this point and (b) what opportunities there are to return to learning at a later date. The language of “stepping out” from study is one that the Commissioner has promoted in his annual report and when giving evidence to this Committee; which [Universities Scotland](#) agrees provides a positive focus to support retention levels.

The Scottish Funding Council published its first [widening access](#) report in late 2017; offering data towards the targets set out in the Blueprint report. Included in that publication were HESA figures on the non-continuation of Scottish domiciled full time degree students living in SIMD20 areas. The table is reproduced at Annexe B. It shows that, at most Scottish HEIs, the retention rate is lower among those living in SIMD20 areas relative to the student population at large. Not included in the SFC figures is information on retention among students at the Open University (OU). This is due to study at the OU offering significant amounts of part-time study. HESA figures indicate that students in part-time study have far higher rates of non-continuation than full-time. The OU in its submission for this session does however note that many of its learners are not studying for a degree, but simply taking single modules. Retention may not, therefore, be understood in the same way at the OU as it is at traditional “brick” universities where people generally go to study for a named degree.

REASONS FOR NON-CONTINUATION OF STUDIES

Work to explore the reasons for some students being more likely to withdraw from their studies a highlight complex mix of factors at play (some relating to the student's own

circumstances and some to the subject being studied). Communication with a small number of officials at Scottish HEIs drew attention to a few possible reasons for non-continuation of study:

- Social as well as academic integration into the life of the university is important to allow students to make friends and engage in “meaningful academic discussions with teachers and peers.”
- Related to this, those who commute longer distances are more likely to withdraw from their studies “because they can find it harder to participate as fully in student life, and to build the social and study networks that are essential to academic achievement.”
- Changing personal circumstances, financial pressures, health consideration and changing aspirations for future careers are cited as common factors in deciding to leave a degree programme.
- The availability of support within the institution can play a part in someone’s decision to leave – whether the student feels they can talk to a lecturer or support services, whether they can access the support they might need to remain, or even knowing that support is available – may play a part in whether someone decides to leave their studies.
- Previous research has highlighted the importance of academic success in someone’s decision to continue or leave their studies. One UK study highlighted that the academic requirements of some courses (particularly STEM subjects and some social sciences) was a significant reason for non-continuation of studies.

In the discussion paper on [Retention, Outcomes and Destinations](#) the Commissioner sets out three options to address lower retention by those students living in SIMD20 areas (and differences in qualifications achieved and destinations of those who complete a degree programme).

- The first involves investing more in support for students from non-traditional backgrounds. He also proposes investing in research to identify the most important obstacles these students face.
- The second (which he does not advocate) is cherry picking which students from SIMD20 areas are offered a place. In effect: “only admit[ting] more SIMD20 students if they [the university] could be sure they [the student] will perform as well as traditional students”. As he notes, however, that this approach would “act as a brake on fair access” and would be “unacceptable in terms of social justice (and political realities)”.
- The third, which he recognises is likely to be the most controversial, involves addressing the cultural / class basis of universities.

Essentially, the Commissioner is suggesting that HEIs are a cultural environment that may not support all types of students to effectively engage. He uses current understanding of

gender discrimination and institutional racism as analogous to what might be happening in relation to class inequality at HEIs. In relation to students living in SIMD20 areas:

“These thoughts are relevant to achieving fair outcomes for SIMD20 students. However much support they receive during their time at college or university, they still suffer discrimination. Not so many enjoy the positive reinforcement of families and peers that helps stop more socially privileged students dropping out. Faced with competing social, and maybe financial, pressures, they need more resilience to stay the course. Far fewer have the ‘middle-class’ habits, and actual social connections, that smooth the paths into professional jobs.”

Finally, we received one response to the call for views from people who had left their studies early. The submission is from someone who is deaf. She explained that a tutor had played a key role in undermining her confidence in her abilities; which led to her decision to withdraw from her degree programme. She did not feel that follow up support was offered by the university: “looking back, it would have been beneficial to have had some sort of follow-up meeting to explain how I was feeling and perhaps what further steps could have been taken.”

The Committee may wish to discuss with witnesses:

- **How HEIs are working to address lower retention rates (based on HESA statistics) among students who live in SIMD20 areas.**
- **Whether the data that HEIs gather and hold on retention / reasons for non-completion of studies is sufficient to ensure that HEIs know how best to support students to continue and complete their studies.**
- **What steps HEIs are taking to improve their understanding of the reasons for non-completion / stepping out e.g. access to appropriate support, financial advice, social and academic integration of all students.**
- **What specific measures are taken by individual HEIs to ensure that students get access to good advice (including on support and options to return at a later date) prior to making the final decision about leaving their studies.**
- **How are HEIs responding to the Commissioner’s commentary that HEIs need to address the culture of these institutions, which he suggests privileges certain behaviours and actions and so serve to disadvantage non-traditional learners.**

THEME 7: FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

A specific issue recognised as playing a part in enabling students from lower income households to participate in university life is the costs associated with studying, particularly relating to accommodation that allows students to live away from home while they attend university. Recently, for example, there was some press coverage of a scheme recently introduced by the University of Aberdeen to offer free accommodation to students who

gained a place to study at Aberdeen and who lived in an SIMD20 at the time of applying. The scheme offers a free year in halls of residence, which usually costs between £3,861 and £5,733 (The Times, 12 April 2018).

Individual HEIs offer scholarships and bursaries as financial incentives to particular students – with some directed at attracting students from lower income households. For example, the [University of Aberdeen](#) offers Entrance Scholarships (Access) that range from £1,000 to £3,000 to students meeting certain widening participation criteria. For example, those who reside in SIMD20 areas may be able to apply for the Prince of Wales Scholarship. At the [University of Edinburgh](#), there is the *Scotland Scholarship*, which provides Scottish domiciled students whose home is outside Edinburgh with between £500 and £2000 to meet the cost of accommodation. There is also an *Enhanced Scotland Scholarship* of £3,000 for 2018-19 entrants who reside in an SIMD20 area (including those living in Edinburgh) where the family live in the lowest income band as well as to students receiving the care experience student bursary.

The research by the Sutton Trust noted some examples of institutional bursaries offered by some of the ancient universities. Examples highlighted include the University of Edinburgh (as noted above) and the [University of St Andrews](#), which offers both accommodation bursaries and awards to Scottish domiciled entrants with a family income of less than £34,000.

It is not clear how commonplace these institutional bursaries and scholarships are available and at which institutions they are on offer. The implication is that these are packages that are offered by the ancient institutions rather than the newer institutions, which may relate to availability of endowment and other charitable giving to the ancient institutions.

The Committee may wish to discuss with witnesses:

- What steps individual HEIs are taking to address the financial barriers facing students from non-traditional backgrounds to enable access to and retention at university.
- Whether some institutions face greater challenges with offering financial incentives (e.g. scholarships and institutional bursaries) than others.

THEME 8: OTHER ISSUES

There have been a number of pieces in the press recently focusing on gender inequality in the university sector. One issue that has been highlighted is women's representation in senior professional roles in universities. Figures published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in January 2018 indicated that, while women make up 44% of the academic workforce, only 23.7% are professors ([Herald 19 January 2018](#)). There is significant variance across the sector in the number of women in senior positions, with variation both between individual HEIs and in the subject areas where women are more or less likely to be in senior positions.

Universities Scotland has pointed out that the HESA figures exclude professors that are working in senior management positions in universities. Universities Scotland's calculations⁵ indicate a figure of 25% for 2017; having increased from 22% in 2014. In personal correspondence, Universities Scotland has said:

"[Universities] are determined to make further progress in this area. Many institutions' gender action plans contain specific actions aimed at removing barriers to promotion for women. In many cases, such actions are also built into Athena SWAN plans."

The list of actions offered by Universities Scotland to address this gap includes:

- Reviewing promotion processes
- Unconscious bias training for line managers
- Introduction into formal promotion process mechanisms to take account of career breaks and part-time working
- New promotion routes for teaching and service roles, where female academics are more prevalent
- Internal mentoring / coaching schemes to support those applications for promotion

Data on gender pay inequality is reported individually by universities as part of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Each institution uses its own method for measuring and reporting its gender priorities, including the gender pay gap. This makes presenting a national figure or a comparison between all institutions difficult. One source shows the pay gap across Scottish universities was 18.8% in 2016-17 (down from 21.1% in 2010-11)⁶. Universities Scotland has provided data⁷ indicating that the pay across Scottish universities was 9.1% in 2017 (compared with 16.1% across the Scottish economy as a whole). It suggests that the gap was even smaller when comparing the gender pay differentials of academics.

As the University of Aberdeen's current [Mainstreaming Equality and Equality Outcomes](#) report points out: "Research has shown that occupational segregation is one of the main causes of the pay gaps in the United Kingdom (Equality Challenge Unit, 2014)." Therefore, the absence of women in senior academic roles plays at least some part in continuing gender pay inequality in the sector. The so-called 'leaky pipeline' where women and men are equally represented at the start of their careers but over time men tend to progress into senior positions, while women do not, is explained as follows:

The explanation lies with a number of factors, some of which are particular to universities while others apply to wider society. The problem on campuses is that the environment is still not conducive to helping women make the same kind of career progress that men do. There are the long hours; then there's the pressure to publish

⁵ Figures provided to US from member universities (13 of the 18 Scotland based institutions) – these figures include all those who hold professorships, including those who also have management roles.

⁶ These figures are from work led by a joint employer-union Gender Pay Working Group, which reported in July 2015. This report was followed by a joint report examining gender pay gap data in September 2016.

⁷ Figures Universities Scotland have accessed via the ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE).

and the need to balance teaching and research, all of which can be incompatible with family and caring responsibilities ([Herald, 6 April 2018](#)).

