

SWAP evidence for Child poverty and parental employment

evidence session - Thursday 15 June

Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) is a partnership of Scottish college and universities that provides opportunities for adults with no or few qualifications to return to higher education.

SWAP is responsible for a range of access programmes delivered by Scottish colleges which provide progression routes to university degrees and HNC. Guidance is provided for adults interested in studying and support is given throughout an access programme.

SWAP is funded nationally by Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Funding through the non-core Strategic Funding has been received since 2011. Currently £240,000 p.a. Our outcome agreement with the SFC is agreed on an annual basis. The appendix contains a summary of the outcome agreement we report to the SFC. SWAP works with all colleges and universities in Scotland. There are two regional partnerships, SWAPEast hosted by Edinburgh University and SWAPWest hosted by Glasgow Kelvin College. SWAPEast and SWAPWest are registered Scottish charities.

National SWAP programmes were initially developed in 1988, at that time in engineering, business and social science. We now provide opportunities across all curriculum areas. Either through broad based access programmes, such as access to science (biology/ chemistry or STEM) or access to social science. These programmes provide multiple progression routes for study at degree level, ensuring students have an opportunity to consider studying a broad range of degrees across a range of universities. We also provide more specialist access programmes in areas such as nursing, allied health profession, social work, primary education, childhood practice, law, paramedic science, medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and pharmacy. These programmes are more focussed on a specific vocational degree. Often where the skills and attributes of adult returners are highly valued by universities.

All SWAP programmes have been developed to take into the account the needs of adult students with no qualifications and consist of the following –

- 1) **An agreed Academic** framework, using Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) units at Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF) levels 5 and 6. Mainly on a full time one-year academic programme. Ensuring returning adults have an equivalence in their learning to school pupils leaving with Highers and an entrance qualification for first year degree study or HNC. The academic framework is agreed between colleges and universities.
- 2) **Preparation for Higher Education (Prep for HE)**. Students are equipped with the skills, competencies, and techniques to be successful with their studies. Providing guidance from consideration of a programme to transition to degree study is an integral part of student success. Prep for He draws on expertise of a college tutor network who have responsibility for the students on the programme, contact with universities, peer support from current and former SWAP students.
- 3) **Student profile**. Students are academically assessed by continuous assessment. Students are provided with an enhanced reference at the completion of their programme, which also considers their development in all areas of academic work including independent learning, critical thinking, collaboration and managing learning. Progression to degree and HNC is subject to a satisfactory student profile. The profile strengthens the partnership work of our college and universities.

SWAP key education themes.

Working in partnership. Colleges and Universities will work together to provide a broader range of education opportunities for adult returners. All programmes are delivered in colleges to provide a supportive education environment. While the range of adult students is by its nature diverse, having a SWAP class means students are supporting one another. The college class tutor who works with SWAP is a key role in the development of students and their progression.

Evidence As part of our role in delivering fair access. SWAP focuses our programmes on students with specific criteria and where there is educational disadvantage. Mainly adults who live in Scottish Index of multiple deprivation, most deprived 20% (SIMD1), left school with qualifications lower than SCQF level 6, first in family to progress to higher education, gender, disabled and BAME. Our outcome agreement with SFC is focussed on these characteristics.

As part of our broader objectives, we have always recorded if students are parents. Age range of the children of students and if they are single parents.

From the evidence base, consistently a majority of students are parents - 55% have children, 29% are single parents (average of enrolments since 2011- 2023). Most of our students will reside within 5 miles of a college. Average age of a SWAP student is 29. Due to the nature of our popular programmes in health, 76% of our students are female. These statistics have remained stable over our history, even when numbers have expanded.

One aspect of policy which did have an impact on SWAP student enrolment was the increase of childcare for 3-year-olds. We noticed a corresponding increase at that time of adults returning with children in the 3 – 5 age range. Prior to the increase in childcare provision most parents returned to education when their children were 5.