There has been significant media attention to the issue of sexual harassment / violence against women on Scottish university campuses. Notable has been the coverage of the incident affecting Emily Drouet while studying at the University of Aberdeen.

The [Equally Safe in Higher Education](#) project is hosted by the University of Strathclyde. The project was established (funded by the Scottish Government) to develop a toolkit using Strathclyde as a pilot site, to challenge gender-based violence across Scotland's campuses. The toolkit was launched by Shirley Anne Somerville MSP on 25 April 2018. It sets out recommendations that should be taken by each university in Scotland:

- Develop a strategy and implementation plan to tackle gender-based violence.
- Establish a Strategic Group to oversee the implementation of the strategy and appoint a named champion or coordinator to report on progress.
- Introduce guidance and training for staff in responding to disclosures of gender-based violence and supporting victims/survivors.
- Develop a secure data collection system to record incidences of gender-based violence and undertakes research to ensure the extent and nature of the issue on campus is fully understood.
- Ensures well-publicised points of contact for students reporting gender-based violence
- Introduce policies for staff and students, including a clearly established code of conduct, disciplinary procedures and sanctions for perpetrators of gender-based violence.

The Committee may wish to discuss with witnesses:

- **How individual HEIs are responding to the under-representation of women in senior positions at Scottish HEIs, and related to this, how HEIs intend to address the gender pay gap in the sector.**
- **Responses to the recommendations in the Equally Safe in Higher Education toolkit**

Suzi Macpherson
SPICe
10 May 2018

ANNEXE A: COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROGRESS TO DATE

Recommendation		Lead	Progress
1	Appointment of Commissioner	SG	Delivered
2	Scottish Framework for Fair Access	CfFA	To be delivered in 2018
3	Public funding for access programmes	SG +	
4	Coordinated approach to access	SFC +	SFC work stream “Engaging with Schools” (no dates) Universities Scotland reported progress - to be achieved in 2018-19
5	More flexible approaches to admissions / entry to higher education	SFC	SFC work stream “Effective pathways and transitions into higher education” (no dates). Universities Scotland reported progress – to be achieved by 2019
6	Better transitions through SCQF 6 to 8 (e.g. Advanced Higher to Higher National Diploma)	SG	SFC work stream “Effective pathways and transitions into higher education” (no dates). To be taken forward via <i>Learner Journey 15-24</i> (no dates)
7	Develop a national model of bridging programmes	SFC	SFC work stream “Effective pathways and transitions into higher education” (no dates). Universities Scotland reported progress - to be achieved in 2018-19
8	More demanding articulation targets	SFC	SFC work stream “Effective pathways and transitions into higher education” (no dates). Universities Scotland reported progress – work-stream on articulation ongoing in 2018-19
9	Monitor expansion of articulation	SFC +	SFC work stream “Effective pathways and transitions into higher education” (no dates). Universities Scotland reported progress – work-stream on articulation ongoing in 2018-19
10	New models of articulation	SFC +	SFC work stream “Effective pathways and transitions into higher education” (no dates). Universities Scotland reported progress – work-stream on articulation ongoing in 2018-19
11	Access thresholds	HEIs	SFC work stream “evidencing improvements in the admissions and selection processes” (no dates) Universities Scotland reported progress. SG: “on track for delivery in 2019”
12	Transparency in access	HEIs	SFC work stream “evidencing

	thresholds / contextual admissions		improvements in the admissions and selection processes" (no dates) Universities Scotland reported progress. SG: "on track for delivery in 2019"
13	University rankings	CfFA	
14	Independent review of non-academic factors in applications process	SFC	SFC work stream "evidencing improvements in the admissions and selection processes" (no dates)
15	Engage with youngest children and families	SFC +	SFC work streams "engaging with schools" and "evidencing improvements in the admissions and selection processes" (no dates). Universities Scotland notes activity in this area
16	Academically based programmes for highly able school learners	SFC	SFC work stream "engaging with schools" (no dates). Universities Scotland notes activity in this area
17	More tailored offer of information, advice and guidance	SDS / schools	To be taken forward via <i>Learner Journey 15-24</i> (no dates)
18	Access to Higher / Advanced Higher courses	LA's, colleges / HEIs	SFC work stream "engaging with schools" (no dates). Universities Scotland notes activity in this area.
19	Research into student finance	CfFA	SG notes that work to deliver this recommendation will be considered in the context of the Student Support Review findings (published Nov 2017).
20	Better information on student finance	SAAS, SDS / schools	SG notes that work to deliver this recommendation will be considered in the context of the Student Support Review findings (published Nov 2017).
21	Offers of a place in HE for people with care experience	HEIs	SFC work stream "evidencing improvements in the admissions and selection processes" (no dates) Universities Scotland notes that offers are in place.
22	Full bursary for people with care experience	SG	Delivered
23	Identifying people with care experience throughout learning journey	SG	SFC work stream "evidencing improvements in the admissions and selection processes" (no dates) SG notes that work progressing
24	Review of widening access funds including Access and Retention Fund	SFC	SFC work stream "funding, targets and regulation" (no dates). SG noted: "The SFC will also conduct a review of the use and effectiveness of the additional access places funded over the last four years. This will inform future funding decisions."

25	Monitoring of core funding for spending on access	SFC	SFC work stream “funding, targets and regulation” (no dates). <i>No further info</i>
26	Options for more targeted funding models	SG / SFC	SFC work stream “funding, targets and regulation” (no dates). <i>No further info</i>
27	The SFC to make more extensive use of its regulatory powers, supported by SG	SG / SFC	SFC work stream “funding, targets and regulation” (no dates). <i>No further info.</i>
28	Embedding access objectives into other regulatory frameworks.	SG	SG notes work being done to identify current regulatory parameters. Minister for FE, HE and Science to write to relevant agencies / public bodies (no dates).
29	Improving tracking and sharing of data	SG	Work to develop a Unique Learner Number (ULN) is ongoing
30	Enhance analysis and publication of data on fair access.	SG / SFC	SFC published statistics in September 2017. Work on data improvements (e.g. UCAS Scotland level data) ongoing. Universities Scotland notes activity in this area.
31	Developing measures to identify access students	SG +	Work ongoing / progressing.
32	Widening access targets	SG / SFC	Various targets to be met by 2021, 2026 and 2030 SG notes: “implementation underway”
33	Consider further work on equal access for other groups and equal outcomes for learners	CfFA	SG notes that work being progressed by Commissioner
34	Report on progress annually	SG / CfFA	Commission proposed that SG produce first report then Commissioner report annually. SG is taking the lead on annual reporting against the Commission recommendations.

Note: The information summarised in the above table is drawn from the Scottish Government’s first [implementation](#) report, the [Blueprint report](#) and the Universities Scotland publication “[Working to Widen Access](#)”

Note: The information summarised in the above table is drawn from the Scottish Government’s first [implementation](#) report, the [Blueprint report](#) and the Universities Scotland publication “[Working to Widen Access](#)”

ANNEXE B: UNIVERSITIES SCOTLAND'S WORKING TO WIDEN ACCESS REPORT – 15 ACTION POINTS

ADMISSIONS:

- Scottish higher education institutions will develop clear and consistent information about contextualised admissions. We will work to publish a set of terms and descriptions in 2018 that pass user testing and are ready for use to inform the application cycle for 2020/21 entry.
- Scottish higher education institutions will use a consistent core of indicators in their contextualised admissions.
- Every Scottish higher education institution will set minimum entry requirements for their courses in 2019 for entrants starting in 2020/21. The minimum requirements will reflect the best evidence on the level of achievement necessary for successful completion.
- Care experienced learners will be guaranteed an offer of a place at university if they meet minimum entry requirements. Until then, universities will continue to give care experienced applicants additional consideration.
- Universities Scotland will work with our members to consider whether there are other categories of learner who should receive special consideration.
- Universities Scotland will work with the Scottish Funding Council and Scottish Government to identify and share the data universities need to inform their contextualised admissions policies.

ARTICULATION:

- Every university will undertake a fundamental review of its ability to increase the number and percentage of students who articulate with full credit for the start of 2018/19. This review will need to involve college partners and others.
- Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland will establish a National Articulation Forum in academic year 2017/18.
- The National Articulation Forum will examine how we can offer full credit articulation to more students. It will do this by looking at opportunities to improve articulation in specific subjects as well as considering how to expand the model of articulation to include other qualifications in addition to Higher Nationals.
- The National Articulation Forum will investigate student perspectives on articulation.
- The National Articulation Forum will develop clear information about articulation.

BRIDGING PROGRAMMES:

- Higher education institutions will work to improve the national coherence of bridging activity. This will involve better regional coordination of bridging programmes and

more mutual recognition of programmes making it easier for students to transfer. This will be implemented during 2018/19.

- Higher education institutions will agree a common language on bridging programmes for use across the sector to ensure clarity for learners and their advisers. This process will be fully inclusive of relevant stakeholders and be delivered in 2018.
- Universities Scotland will work with others to scope the development of a single online resource that enables learners and their advisers to access information about bridging programme opportunities offered across Scotland. We will deliver this scoping exercise for the start of 2018/19.
- Higher education institutions will explore the potential of introducing regional widening access targets to encourage collaboration.

ANNEXE C: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COMMISSION FOR FAIR ACCESS

Recommendation 1: The Scottish Government should take every opportunity to clarify the different agendas arising from the wider goal of fair access to higher education as a whole and the narrower goal of fair access to universities. It should make clear its view on their relative priority for the next four years in the lead up to delivery of the first CoWA targets.