We use the evidence to ensure there is no disadvantage from a particular characteristic. In terms of our evidence of being a parent or a single parent there is no distinction in being a successful student. That said, we are mindful of the economic consequences on students with families and single parents and the impact on their studies.

Our focus as a partnership is very much on returning adults with no or few qualifications. Developing students academically and developing their social and personal learning competences. SWAP does not suit all adult returning to education. Students with qualifications have other option for study at SCQF level 7 and above. Impartial guidance is provided on these options.

Learning from recent developments – over the past 10 years we have seen an increase in the number of students enrolling and completing access programmes. Mainly due to expansion of programmes across Scotland and working with regional colleges to meet local demand. We have also worked with our universities delivering nursing and health programmes to increase the number of adults returning students. SWAP aims to do that in a proportionate way ensuring progression opportunities for all SWAP students and that university partners can meet their targets across a broader range of the student body. For example, the focus on fair access on SIMD1 students applying and progressing with their studies.

SWAP programmes have also developed. While our focus is on ensuring students can gain entrance qualifications as quickly as possible. We also have programmes that can be delivered part time, online at UHI Perth, online and campus delivery at UHI Argyll. Flexibility in terms of start and end

points of the college day to allow for children collection at school and nursery. Flexibility in the use of online and technology, ensuring we retain quality education delivery, which can be offered with some of the lessons learned from online delivery during the pandemic.

On a broader policy area, we have been looking to work in partnership with our colleges and local health boards. UHI Moray college will be delivering a 2-year access programme to allow care workers to continue to work and study on an access to nursing programme. We have been working in Ayrshire to develop local allied health professionals. Learning from delivering a Childhood Practice access programme with Ayrshire College and South Ayrshire Council in Girvan. Glasgow Clyde college are piloting an ESOL and nursing programme for refugee students. These SWAP pilot programmes will be developed with the aim of becoming sustainable programmes for the future.

Reflections on delivering the programmes during the pandemic period and the current economic impact on the students that we work with.

All SWAP programmes moved to online delivery in March 2020. We were able to intervene on individual case by case basis to ensure progression for students who were studying with us that year. Many of whom were key workers in the care and food industries. Having children at home during lockdown was a considerable challenge.

From 2020 – 2021 programmes were delivered mainly online. There was an unprecedented demand for access programmes that year. We enrolled 2348 students.

2021 – 2022 was a more challenging year. Again, with unprecedented demand but challenges both with the unpredictability of COVID, and the rise in energy and living costs impacting students' ability to study and the economic viability of progression.

While we are still reflecting on the current academic year, recruitment has returned to a pre-covid level. Mainly due to economic uncertainty, which always has an impact on student recruitment for SWAP programmes. Our institutional history shows this from previous economic crisis and recessions in the early 1990s, 2008 and October 2022. Our focus currently is on developing capacity within our college partners to be able to continue to support current students and future students when the economic position improves.

Issues relevant to parents currently studying or considering study.

SWAP programmes as they are developed for adult returners have always had a high proportion of parents studying within our programmes and in classes. Our target areas also focus on parents who reside in areas of economic deprivation. From that we have a high rate of single parents, parents on benefits and refugees.

We have higher levels of women returning to education. Some of that is based on the gendered nature of curriculum areas e.g. nursing and health. These students are highly sought after due to their previous skills and abilities.

Where students have children. Students learn to juggle multiple responsibilities, with employment and study. And in some case broader caring responsibilities for parents. Throughout the programme we will discuss and promote techniques to balance between competing pressures. That work is mainly done through peer support, from previous students. Highlighting the challenges and benefits of being a learning household for children. Developing confidence in handling a return to education from managing study, to becoming a person in community with UCAS experience, to becoming a local role model. "If she can study to become a nurse then so can I". Our student voice is an effective

tool in encouraging other adults to return. For example, stories like Rachael Carswell, an Inverness College Access to Nursing student. [Managing full-time study as a single parent](#)

While not published research, we do have responses from students on the positive benefit of their children on seeing their parent studying.