Recommendation 2: In advance of reviewing institutional targets in 2022, as recommended by the Commission on Widening Access, the Scottish Government should encourage the widest possible national debate on this issue, in partnership with colleges and universities and other stakeholders.

Recommendation 3: The SFC and Scottish Government should work with the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to ensure the data required to report on the proportion of SIMD20 entrants (i.e. entrant domicile and home postcode) is prioritised within the HESA 'Data Futures' project, so that more timely data can be made available to measure progress towards meeting fair access targets.

Recommendation 4: The Scottish Government should consider whether the total number of funded places in Scottish higher education needs to be increased in order to ensure that overall demand, from applicants from all social backgrounds, is met while maintaining the momentum towards fair access.

Recommendation 5: It should undertake to retain within the higher education budget any savings produced by any overall reduction in demand as a result of demography; the removal of other-EU students from the total of funded places after the UK leaves the EU (however undesirable Brexit may be); and any increase in efficiency produced by 'smarter' articulation (between HNs and degrees but also between S6 and first-year higher education).

Recommendation 6: If additional funded places are made available by the Scottish Government, only a proportion of them should be ring-fenced to support fair access. Institutions should be free to use a proportion in ways they determine, in the hope that this will ease fears of displacement and also in the hope that fair access will be accepted as a mainstream goal by all. If no additional places are provided, there will be no alternative to setting new targets beyond the existing access places.

Recommendation 7: Progress towards fair access targets should continue to be monitored by the SFC, not only with regard to the use of the proportion of any additional places ring-fenced but with regard to all the student places it funds.

Recommendation 8: In taking the [15-24 Learner Journey] forward, the Scottish Government should make clear how implementation will support fair access to higher education, as well as the range of education, training and employment opportunities available to young people. In particular it should focus on the development of flexible pathways between these various routes into higher education.

Recommendation 9: The SFC should aim to encourage seamless progression from further to higher education in colleges, and also work towards removing unnecessary differences in

its funding and accountability systems for colleges and universities with regard to higher education provision. This need not involve far-reaching governance reforms, nor imply significant shifts in current funding patterns. The goal should be to produce a properly integrated and articulated tertiary education system across Scotland.

Recommendation 10: The SFC should take a stronger lead and have a clearer voice in debates about the future of higher (and further) education in Scotland. It should consider making more, and smarter, use of the powers it has been granted, acting as a bridge between high-level priorities established by the Government and the strategic goals of individual institutions. Fair access is a key area in which national coordination of institutional strategies and activities would be beneficial, below the level at which it is reasonable (or appropriate) to expect the Government to operate.

Recommendation 11: The SFC should review its use of outcome agreements - ensuring that it offers a robust challenge to institutions in negotiating agreed goals and that outcome agreement and more detailed agreements and action plans (in areas such as fair access) are better integrated; and also that there is greater clarity about what sanctions it would be appropriate to impose when targets are not met. Consideration should be given to imposing penalties for non-delivery, not simply in relation to ring-fenced funding initiatives but to funding allocations more generally.

Recommendation 12: Universities should consider the designation of a common core for all summer schools and other bridging programmes across Scotland, based on identifying those elements that already appear in all or most programmes. Some of these elements clearly would need to be subject-specific, and there should also be scope for institutions to customise some elements based on their particular needs. Greater commonality would produce greater consistency, making the content of these programmes more transparent to learners (and their advisers) and also making them more transferable. It would also make it easier to increase the scale of provision, which is clearly necessary.

Recommendation 13: Universities and Universities Scotland should work with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the Framework Development Group to develop an authoritative typology of bridging and outreach programmes and an easily accessible web-based database of courses. This should align to the evidence and best practice published in the Scottish Toolkit for Fair Access.

Recommendation 14: Universities should consider developing a new 'social covenant' that brings together all activities that reflect their wider social responsibilities – within their local communities, wider regions and Scotland as a whole (and, indeed, on European and international levels). Fair access initiatives should be firmly embedded within these new covenants.

Recommendation 15: Universities should commit to substantially increasing the proportion of transferring HN students admitted with full credit (to at least the 75 per cent benchmark identified by the SFC), and all HND students, without exception, should be allowed to transfer into Year 2. If individual students are not given, or specific courses do not grant, full credit, the reasons should be specified, and fully justified, along with an action plan to remedy these perceived deficits in preparation.

Recommendation 16: Universities should commit to substantially increasing the number of transferring HN students they admit, and offering necessary support. In the case of universities with insufficient HN applicants to support such an expansion, active measures should be taken by establishing stronger links with local colleges to increase the supply. If voluntary action by universities is inadequate, the SFC should consider introducing institutional targets for articulation, enforced through outcome agreements.

Recommendation 17: Universities should make more imaginative use of the first year of undergraduate education, by paying more explicit attention to the learning needs arising from transition from school to university. This would benefit all students (even those with excellent entry grades). More explicit use of the first year as a foundation year, a common practice in the United States, could also have a number of other advantages:

- Some of the curriculum that is currently offered in summer schools could be incorporated.
- The perceived educational deficits of some HN students could also be addressed by incorporating 'enhancement' elements that are currently included in some HNs.
- The choice of Highers made during secondary education, which is generally regarded as an important reason why disadvantaged students with more limited access to sound advice have more limited access to universities, would become less crucial.

Recommendation 18: Universities should substantially increase the proportion of well qualified S6 leavers with Advanced Highers admitted into Year 2 - to reduce any possibility of 'coasting' and to reduce repetition of the curriculum; and also to increase efficiency and generate more funded places within the existing budget.

Recommendation 19: Universities, as recommended in the recent US report, should agree a common language to describe contextual admissions, and identify a set of common indicators to be used by all universities. The use of institution specific indicators should be the exception, not the norm.

Recommendation 20: Universities should publish a detailed guide to their contextual admissions processes and practices in as accessible a form as possible to ensure full transparency. This should include a list of indicators, common and specific, and an explanation of what the presence of each indicator means for applicants in terms of the actual offer they will receive.

Recommendation 21: Universities should make much bolder use of adjusted offers, by explicitly identifying acceptable risks of non-progression and failure to achieve good degree outcomes rather than merely tolerating limited variations from historical patterns.

Recommendation 22: The Scottish Government should encourage a wide debate about definitions of 'standards' and 'success' (as measured by the continuation rates and degree outcomes typical of traditional students) without fear of ill-informed accusations of 'dumbing down'. In the case of formal indicators an acceptable degree of risk should be defined to identify minimum thresholds for success. It should work with institutions to ensure that - as

far as possible - students who 'stop out' are not forced to 'drop out' by over-rigid definitions of progression.

Recommendation 23: The Scottish Government should make it clear that the Government's targets are for all first-degree entrants, regardless of age, despite the focus on breaking the cycle of deprivation for young adults. It should ensure that the needs of adult students from similar backgrounds are given the same priority as school-leavers.

ANNEXE D: RETENTION RATES FOR STUDENTS FROM SIMD20 AREAS

Table 1 below shows the figures for full time Scottish domiciled students who entered a degree programme at a Scottish HEI in academic year 2014-15 and the proportion that continued their studies into academic year 2015-16⁸ (the second year of their studies). It presents figures on the overall retention rate and then separately the retention rate among students who lived in SIMD20 areas. It shows the total number of students in SIMD20 areas as a way of contextualising the percentage figures. A column has been added to show the difference in the retention rate between SIMD20 participants and the student body as a whole⁹.

Table 1: Retention rate at Scottish HEIs – Scottish domiciled full time degree entrants in AY 2014-15 – all students and SIMD20 students only -AY 2015-16

	Retention Rate	Retention for MD20	Number of MD20	% difference between SIMD20 and overall retention
Aberdeen, University of	93.7%	85.7%	75	-7.9%
Abertay Dundee, University of	89.1%	84.2%	140	-5.0%
Dundee, University of	94.6%	89.8%	285	-4.8%
Edinburgh Napier University	89.0%	84.0%	280	-5.0%
Edinburgh, University of	93.7%	91.9%	135	-1.9%
Glasgow Caledonian University	91.0%	88.8%	750	-2.2%
Glasgow School of Art	96.1%	95.2%	40	-0.9%
Glasgow, University of	94.1%	89.2%	345	-4.8%
Heriot-Watt University	90.9%	85.0%	135	-6.0%
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	85.9%	75.9%	85	-10.0%
Robert Gordon University	92.8%	89.4%	140	-3.4%
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	93.2%	91.7%	10	-1.6%
St Andrews, University of	96.6%	91.7%	35	-4.9%
Stirling, University of	93.5%	92.5%	255	-1.0%
Strathclyde, University of	92.4%	89.6%	395	-2.8%
Scottish Agricultural College	85.0%	87.5%	25	2.5%
Highlands and Islands, University	91.4%	87.5%	55	-3.9%
West of Scotland, University of	84.8%	83.4%	935	-1.3%

Source: Table 2A [SFC Report on Widening Access 2015-16](#) The final column (% differences) is not from the SFC report, but is my own calculation of the difference between students living in SIMD20 areas and the overall student population (those living in all five SIMD quintiles)

Note1: At some Scottish HEIs the number of students is relatively small; as such, percentage differences should be treated with caution.

Note2: The SFC did not include the Open University in the SIMD20 analysis replicated above.

⁸ The widening access report for academic year 2016-17 is due to be published at the end of May 2018.

⁹ The SFC only publishes figures on the population of students living in SIMD20 areas as compared with the general population [all SIMD quintiles], rather than the proportions of students in each of the five SIMD quintiles.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

15th Meeting, 2018 (Session 5), Wednesday, 16 May 2018

Widening Access Submissions

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the submissions received in respect of the Widening access evidence session.

Submissions

2. The Committee has received submissions from two of the organisations on the panel. The links to the submissions are below.

Witness Submissions:

- [Annexe A: The Open University Scotland](#)
- [Annexe B: Universities Scotland](#)

Submissions:

3. The anonymous submission was received in response to the Committee's request for experiences of students who do not complete university courses, or who take time out from their course

- [Annexe C: Anonymous 1](#)
- [Annexe D: Lucy Hunter-Blackburn](#)

.Supplementary evidence:

- [Annexe E - Letter from the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science following the evidence session on 7 March](#)

Annexe A**EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE****Widening Access Submission****The Open University Scotland****Introduction**

The Open University's (OU) mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. Social justice and equality of opportunity are at the heart of everything the OU does and widening access to higher education is the ambition on which it was founded. The OU is committed to extending opportunities for educational success to those who would otherwise be excluded from higher education.

The OU in Scotland is one of Scotland's nineteen higher education institutions and receives funding from the Scottish Funding Council. The OU accounts for more than half of all part-time undergraduates in Scotland, with 15,765 students in 2016/17.

Entry

The OU operates a unique open entry policy which means that no entrance qualifications are required for the vast majority of undergraduate provision. Prospective students do not apply to the OU via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Instead, they register directly with the OU.

Teaching

The OU's distinctive teaching model is based on personalised distance learning. Students do not go to university; rather, the university comes to them. The emphasis is on flexibility, allowing students to study at a time and place that suits them, enabling them to fit their learning into their busy lives and around other commitments.

Although some students study at full-time intensity (120 credits per year), most OU students study part-time at about half this intensity (60 credits per year) and will therefore take around six years to complete an honours degree.

OU study is modular. Modules can be studied on a standalone basis or can be combined to follow pathways to achieve specific named qualifications. The OU also offers a suite of Open qualifications, which allow students to build and tailor their study based on their own needs. Every student is assigned an Associate Lecturer, a personal tutor who supports the student through their module.

Students

Student numbers have been growing for several years: from 14,635 students (6,200 FTE) in 2013/14 to 15,765 (7,570 FTE) in 2016/17. The OU's 15,765 students are found all over Scotland, from Selkirk to Shetland, from Mull to Montrose, and in every Parliamentary constituency.

- 17% of new undergraduates live in areas in the most deprived quintile of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD20)
- Almost a quarter of students live in rural or remote areas
- 21% have declared a disability
- 74% of students are in full- or part-time work

- 69% of new undergraduates earn less than £25,000
- 17% of new undergraduates lack traditional entry qualifications
- 18% have a college Higher National Certificate or Diploma
- The median age of new undergraduates is 26
- Students range in age from school-age to 96.

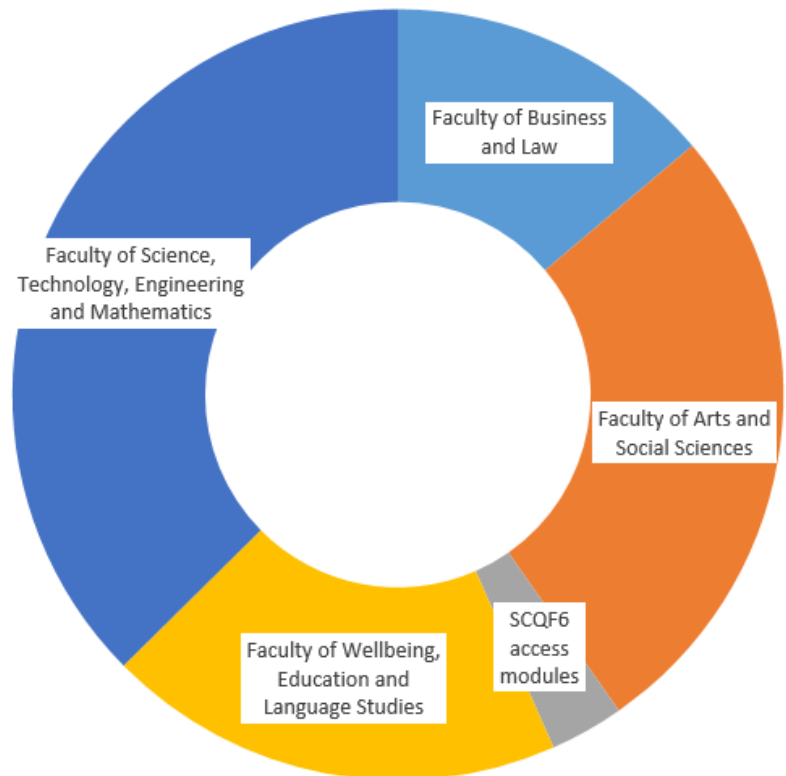
Areas of study

The OU is organised into four faculties. We also offer three broad access modules at SCQF level 6, designed to help students to prepare for degree level study.

The chart shows the proportion of Scottish module registrations by faculty.

42% of OU students in Scotland studied STEM subjects in 2016/17. Of these students, 47% were female.

The OU in Scotland is working, as part of its Gender Action Plan, to further improve the proportion of women studying STEM subjects and men studying health and social care subjects.



Funding

The OU, uniquely among Scottish HEIs, is funded by the SFC on completion. The ongoing growth in student numbers is such that there is now a significant gap between our total number of students and funded places.

Almost two-thirds of OU undergraduates are in receipt of the Scottish Government's Part-Time Fee Grant (PTFG), administered by the Student Awards Agency Scotland, which waives tuition fees for students earning under £25,000. This proportion has grown every year since the PTFG's introduction in 2013/14 and as it is means-tested arguably represents an access measure in its own right.

Part-time undergraduate students earning over £25,000 pay fees. However, OU fees in Scotland are maintained at a significantly lower rate than in England because of the teaching grant the OU receives from the Scottish Funding Council.

Part-time students are not generally eligible for maintenance support. The recently-concluded independent review of student support, which had as its central recommendation a proposal for a minimum student income, did not address this issue. Despite citing fairness and parity as two of its values, the review group instead made its proposals on the basis of mode of study rather than need.

Learner journey

Learner journeys are not linear. Different learners have different needs and ambitions and therefore will take different journeys to achieve those ambitions. This must by necessity include multiple entry and exit points, giving learners the flexibility to study in a manner that suits them and their circumstances.

In an increasingly dynamic economy, in which it is anticipated that the development of new technology will have an ever-increasing impact on jobs, there is a pressing need to recognise that the learner journey has to enable learners to up-skill and re-skill in order to change jobs and careers throughout their working lives.

More information For more information, please contact Kenny Stewart, Kenny.Stewart@open.ac.uk.

Annexe B

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Widening Access Submission

Universities Scotland

We are pleased to have the opportunity to make a written statement to the Education and Skills Committee. We were asked to focus on progress with widening access to higher education and on the goal that 20 per cent of entrants to higher education should be from the poorest 20 per cent of neighbourhoods by 2030.

The brief is structured as follows:

1. Progress on widening access, as shown by the data
2. Progress on implementing the 15 actions in *Working to Widen Access*
3. Remaining challenges facing higher education and its aspirations on access.

Where possible, we have presented evidence collated by ourselves at the end of the document in the Annex.

1. Progress on widening access, as shown by the data

1.1 Progress on increasing the number of students from SIMD20 (quintile 1)¹ data zones in HE

- Currently, 14.8% of Scottish-domiciled entrants to undergraduate degrees, of all ages, are from SIMD20 data zones.² This is the way our progress to the 2030 target of 20% is being measured. The target is challenging but within sight. The proportion of entrants has increased from 11.4% in 2006/07.
- In 2016, the **offer rate** for applicants from the SIMD20 quintile was exactly the same as the offer rate to applicants from SIMD60-80. Applicants from SIMD40 quintile had the same offer rate as applicants from the SIMD80+ quintile.³ In the Commissioner's own words: "This suggests that institutions were actively trying to bring in more students from Q1 [SIMD20] and Q2 [SIMD40]".⁴

1.2 Progress towards 2021 CoWA targets

- The 2021 access target is that all 18 institutions should reach the threshold of 10% entrants from SIMD20 backgrounds. The latest published data on progress towards this goal is for 2015/16, which is two years behind the present. Even working from this data set, on full-time first degree entrants, 11 institutions had already almost exactly met or exceeded that target. A further three institutions were within two per cent of the target.⁵

1.3 Progress widening access to the 'professions' including medicine

¹ SIMD20 is used most commonly in Scotland. However the Commissioner's discussion papers and UCAS data often refer to Q1 for SIMD20 through to Q5 for SIMD80+ applicants. We will try to standardly use SIMD20

² This measure tracks entrants to full-time first degrees at university and looks at entrants of all ages.

³ Chart 2, Commissioner for Fair Access (2017) [University and College Admissions, Offers and Acceptances: Discussion Paper](#).

⁴ Ibid. p.2.

⁵ [Laying the Foundations, Commissioner's annual report](#), 2017. Chart 4, page 14.

- Applications to study medicine from SIMD20 and SIMD40 backgrounds are now much more likely to receive an offer than students in other quintiles.
- 49% of applications from students living in SIMD20 data zones received an offer to study medicine in one of Scotland's university medical schools in 2017/18. This has increased from 16% of SIMD20 applications made an offer in 2014/15 and compares to the 36% of applications from students living in SIMD80+ data zones who received an offer in 2017/18.
- This is significant progress in the proportion of entrants, with more than double the number of SIMD20 entrants (matriculations) to medicine in three years (2014/15 to 2016/17) at 7.6% of all entrants (matriculations) up from 3.7%. However, SIMD20&40 students remain under-represented.