Challenges for parents when studying. These mainly relate to juggling finance, with a combination of benefits / employment / college bursary during studies. Successful students will tell us of their strong support mechanisms to allow them to study. Support from partners, extended family, and friends. Main factors of not being successful is where multiple issues can happen at once. For example, unexpected child illness, additional funding pressure if something breaks down or goes wrong, homelessness and moving house. Employees not being sympathetic to study. Many of our education systems are designed around young adults with few responsibilities. For example, balancing universal credit with studying is a challenge. The system of benefits does not encourage being a student. Discretionary funds to help with one off challenge are useful for students but colleges and universities trying to be supportive to students on universal credit run the risk of the funding being taken off the students' universal credit.

Policy developments can be supportive. For example, free tuition fees provide clarity for many of our students. The lone parent bursary is useful when students reach the higher education funding through SAAS. As is the additional bursary funding for nursing and paramedic science students. Transition points in terms of finance can often be a risk. For example, students moving to SAAS funding.

We would tend to categorise this as balance of risk and reward for adults to consider when they are returning to education. Supporting the reward side is beneficial for adult students.

SWAP summary

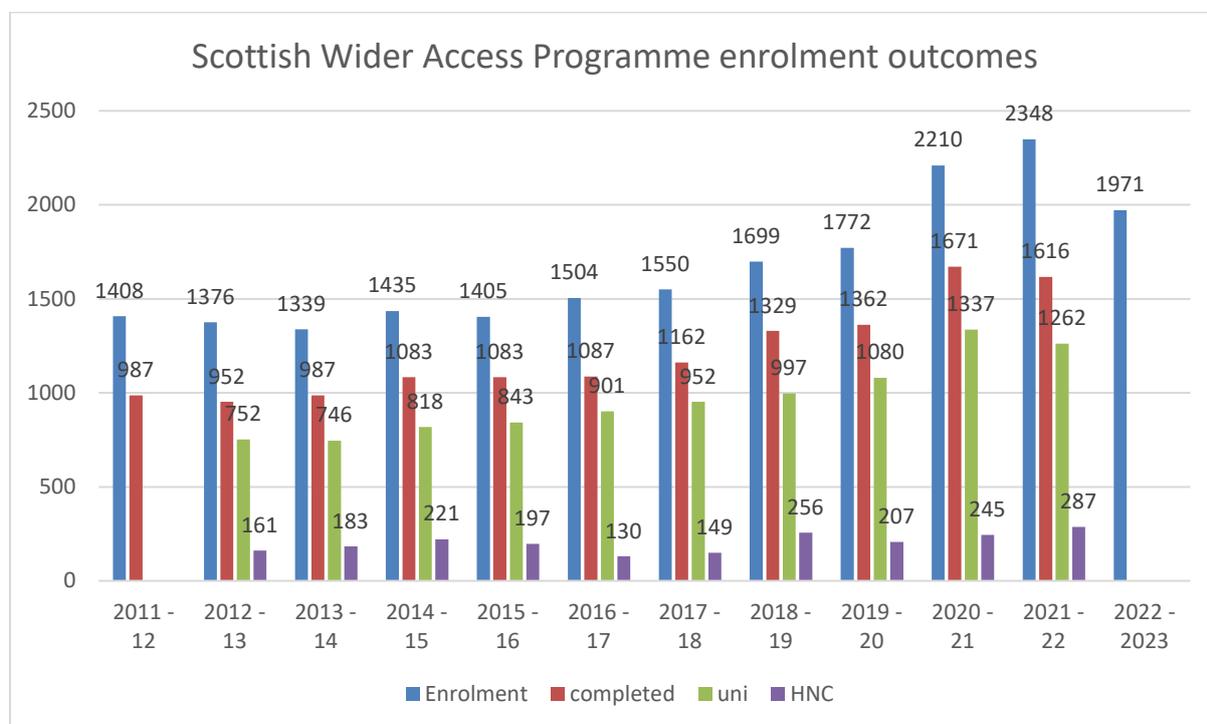
A good education experience of returning to education we believe should have the following characteristics.