1.4 Progress with student retention:

- Scotland's universities have improved their rates of retention with 'non-continuation' levels now at just 6.2% for full-time students. This non-continuation rate has fairly steadily improved over time (and marks a significant improvement from 10.7% in 2002/03).
- Continuous improvement in Scotland's retention rate, over a period, means that Scottish higher education has surpassed the retention rate of English higher education for the first time in 19 years.⁶
- There has always been a gap in retention rates between the average and that of SIMD20 students. This reflects the additional challenges access students can face at various points in their studies and is why Universities Scotland has consistently said⁷ that access and retention have to go hand in hand. The real challenge is not to widen access to the first year, it is to ensure a successful outcome for every student. Positively the gap is closing and it is closing as a result of levelling up (rather than levelling down). The retention gap is currently at 6.4 percentage points down from 7.5 percentage points in 2011/12.

1.5 Direct progression from college into university via articulation

- Between 2009/10 and 2015/16 there has been a 36% increase in the number of students moving from college direct into university (articulation) with full credit for their college course. This reflects the rise of articulation as an alternative entry route into university.
- 47.8% of all HN students who move onto university receive *full credit* from the university for their existing qualifications.
- Where students stay in the same subject as they progress between college and university, 57.6% of HN students receive *full credit* from the university. And in some subjects, where moving between HN and degree level study is easier, such as business and administration, the percentage of students receiving *full credit* increases to 75.7%.⁸

⁶ <https://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/scottish-universities-better-uk-average-retention-first-time-generation/>

⁷ Since [Action on Access](#) in 2014.

⁸ Universities Scotland (2017) [Working to Widen Access](#), table 1, p.21.

- 21.4% of all students who received *full credit* for their HNs through an articulation route were students living in SIMD20 data zones.⁹
- Of the total number of 1,926 SIMD20 students on articulation routes, 44.5% progressed to university with *full credit* given for their HN qualification.

1.6 Care experienced students

- The percentage of **entrants** to full-time first degrees in university with care experience is now at 0.6%, up very marginally from 0.5%. The overall numbers are low and so prone to fluctuations year to year.
- There were 160 full-time undergraduates at university known to have care experience in 2015/16.
- Universities are working towards reaching 1% of entrants with care experience. New data is due out soon.

1.7 Mature students will be vital to success on access

- Scotland has a positive trend of increase in the number of mature applicants (25+ years of age). The numbers of Scottish-domiciled mature applicants to 18 institutions via UCAS have increased by 10.7% over the last four years (2015-2018) to a new high of 9,280 applicants.¹⁰
- This positive trend is in stark contrast to the pattern for mature students in England, where applicants aged 25+ have fallen by 30.3% over the same time period.
- Mature students will be essential to Scotland's ability to reach the 2030 *Commission on Widening Access* (CoWA) targets. This is clearly evident in this year's applicant figures which unfortunately showed a very slight decrease in the number of Scottish-domiciled 18 year old applicants from SIMD20 data zones (a decrease of 10 applicants relative to 2017 cycle) but saw an increase of 170 SIMD20 applicants aged 20+ to at least a nine year high of 4,340 applicants at the 15 January deadline for entry in 2018.^{11 12}
- It was very helpful for the Commissioner and the Minister to confirm (at their respective sessions with the Education and Skills Committee recently) that the CoWA 2030 targets were inclusive of students of all age groups. This is important because 33% of first degree entrants to university are 21 or over¹³ and many learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, who have not reached their full potential at school, will enter higher education as a mature student, after work or further education.

⁹ National Articulation Database as supplied by the Scottish Funding Council. Analysis done by Universities Scotland. Data for 2014/15.

¹⁰ [UCAS January Deadline Analysis: Applicant Sex and Age](#). Table D.2.46. These data are applicants by the 15 January deadline for equal consideration. These are not end of cycle figures but they do present the picture up to and including the current admissions cycle. Not all mature entrants to university apply via UCAS so these figures may underrepresent the total number.

¹¹ UCAS [January Deadline Analysis: SIMD Quintile](#). D.1.3

¹² The UCAS analysis at the 15 January deadline shows the figures in age brackets of under 18, 18, 19, 20+ and all ages. We would liked to have shown data for 25+ years of age to match the definition of 'mature' students but it is not publicly available at this point in the cycle.

¹³ Universities Scotland (2017) Submission to Learner Journey Review

2. Progress implementing the 15 actions in *Working to Widen Access (WtWA)*:

Scotland's universities committed to 15 actions last November across the areas of admissions, articulation and bridging programmes with schools with the aim of delivering a big step forward in access. In less than 6 months we can report the following progress:

2.1 Admissions

- At least 9 of 18 universities have set minimum entry requirements for their undergraduate courses, although some are reviewing these requirements in response to the actions set out in *Working to Widen Access*. Another 6¹⁴ are in the process of setting minimum entry requirements and report being on track to publish these in time for 2020 entry.
- At least 9 institutions now guarantee offers for care-experienced applicants who meet the minimum entry requirements. These offers are generally made at the access threshold. Another 6 have guaranteed offers under consideration.¹⁵
- We have established an Admissions Working Group of expert practitioners and key partners, including NUS Scotland, to drive progress on our admissions actions.
- The Group has responded to feedback from schools, by agreeing to examine how universities take account of personal statements, Foundation Apprenticeships and Advanced Highers in the admissions process.
- It will also explore whether free school meals and Education Maintenance Allowance should be 'core contextual indicators' (i.e. factors that all universities should take into account). If so, this would add to the two core contextual indicators, of SIMD20 and care experience, that were confirmed by all institutions in November 2017. The goal is to create opportunity for those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage but who do not necessarily live in SIMD20 data zones. It will also bring greater consistency in approach across the sector and therefore offer more clarity to applicants, teachers and their parents/advisers.
- As part of work on admissions, another group is focused on developing clear and consistent language for contextualised admissions so that it becomes far more accessible and user-friendly. The membership of the group will give a voice to young people, adult returners, parents and schools as well as UCAS, the Scottish Funding Council, the Plain English Campaign, universities and others.
- As a crucial first step, the group has agreed to hold a discussion with existing and prospective students to understand their views on how the language that universities use could be made simpler and more consistent: we are determined to put learners at the centre of this process and to remove any barriers to people applying to university.

¹⁴ Neither the Open University in Scotland or the Conservatoire are counted within this survey on admissions as the OU does not have standard entry requirements for its courses and the Conservatoire does not apply academic entry requirements.

¹⁵ Admissions survey of institutions was run by US between February and May 2018. This information is based on a total of 16 respondents.

2.2 Articulation

- The National Articulation Forum promised in *Working to Widen Access* has been established. It is co-convened by Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland.
- The Forum will take account of any relevant recommendations on articulation from the long-awaited Scottish Government review of the 'Learner Journey', which was published in May 2018.

2.3 Bridging programmes

- We want to make it easier for learners, their parents and advisers to understand what bridging programmes are available and how programmes could help to support students into university. The provision of bridging programmes at a regional and national level must be more coherent, and we need better links between HEIs so that more learners can get credit for the study they've undertaken on bridging programmes.
- Our progress has been slightly delayed as we did not receive anticipated funding to support our work nor do we know whether the Learner Journey review will affect our proposed actions. We have, however, appointed a senior professional from within the sector to lead our work, while we will seek to work collaboratively with the Scottish Funding Council as it takes forward relevant work on bridging programmes.

3. Remaining challenges facing higher education and its aspirations on access

3.1 The attainment gap amongst school leavers.

- The attainment gap amongst school leavers remains stark. Only 20% of school leavers from the most deprived 10% of SIMD data zones have 3+ Highers (or equivalent SCQF level 6 qualifications) compared to 70% of school leavers from SIMD80+.¹⁶
- The most pressing shared challenge is to increase the proportion of people from the most deprived backgrounds who choose to apply to university and have the qualifications to do so. In 2016 over 6,000 18 year olds applied to university from the least deprived quintile compared to 2,000 from the most deprived quintile.¹⁷
- Obviously the Scottish Government has made the attainment gap a priority and is working with partners (including universities) to address this but this is the stark reality in Scotland at the moment and the reality against which universities make progress with SIMD20 entrants.

3.2 There are not enough applicants from SIMD20 or SIMD40 data zones applying to university.

- For entry in 2017, applicants from SIMD20 data zones made up only 15.6% of all applicants to study at undergraduate level in Scotland.
- Applying a modest threshold for entry, of four Higher grades at BCCC, applicants from SIMD20 data zones made up an even smaller proportion of applicants, at

¹⁶ Data is for 2014/15. Data received from Scottish Government in a request from the University of Edinburgh.

¹⁷ Commissioner for Fair Access (2017) Discussion Paper: UCAS Applications, Offers & Acceptances.

only 14.3%. It is worth stating that BCCC is below the entry rate, even with adjusted grades, for several institutions.

It is essential that universities' actions to widen access, through the measures described, happen in parallel with significant growth in the overall number of SIMD20 applicants with the attainment level needed to succeed at university (school-leavers or otherwise), if Scotland is to meet the access ambitions for 2030. Otherwise, Scotland risks a situation whereby SIMD20 students simply make different choices about which institutions in which to study without actually, or significantly, increasing the number of SIMD20 students studying in the university sector as a whole.

3.3 The need to support mature and part time students in order to reach the aspirations on access

- The data in section 1.7 made it clear that mature students will be vital to the achievement of the 2030 widening access targets. Given this, it should be one of the early priorities of the newly created Access Data Working Group to consider how to best identify socio-economic disadvantage among mature learners. There are additional challenges that mature learners also face such as additional responsibilities such as work and family.
- Part-time students continue to face challenges around student support. This was not dealt with in substance by the student support review.
- The sector is at the forefront of delivering Graduate Apprenticeships to meet the needs of people wanting to up-skill whilst already contributing to the economy within the labour force.

3.4 Availability of places

- Demand from well qualified applicants far exceeds the supply of places available at undergraduate level in Scottish higher education. Audit Scotland's 2016 analysis found that the cap on places for Scottish and EU-domiciled students has made it more difficult in recent years for Scottish students to gain a place at a Scottish university.¹⁸
- Brexit provides Scottish higher education with an opportunity, which is to maintain a proportion of the funded places currently available to EU-domiciled students for exclusive use by Scots, and to use some of the remaining resource to increase the overall level of per student investment by making above real terms increases in the university Teaching Grant. These two actions would support widening access without additional cost to Government.
- In recent months the Minister has signalled that the Scottish Government may not be inclined towards this option. In evidence to the Education and Skills Committee the Minister stated: *"you can extend a system to infinity, but that does not necessarily make it fair. We have an unfair system at the moment..."*¹⁹
- We acknowledge that Scotland faces significant societal and educational inequalities. We support the view, as expressed in *Blueprint for Fairness*, that

¹⁸ Audit Scotland (2016) *Audit of Higher Education in Scottish Universities* p.41.

¹⁹ Scottish Parliament [Education and Skills Committee Official Report](#), 7 March 2018

“everyone should be expected to meet the same academic standards... if all applicants had the same opportunities to realise their potential. But this is plainly not the case...” The higher education sector is taking action to level the playing field for applicants who have experienced that inequality. Contextualised admissions, adjusted grades and guaranteed places for those with care experience²⁰ represent new ways of recognising an applicant’s *achievement* with the goal of redressing the inequality they have experienced at other stages in their lives.

- However, it is very important to note that university admissions is a fair system. Fairness for every student is a guiding principle of the admissions process.²¹ We believe contextualising admissions and adjusting grades is consistent with being fair, as it is consistent with one of the five principles²²; the desire to minimise barriers for applicants. But it is important to signal to all applicants – regardless of age or background - that the admissions system, even without these changes, is one that adheres to principles of fairness. To say otherwise discredits the hard work and achievement of other successful applicants. The ultimate goal has to be to eradicate the inequality that applicants have faced.
- We believe that retaining a proportion of existing funded places in higher education so that they are available to Scottish-domiciled students and reinvesting in the unit of teaching resource available to support the education and welfare of every student in university would be a good way to support the Government’s aspiration to widen access to university.

3.5 Lack of granularity of data available

- The school leaver attainment data referred to in section 3.1 (which shows the proportion of SIMD20 students achieving 3 or more Highers) is all that is publicly available to universities, and others, to work with in terms of school leaver attainment by quintile of deprivation.
- The published data lacks grade specification and therefore doesn’t give universities enough detailed information with which to track the number of suitably qualified school-leavers now, or to project and track the progress on attainment to university entry level, forward to the 2030 targets.
- Similarly, we were concerned that the Scottish Government’s 2017 consultation on measuring the attainment gap and milestones towards closing it did not include measurements that would show increase in attainment at levels that would qualify learners for university entry, even with reduced offers through contextual admissions. Whilst we’d support the 8 measurements proposed as valuable, there is an opportunity to connect this work, aimed at the early years and those of school age, to the Government’s ambitions in post-16 education as

²⁰ As per action 3 in *Working to Widen Access*

²¹ Supporting Professionalism in Admissions’ five principles are: 1. being transparent; 2. enabling institutions to select students who are able to complete the course, as judged by their achievements and their potential; 3. striving to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid; 4. seeking to minimise barriers for applicants; and 5. being professional in every aspect and underpinned by appropriate institutional structures and processes

²² See ‘Our Guiding Principles’ (2017) [Working to Widen Access](#), p. 6.

part of the original holistic approach to widening access taken by the Commission and that was commended by all stakeholders.

- We have been in discussions with the Government since June 2017 about how the university sector can access the more granular level data which shows grade attainment by SIMD quintile. We have recently been advised that the data will be made available via the newly created Access Data Working Group to support the implementation of the Commission for Widening Access' recommendations. This group next meets on 24 May and we very much hope to be able to draw on the data as a useful resource from that point onwards.

3.6 The limitations of SIMD as a measure

- Universities Scotland members have long expressed concerns about the use of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) as the sole way of determining the sector's progress on widening access.
- The Scottish Government's own publication, *Introducing The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2016* argues that SIMD is not to be used for "identifying all people who are deprived in Scotland – not everyone who is deprived lives in a deprived area."²³ The document goes on to say: "not all deprived people live in deprived areas: Two out of three people who are income deprived do not live in deprived areas"²⁴ and points out that there are no deprived data zones in three different local authorities in Scotland (Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles) despite the presence of people experiencing deprivation in these areas.

²³ Scottish Government (2016), [Introducing The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2016](#)

²⁴ Ibid

Annex A**Table 1: Number of Scotland-domiciled full-time first degree entrants to Scottish HEIs from the most deprived SIMD quintile, and these as a percentage of all Scotland-domiciled full-time first degree entrants (2006/07 and 2009/10-2015/16) ²⁵**

	2006/07	...	2009/10	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number	2,915	...	3,400	3,695	4,060	4,200	4,250
Percentage	11.4	...	11.6	13.6	14.4	14.7	14.8

Table 2: Scotland-domiciled applications from SIMD20 through UCAS, and the difference between cycles (2011-2017) ²⁶

For entry in:	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
	5,260	5,240	5,390	5,860	6,430	6,600	6,780	6,890
Difference to 2017 cycle	-22%	-23%	-20%	-14%	-5%	-3%	0%	2%
Increase year-to-year	220	-20	150	470	570	170	180	110

Table 3: Number of acceptances through UCAS by SIMD (Scotland-domiciled 18 year olds, 2011-2017) ²⁷

For entry in:	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
SIMD Q1	1,070	1,100	1,170	1,250	1,215	1,280	1,425
SIMD Q2	1,660	1,710	1,775	1,830	1,865	1,935	2,000
SIMD Q3	2,530	2,675	2,645	2,540	2,765	2,660	2,630
SIMD Q4	3,630	3,670	3,605	3,530	3,660	3,720	3,665
SIMD Q5	5,310	5,250	5,275	5,120	5,195	5,260	5,125
Total	14,455	14,455	14,505	14,280	14,735	14,875	14,875
%SIMD20	7.4	7.6	8.1	8.8	8.2	8.6	9.6

Table 4: Non-continuation of full-time first degree entrants following year of entry (Scottish HEIs, 2005/06 and 2010/11-2015/16) ²⁸²⁵ Table 5, pg 10, 2017 SFC Report on Widening Access 2015-16. Full time, first degree at university.²⁶ Tables D.13.3 and D.13.4. UCAS 15 January Deadline analysis for entry in 2018.²⁷ UCAS Acceptances by SIMD (File: DR2_057_01)<https://www.ucas.com/file/140256/download?token=RmdwhRsl>

	2005/06	...	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Scotland	8.7		7.6	6.6	6.2	6.7	6.5	6.2
UK	7.1		6.3	5.7	5.7	6	6.2	6.4
England	6.7		6.2	5.7	5.7	5.9	6.3	6.4

Table 5: Full-time retention rates for Scotland-domiciled undergraduate entrants by SIMD (2011/12-2015/16) ²⁹

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Retention rate SIMD20 (%)	84.6	87.2	87.7	87.5	86.7
Retention rate overall (%)			91.7	91.4	91.3
Difference between SIMD20 – overall			4	3.9	4.6

Table 6. Resumption of study after a year out: Percentage who resume the following year at the same HEI (2009/10-2014/15) ³⁰

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Scotland (%)	15	13.6	15.9	11.4	16.9	18.8
England (%)	12.7	11.5	11.6	9.8	10.2	10.4
Difference (%)	2.3	2.1	4.3	1.6	6.7	8.4

Table 7: Number and percentage of Scotland-domiciled entrants to Scottish HEIs with care experience ³¹

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
% full-time first degree at university	0.5	0.6	0.6
# full-time first degree at university	145	170	160
# full-time HE in college	20	40	140

Table 8: Number of students who articulate directly from colleges to HEIs with full and partial credit (2009/10-2014/15) ³²

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	% change over period
Advanced Standing (full credit)	2,931	3,056	3,096	3,592	3,757	4,007	36.7
As a % of all those on articulation	46.4	47.7	47.0	49.2	47.8	47.8	

²⁸ HESA Performance Indicators Non-continuation. Full-time 'young' first degree entrants for 2015/16.

²⁹ Table 9 2017 SFC Report on Widening Access. Full-time Scot-dom UG entrants to university.

³⁰ HESA Performance Indicators. Resumption of study after a year out. Percentage who resume at the same HEI. Full-time, first degree.

³¹ Tables 23 & 24 2017 SFC Report on Widening Access. Full time, first degree.