- Based on student need in terms of their academic development
- High academic standards. With expectations around being able to access a range of degrees and HNC
- High level of impartial and honest guidance on progression
- Balanced with a flexibility to ensure we can handle the multiple issues which will be managed by parents when returning to study.
- Evidence based to consider broader trends.
- Cost effective and proportionate taking into accounts the broader priorities of the whole education system.

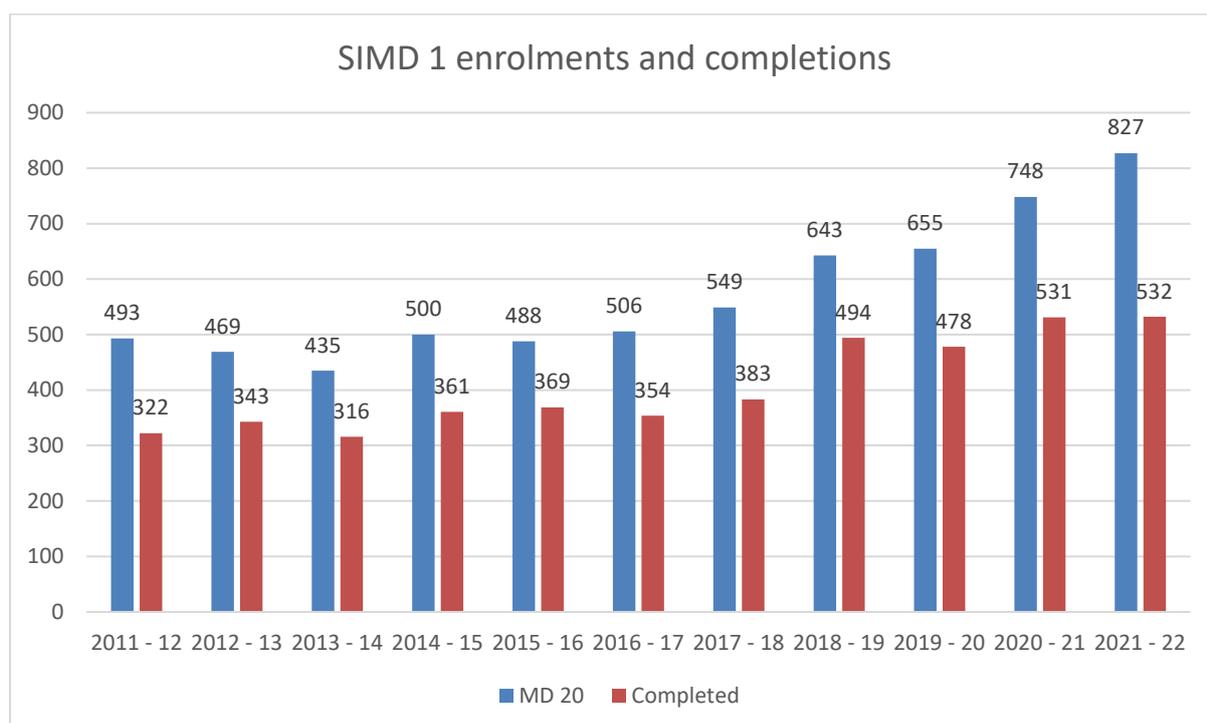
We are one part of an education infrastructure that can be developed that provides a system designed to encourage parents to return to education.

Appendix SWAP outcomes

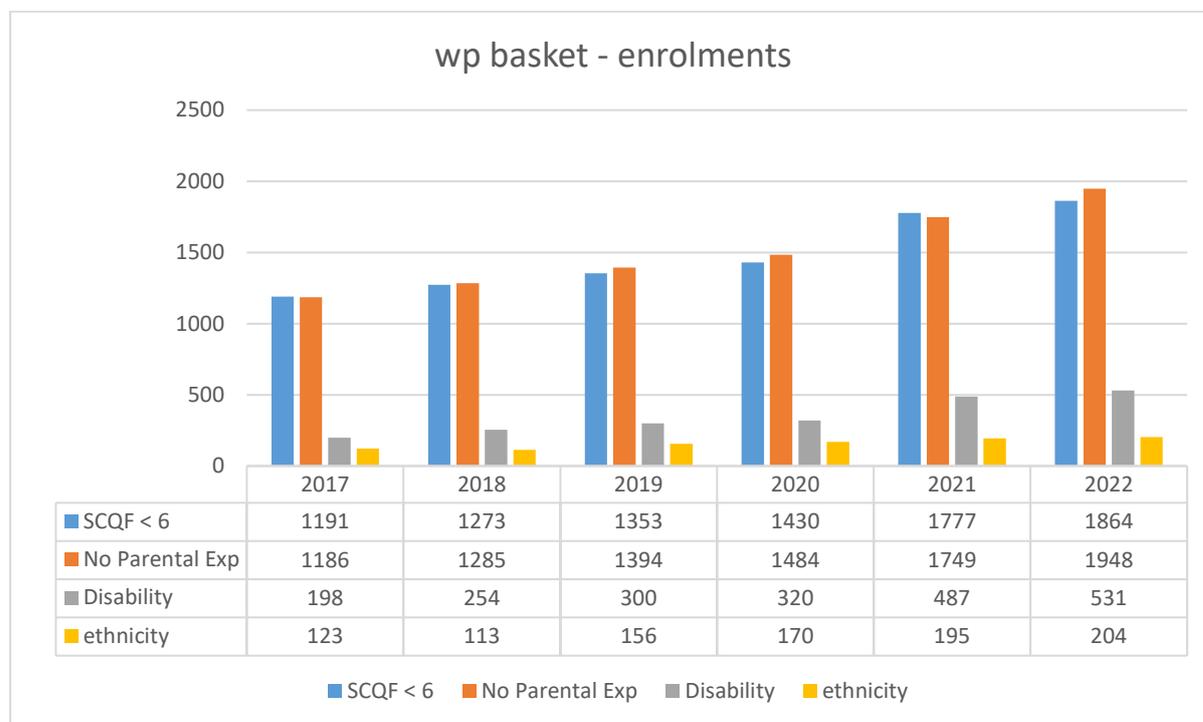
SWAP provides Scottish Funding Council with outcome data on an annual basis as part of our outcome agreement. We have added additional evidence which SWAP collects for partners which we have added to the information. Further information and data are available from the SWAP office.



Enrolment of parents during the period averages at 55% of all enrolments with proportions completing and progressing being consistent. Single parents average is 29%.



Our main outcome indicator with Scottish Funding Council is Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 1. Which is the most deprived 20% (MD20). Our target of enrolments is 35% across Scotland. Due to the nature of working with adult returners with no or few qualifications we tend to recruit higher % from SIMD1 areas. A key indicator of SWAP success is having a similar % of SIMD1 students completing and progressing. And growing the number of students from SIMD1 completing.



As well as SIMD1 indicator. We report annually to SFC on students with qualifications below SCQF level 6, first in family to enter degree study (reported as no Parental Exp), disclosed disability and ethnicity. Progression remains consistent with enrolment. Ethnicity or enrolment within BAME community remains consistent at or around 9 – 10%. Disability as a % has grown. The growth relates to better disclosure of mental health.

Our final area of reporting to the SFC is gender ratio. Which relates mainly to the popularity of nursing and health related SWAP programmes.

Gender balance	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Female	1107	1177	1273	1392	1687	1863
Male	395	410	426	400	518	483
Ratio F:M	74: 26	74:26	75:25	78:22	76:24	79:21