³² Data from National Articulation database supplied by the SFC.

routes (excl. unknowns)							
Advanced Progression (partial credit)	762	698	647	727	726	862	13.2
As a % of all those on articulation routes (excl. unknowns)	12.1	10.9	9.8	10.0	9.2	10.3	

Table 9: Number of students who articulate into degree programmes with HN qualifications in the same subject area or a different subject area (2014-15)³³

		Advanced Standing (full credit)	Advanced Progression (partial credit)	Progression (no credit)	Total	Total as a % of all those on articulation routes (excl. unknowns)
Same subject area	Number	3,131	625	1,676	5,432	64.8
	Percentage	57.6	11.5	30.9		
Different subject area	Number	875	235	1,837	2,947	35.2
	Percentage	29.7	8.0	62.3		

Table 10: Percentage of applications by all quintiles of Scottish domiciled applications to Scottish Medical Schools³⁴

% applications made an offer	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
SIMD Q1	16	20	35	49
SIMD Q2	33	33	47	58
SIMD Q3	18	25	28	34
SIMD Q4	24	30	33	31
SIMD Q5	26	32	35	33
TOTAL	24	30	34	36

³³ Data from National Articulation database supplied by the SFC, analysed by Universities Scotland. Excludes those with HN in unknown subject area or unknown credit recognition. "Subject area" as defined by JACS.

³⁴ Data from Scottish Medical Schools Admissions Group, analysed by Universities Scotland

Table 11: Proportion of entrants to medical school from each quintile³⁵

% of entrants	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
SIMD Q1	3.7	3.6	7.6
SIMD Q2	9.8	10.7	11.2
SIMD Q3	12.7	13.1	14.2
SIMD Q4	23.9	22.9	22.5
SIMD Q5	50	49.8	44.5

³⁵ Ibid

Annexe C**EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE****Widening Access Submission****Anonymous 1**

Hello, I am profoundly deaf. I came across this on Twitter, as I saw that the Education and Skills Committee were looking for responses to the questions below. I have had experience of both university and college studies. I am happy to complete the following, and also be contacted if you need any further information, by email.

• What factors led you to take a break from your course?

I was doing a BA Primary Education course, which I joined after finishing school in 2008. I had always wanted to be a teacher and successfully obtained the grades needed to get into this course. I completed one full year of the course (retaking a placement in August after failing my initial placement) and then did around 5 months of the second year. At the time, I was not aware of the many different kinds of support available to me and I felt quite independent. I had not fully embraced my Deaf identity and felt that I would cope with minimal support, as this was my choice. However, looking back now I do wish I had asked for more support such as a note-taker and BSL/English interpreter.

During my second year placement, my tutor from university came out to have a catch-up with me and I recall having the conversation with her in which she suggested that I should talk to my class about my deafness. At the time, I was not as comfortable talking about my deafness and felt a bit of pressure from my tutor to tell my class. She then put her head down and said something, to which I responded by saying "oh sorry, I didn't catch what you said" and her response was quite derogatory, saying "see! If you didn't hear what I said then how will you cope in class?" and this immediately knocked my confidence. I managed to stay at the school for as long as I needed to and then when I got home later that day, I was quite upset and told my parents that I didn't want to go back to university. I had already been feeling quite stressed with the amount of paperwork needing to be done and this was an additional stress factor.

• What support did you receive in making the decision to step out?

I spoke with my parents, explaining how stressed I had been feeling and that I felt I couldn't continue. My mum then contacted the head of the course on my behalf to explain how I was feeling and what had happened. The head of the course was very apologetic and even tried to encourage me to reconsider my decision to withdraw from the course but I was adamant that I was too stressed to continue. My confidence had also been knocked in a big way and it was very difficult to overcome that; even now to this day I still have confidence issues.

• Did you return to your course?

No.

• If you did not return to complete your course, why not?

My confidence had completely been knocked and I felt like I was unable to continue. I did not feel there was enough support from the university to ease me back into my studies, and I did not receive any correspondence from my tutor which made me feel like I was seen as not important.

• If you did return, how long was your break?

N/A

• What support did you receive to decide whether to return to your course?

I do not recall any follow up support from the university after the initial phone call between my mum and the head of the course. Looking back, I feel it would have been beneficial to have had some sort of follow-up meeting to explain how I was feeling and perhaps what further steps could have been taken.

• Were you satisfied with your decision to stop your studies?

Yes and no. I am satisfied that I finished when I did because had I continued I probably would have made myself more ill with stress and felt unable to continue any longer. However, on reflection I do wish that more support had been in place and if I had received appropriate support then I could have been a confident teacher by now, maybe looking to do more specialised teaching such as a Teacher of the Deaf. Because my confidence was knocked badly that day, I am still quite nervous and do not have the confidence I would like to even consider pursuing this career later in life.

I hope these answers are satisfactory and, as stated earlier, I am happy for you to contact me should you have further questions.

Annexe D

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Widening Access Submission

Lucy Hunter-Blackburn

University of Edinburgh (Doctoral Student)

[Email in response to request from SPICe for information on whether and which students might be affected by the target to widen access people living to the 20% most deprived areas.]

Some thoughts first about how to conceptualise, and so examine, this.

What is displacement?

In any capped system which is over-subscribed, admitting one person will be at the expense of another and therefore displacement will occur in the most basic sense. That is clearly a long-standing feature of the system here.

The debate emerges now because the government is intervening to promote increased admission from one particular group, without necessarily increasing the size of the system to match the expected growth. This implies that admissions could be smaller than would otherwise have been the case for those not in that group. What is new, therefore, is the possibility of the displacement of students from specific groups as the direct result of government policy.

Displacement is not necessarily a bad thing, most obviously if those displaced would have made poor use (however defined) of a university place. It becomes more contentious if there is no argument about the capability of those who are displaced, but they are simply deemed less deserving than others because of some quality which has not previously been treated as relevant (in this case, their postcode).

Displacement and growth

The SG has noted that overall admissions are still rising.

Displacement affects those who apply in a particular year. *As long as some people are being rejected who would not otherwise have been, as a result of a government intervention, then that intervention has caused their displacement.* This can happen even if overall admissions are rising.

Thus, if a system has 1000 places, is allowed to grow by 20, but the government requires participation of those from Group X to be increased by 30, then the intervention has still reduced the places available for those not in Group X, compared to before.

Rising numbers are not therefore *of themselves* evidence that displacement is not occurring.

Comparison over time

Displacement can be looked at within a single year (as in the example above). However, it is reasonable to argue that what matters more is whether it is getting harder or easier for a person with particular attributes from a particular background to enter.

Using the example above, the intervention has caused the displacement of some people not in Group X, but there might be less concern about that if their likelihood of getting a place with a certain set of exam results, say, has not reduced. That might be the case if the overall population was falling and so reducing the overall competition for places, for example.

Changing demand

Displacement therefore does not necessarily simply mean "fewer places than before" for those not in the target group. It also has something to do with how many places there are relative to demand, and whether that is falling or rising.

In Scotland, the number of 18 year olds in the population is falling and is predicted to do so for a few years more. However, the proportion staying on at school and gaining the minimum qualifications for university entry is rising, along with interest in university-level study. At the same time, there are still many older people who have not yet been to university, whose changing demand is hard to predict. In addition, funded places can be taken by people who have already studied for a degree, but are re-qualifying: changing demand from this group also affects the level of applications. At present, demand from EU students is also relevant: this fell slightly in 2017. It will be relevant up to 2019, at least.

Overall, applications have been rising, and this has been regarded as positive by the Scottish government, whatever SIMD quintile that demand comes from.

Measuring displacement

At the level of individual units of admission within HEIs, it may be possible to identify directly how far decisions to admit more students from disadvantaged backgrounds has affected opportunities for others. At national level, the data can only ever be suggestive, by providing information on how the success rates of different groups compare over time and thus whether any particular group is starting to come under greater pressure than before.

UCAS offer rates (that, is what proportion of applications resulted in an offer) at 18 are available by SIMD and are provided by UCAS both as absolute figures and in an adjusted form which allows comparison to take into account differences in exam results and the types of courses applied for.

The number of UCAS *acceptances* as a percentage of *applicants* is a more direct measure of applicant success rates: both data sets are available by SIMD, but their relationship requires to be calculated by hand.

The data cannot however tell us what is happening to the success rates of disadvantaged *individuals* across all the SIMD quintiles. *This is a very substantial limitation in the way the relevant information is gathered for Scotland.* SIMD3 can be taken as giving a proxy for effects on individuals from backgrounds which are neither strongly disadvantaged or advantaged. However, we cannot track how far effects in SIMD groups are experienced equally, or may fall unevenly within each group according to individual or household disadvantage. In particular, we cannot tell what is happening to individuals from more disadvantaged backgrounds who live outside the target areas.

Analysis to date

This blog post contains analysis of trends in the offer rate by SIMD up to 2016. There is some evidence here that SIMD3 has become the least successful group in recent years, after accounting for academic achievement and the type of courses applied for. I have not looked at this again since the 2017 figures became available.

<https://adventuresinevidence.com/2017/02/01/displacing-the-privileged-vs-squeezing-the-middle-a-bit-more-evidence/>

Last, this post looks at what happened in Scotland in 2017 with EU applicants. Scotland appears to have seen a unique and large fall in the success rate of these applicants this year, which has made space for more Scottish applicants and as far as I can see accounts for the growth in that group in 2017. How far this trend continues, stabilises or reverses in 2018 and 2019 will therefore also be relevant to the debate about displacement.

<https://adventuresinevidence.com/2017/11/29/brexit-blamed-for-fall-in-eu-students-should-it-be/>

In summary, there appears to be some evidence that age 18 applicants from SIMD3 postcodes have very recently begun to be less successful in applying through UCAS than those from SIMD2 postcodes, and that since 2013 they have been less likely to receive an offer than those from any other area, after taking into account their results and the courses they apply for. The first of these in particular would be consistent with some recent displacement effect, but data of this sort cannot conclusively show this is happening.

I hope this is helpful. Happy to come and speak about any of this if that would be helpful.

Best wishes,
Lucy

Annexe E

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Dear Convenor,

Thank you for your letter of 19 March, on behalf of the Education and Skills Committee, seeking clarification on some of the issues raised during my appearance before the Committee on 7 March.

I have responded to each in turn below and I hope you find this helpful.

Questions from Members

Whether the new higher exam materials will be ready for teachers to start using in June and...whether you have raised this issue with the Cabinet Secretary and to provide further detail on his response.

I can confirm that this matter has been raised with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. In January the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) published a document summarising assessment changes for all subjects including information on the question paper and coursework for Highers. Higher course specification documents will be published by the end of April and updated support materials on a course by course basis between May and September. This will include a specimen question paper and, where appropriate, a specimen coursework task. It may be helpful to note that course structures remain unchanged, providing continuity for teachers and young people moving through Scotland's education system.

In response to stakeholder feedback, SQA is publishing information on revisions to individual subjects as soon as they are available, and are prioritising those subjects that have new assessment components added, such as a new question paper or new piece of coursework.

The changes to National Qualifications are part of a range of activity designed to address teacher workload and free up time for teachers to teach. The removal of unit assessments represents a considerable reduction in workload for teachers and young people, and were welcomed when announced last year.

What work has been done “on analysing students who have articulated successfully into second or third year at university in terms of their final degree result or the retention rate?”

As I set out in my response to that question during the Committee session I will be happy to come back to the Committee with that analysis. Currently the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is in the process of developing a National Articulation Database which will provide the basis for the analysis. The previous articulation database was managed by an SFC funded articulation hub hosted by Edinburgh Napier University. While the SFC supported this process financially, they did not own the dataset.

Funding for articulation hubs came to a close at the end of the agreed project timeline in 2016 and at that time the dataset was provided to the SFC. At that stage, the SFC recognised the need to re-build the dataset to enable them to add more data to it and to interrogate the information in more depth. They have now completed that process and are undertaking final quality control checks on the data.

The new National Articulation Database will provide data on HNC and HND students progressing into degree level provision, including the amount of progression (i.e. students beginning a degree at year 1), partial progression (e.g. students progressing with a HND into year 2) and advanced standing (i.e. full articulation with a HNC into year 2 or a HND into year 3). The dataset will also provide details on the student profile, institutions attended, subjects studied and qualifications achieved. This will enable the SFC to analyse students who have articulated successfully into second or third year at university in more depth.

Information from the dataset will be published in their annual Access Statistics Publication 2018, due later this year, and will be used to monitor and report on articulation.

I will be happy to forward information to the Committee once available. However, in advance of that and specifically in respect of the retention rates of articulating students, it may be helpful to note that the [SFC's 10 year plan to grow articulation](#) considered both articulation and retention (see p24 – 25), and took into account data up to 2013-14. I understand their conclusion is that the performance of articulation students, in terms of retention, is reasonably close to the rates for all students, and in some cases higher.

Clarification on the rationale behind the apparent change in the approach to funding widening access policy [insofar as “in the past, moneys went to universities for widening access places, but now that is part of their core funding”] and on what leverage the Government has if any universities are underperforming under the revised funding arrangements.

With reference to this point it may be helpful if I explain that in AY 2013-14 the SFC introduced three new investment programmes, providing higher education institutions (HEI's) with additional funded places to: widen access (defined at that time as growth in the SIMD40 intake); increase articulation; and support key sectors of the economy with additional undergraduate and Taught Post Graduate skills

places. The widening access places were reviewed by the SFC last year and they have confirmed that they are content with the growth achieved by these.

As a result of this the SFC has 'mainstreamed' the additional widening access places with universities' core funded places from AY 2018-19 and it has been made clear to the sector that from AY 2018-19 onwards these places should be used to support growth in SIMD20 (the places were previously focussed on SIMD40).

In the "Outcome agreement funding for universities – indicative allocations for 2018-19" published by the SFC on 27 February it states:

- Universities must continue to use the additional funded places that have been allocated to them since AY 2013-14 for the purpose of widening access.
- We expect universities to use both these now embedded additional places and their other core places to continue to make progress in their SIMD20 intake and for this to be clearly articulated in their Outcome Agreements.

In return for the mainstreaming of these places, the SFC have been clear that they expect both the sector as a whole, and each university, to meet the 2021 targets set by the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA). These require that 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 and 10% to every individual Scottish university.

Institutions which do not meet their SIMD20 targets, including those with embedded places, may face financial penalties. As set out in the SFC University Outcome Agreement Guidance 2018-19, published in October, *"the SFC will monitor progress and decide whether to apply a funding recovery and/or financial penalty within the Outcome Agreement process for aspects of Outcome Agreements, specifically:*

- *Outcome Agreement funded incentive mechanism;*
- *Other objectives agreed in Outcome Agreements that are aligned to Scottish Government priorities.*

When considering progress, SFC will establish evidence of under / over-delivery from a combination of the statistical data available, from the progress reported by institutions and by the information available from Outcome Agreement managers and key stakeholders. It will be the responsibility of an institution to make its case in relation to its progress, so that the decision making process is informed by a full and accurate agreement of the progress submitted by the institution."

Whether "...any analysis been done to find out what courses young people from deprived areas are going into". You explained that the Data Working Group has been examining this issue and we welcome your commitment to provide further information on the relevant work being done.

CoWA recommendation 33 stated that the Commissioner for Fair Access should "consider what further work is required to support equal access for other groups of learners and within specific degree subjects". In response to this, the Commissioner will liaise with universities, the SFC, and those supporting access to high demand

and low participation subjects to identify what further work can be done to support equal access to these subject areas. The Commissioner had an initial look at the distribution of entrants from deprived areas by subject and institution type in his January 2018 Discussion Paper: [Outcomes, Retention and Destinations](#). This high level analysis showed that, overall, entrants from the 20% most deprived areas study a similar range of subjects to entrants from other areas, but are more likely to go to post-92 universities.

The Access Data Working Group will look to support and complement the Commissioner's work on this topic, although the initial aim of the group is to assist with the delivery of Recommendation 31- "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".

An update on the availability of the data requested by Universities Scotland [on "the achievement levels of secondary 6 pupils in the SIMD quintile, as a trend" to make it easier for universities to assess the level at which their minimum entry level requirements should be set], including whether a decision was taken to share it with universities at the most recent meeting of the Data Working Group?

The Universities Scotland request for detailed attainment data by SIMD quintile was discussed at the Access Data Working Group on 13 March and the Scottish Government will make the requested attainment data available. Officials are currently finalising the exact specifications of the data with the help of group members.

You may wish to note, however, that the Commission recommended that minimum entry requirements or 'access thresholds' should be "set as ambitiously as possible, at a level which accurately reflects the minimum academic standard and subject knowledge necessary to successfully complete a degree programme". As such, I do not expect universities to use the attainment data to set their thresholds in the first instance but to use it instead to assess the impact and implications of the minimum thresholds they have set.

Questions from the Public

David Hiddleston via Twitter–

- **What is planned to widen access in alternative university routes, such as Foundation Apprenticeships?**

The Scottish Government places great importance on having an integrated education system that supports our most disadvantaged learners and provides a range of routes into higher education. We are considering this through our 15-24 Learner Journey Review, the outcomes of which will be published in due course.

In addition CoWA recommendation 5 also aims to ensure that admissions processes take account of changes in the broader education system. It states that "universities should ensure their admissions processes and entry requirements are based on a strong educational rationale and are not unnecessarily prescriptive, to the detriment

of learners who take advantage of the availability of a more flexible range of pathways.” Implementation of this recommendation 5 is being led by Universities Scotland.

Institutions themselves are also considering Foundation Apprenticeships alongside all other qualifications in their admission policies and are using the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), funded by the SFC, to support this.

- **What is planned for FE College and University partnerships, increase articulation agreements?**

Growing articulation between colleges and universities is a priority for the Scottish Government.

This was emphasised in my letter to the Chair of SFC, of 18 October, which set out my expectations that the “SFC, alongside universities and colleges, closely monitors the expansion of articulation to ensure it continues to support disadvantaged learners to progress to degree level study”.

The SFC also expects both universities and colleges to make a purposeful commitment in their outcome agreements (OAs) to articulation. Their ambition for growth was to see an increase to between 4,200 and 4,500 students articulating to university with advanced standing per year by 2016-17 and to rise further to 5,500 per year by 2019-20.

As set out above they are also developing the National Articulation Database. This will report on 2015-16 and 2016-17 data shortly. The published 2017-18 OA's and draft 2018-19 OA's show a significant increase in articulation and the SFC are confident that their published data from the Database will show growth in line with their national ambitions.

- **What role will FE Colleges play in widening participation?**

Colleges play a central role in widening access by opening the first door to further and higher education for many learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and, through articulation, providing a stepping stone onto degree level study. In their College Outcome Agreement Guidance the SFC sets out a range of widening access expectations. This includes the need for improvement targets in relation to:

- The intake of SIMD10, care experience students and any under-represented group;
- The successful completion rates of SIMD10 students, care experience students and students aged 16-19 on Full Time Further Education courses;
- Articulation

Scott Smith via Twitter–

- **What does the minister believe lies behind the disparity in access to university for students from deprived backgrounds between England, where tuition fees are in place, and Scotland, where they are not?**

We believe that free tuition is fundamentally important but not sufficient by itself to deliver fair access and that is why we established the Commission on Widening Access and have committed to implementing its recommendations in full.

The 2017 UCAS figures on entrants demonstrate that good progress is being made on access with a 13% increase in the number of Scots from the most deprived communities getting places to study at a Scottish university. That means 605 additional people from the most deprived communities were accepted to study at university.

I hope this update has been helpful but please do let me know if you have any further questions. As you have requested, I will be happy to provide an update to the Committee on other on-going work streams as the information becomes available.

Yours sincerely,

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE