EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

AGENDA

3rd Meeting, 2017 (Session 5)

Wednesday 25 January 2017

The Committee will meet at 10.00 am in the Robert Burns Room (CR1).

1. **Decision on taking business in private:** The Committee will decide whether to take item 5 in private.

2. **Commission on Widening Access:** The Committee will take evidence from—
   
   Dame Ruth Silver, Chair, Maureen McKenna, Member, and Professor Petra Wend, Member, Commission on Widening Access.

3. **Commissioner for Fair Access:** The Committee will take evidence from—
   
   Professor Peter Scott, Commissioner for Fair Access.

4. **Review of Evidence (in private):** The Committee will review the evidence heard earlier in the meeting.

5. **Work programme:** The Committee will consider its work programme.

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The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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The papers for this meeting are as follows—

**Agenda items 1 and 2**

SPICe Briefing_ES/S5/17/3/1

Submissions_ES/S5/17/3/2

**Agenda item 5**

PRIVATE PAPER_ES/S5/17/3/3 (P)
Introduction

This briefing is intended to inform the discussion at the two panels taking place on 25 January 2017. The first panel is with the Chair of the Commission on Widening Access and accompanying Commission members. The second panel is with the new Commissioner for Fair Access. The purpose of the session is for the Committee to hear from the Commission on its findings in its interim report (published in November 2015) and its final report A Blueprint for Fairness (published in March 2016). This is also the first chance for the Committee to hear from the newly appointed Commissioner for Fair Access on his initial views on the Commission’s work, his role, and how he plans to take forward fair access in Scotland.

Members of the Commission were informed of the session with the Commission, followed by the Commissioner. A number of Commission members have made written submissions to inform it. The Commissioner has also made a submission.

To support the Committee’s discussion with members of the Commission and the Commissioner, the briefing focuses on the Commission for Widening Access’ reports and the role and functions of the newly appointed Commissioner for Fair Access.

Commission panel

Dame Ruth Silver, Chair of the Commission will make an opening statement on the work of the Commission. The purpose of the panel is to discuss the findings of the Commission, to inform the evidence that follows from the Commissioner.

Commissioner

There are also a number of possible themes for the session with the Commissioner (starting page 7). These are based on the submissions received at time of drafting.
Background

Remit of the Commission on Widening Access

The Scottish Government’s Programme for Government 2014-15 set out a renewed commitment to widening access to university; although this has been a long standing policy priority in Scotland.\(^1\)

In the statement accompanying the publication of the Programme for Government 2014-15, the First Minister set out the following policy commitment:

“A child born today in one of our most deprived communities should, by the time she or he leaves school, have the same chance of going to university as a child born in one of our least deprived communities”\(^2\).

The Commission on Widening Access (“the Commission”) was established in 2015 to advise Scottish Ministers on what is required to meet this ambition. Early in its work, the Commission identified the following issues as important to the work it was doing:

- A shared understanding of the barriers to accessing higher education, and their removal, facing those from the most deprived communities and households, based on reliable and comprehensive evidence.
- A clear target to achieve equality of access and an understanding of the actions required to meet that ambition.
- Partnerships between early years, schools, colleges, universities, employers and the Scottish Government, with each recognising the part that they play to eradicate inequalities in access to higher education and how partnership working can overcome these.

The Commission recognised that its work was feeding into a policy setting where there are already a number of policy activities / commitments in place, including:

- Free tuition for eligible full time higher education students.
- *Curriculum for Excellence*
- Reducing the attainment gap / improving school attainment
- Reforms to the post-16 education system
- *Developing the Young Workforce*

In the call for evidence that went out at the start of the Commission’s work, it was made clear that the focus of the Commission’s work was widening access to university for those from socio-economically deprived backgrounds, although the remit of the Commission also included identification of any specific barriers “for those with different equality characteristics or those from a care background”\(^3\).

\(^1\) For example, there was a SPICe briefing written on Widening Access to Higher Education: Policy in Scotland published in February 2010. This sets out the policy focus at that time.
\(^3\) [http://media.wix.com/ugd/785ba4_c19b9935bc64440bb5b3abb22fd5da6.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/785ba4_c19b9935bc64440bb5b3abb22fd5da6.pdf)
One of the purposes of the Commission’s work was to synthesise existing evidence around barriers to widening access and retention in higher education, and their effective removal. The Commission was charged with using this evidence to propose both a short and long term target for participation in higher education and clear milestones to drive further and faster progress on widening access. Its’ role was also to identify the data and information required to monitor and support improvements on widening access across all education providers; while at the same time making recommendations on the processes necessary to support this. Finally, the Commission was to identify best practice on widening access across early years, schools, colleges, universities and employers and make recommendations as to how best practice on access and retention in individual settings can be rolled out across the wider education and employment environment.  

A Blueprint for Fairness: The Commission’s Report

The Commission produced an interim report in November 2015 setting out what had been learned through the work pursued to that point. The report set out the barriers that had been identified as limiting access to higher education and the systemic issues that may be limiting progress in addressing these barriers. It also reflected on some of the models of best practice that the Commission had heard. Figure 1 presents the barriers and systemic issues identified by the Commission in its interim report.

4 The analysis of responses can be found here: http://media.wix.com/ugd/785ba4_c19b9935bc64440bbb5b3abb22fd5da6.pdf
The Commission’s final report A Blueprint for Fairness ("Blueprint report") was published on 14 March 2016. It laid out the importance of working to achieve equal access to higher education as both a social and economic good for Scottish society. It also pointed out that its recommendations were informed by a range of inputs:

- Evidence heard through the call for evidence.
- A review of existing evidence / a literature review on barriers to access.
- Consultation events and meetings across Scotland.
- Presentations from key stakeholders at Commission meetings, including from students, care leavers, experts and practitioners.
- A series of expert groups to bring together practitioners and professionals from different sectors and specialisms in order to test and enrich the Commission’s thinking so as to shape the final recommendations made in the report.

A total of 34 recommendations were made (listed at Annexe A). The recommendations are framed around four issues, each is briefly considered below.

1. A Whole System Approach

The interim report noted that socio-economic inequality in higher education is an issue that impacts on the whole education system and beyond. As such, it is important that the focus of activity to achieve equal access is on a range of relevant bodies such as those involved in early years and school age provision, as well as those involved in post-16 education.
The Commission noted that, at present, too much focus is on universities. This is supported by primary strategic responsibility for widening access lying with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The Commission suggested that:

“...these arrangements are insufficient... with [the SFC having] no locus over many other parts of the system with vital roles to play. This makes it difficult to ensure that the responsibility for driving progress is shared right across the education system.

The report goes on to point out another important reason for a system change being needed:

“...as one of the key contributors to access policy and principal funders of access programmes, we believe that the SFC, as well as the Scottish Government, should themselves be held to account for progress.”

In other words, as the SFC is charged with both policy and funding of widening access activity, the Commission was of the view that there needed to be a separate mechanism for regulating the activity of the SFC in leading on this policy agenda. This is one of the reasons that the Commission made the recommendation that the Scottish Government should appoint a Commissioner for Fair Access (Recommendation 1) and that through this appointment there are changes to the way that widening access activity is funded and delivered (Recommendations 2 to 4).

2: Embracing New Talent

Much of the work being pursued at present to widen access to university focuses on supporting and developing individuals to realise their potential. While the Commission welcomed this activity, the Commissioners were clear that the focus should not all be on individuals. Rather systemic change is needed to achieve meaningful opportunities for all learners.

The focus here then is on creating fairer admissions systems and more flexible and joined up transition opportunities. There are ten recommendations in the final report that contribute to achieving this priority (Recommendations 5 to 14). This is also the central issue that has been discussed since the Commission published its report (discussed further below)

3: Supporting Our Learners

The Commission highlighted that more work needs to be done to support potential learners to access the opportunities that are being opened up. The issue here is both supporting people to gain entry to university as well as ensuring the right support is in place to enable learners to sustain participation to completion. Under this theme there is a range of activity proposed, summarised in the content of Recommendations 15 to 23.

4: The Architecture to Support Fair Access

The final issue relates to the systems that need to be in place to support the delivery of a fair access agenda. This includes (as laid out in Recommendations 24 to 32):

- Ensuring funding is in place to enable the recommended activity to take place.
- Adequate regulatory mechanisms are in place to ensure that commitments are met and that organisations are aware of the expectations on them and consequences for not delivering on agreed commitments.
Better use of the data that is available to monitor progress as well as more varied and relevant data measures being developed that allow proper tracking of progress towards equal access to university.

The final two recommendations are broader, but sit within this remit. These focus on:

- What the Commissioner for Fair Access should do - including consideration of “what further work is required to support equal access for other groups of learners [beyond SIMD] and within specific degree subjects”.
- What the Scottish Government should do - including reporting on progress against any Commission recommendations that were accepted by the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government has not as yet produced a document setting out its planned activity and formal response to the Blueprints recommendations. However, after the report was published the government did say it would accept the recommendations if re-elected in May 2016. Formal support for the recommendations was made through a Scottish Government motion heard in the Chamber on 16 June 2016 which asked the Scottish Parliament to agree that the Scottish Government should implement the Commission’s recommendations.

Commissioner for Fair Access

The announcement of the appointment of Professor Peter Scott as the first Commissioner for Fair Access was made by the Scottish Government on 16 December 2016 with the role starting in January 2017. Peter Scott is Professor of Higher Education studies at University College London. He regularly writes in the UK media and was knighted in 2007 for “services to education”.

In writing to the Committee about the appointment, Shirley-Anne Somerville, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science stated:

“The role of the Commissioner is central to this Government’s commitment to deliver the recommendations in the Blueprint for Fairness and in particular, achieve the targets set for our education system so that by 2030, 20% of students entering university are from Scotland’s 20% most deprived communities. Professor Scott’s role will be to lead work to drive fair access in Scotland, acting as an advocate for access for disadvantaged learners, working across the education system to provide strategic leadership and hold to account those with a role to play in achieving equal access.”

The Commission recommended that the Commissioner for Fair Access should play a lead role in coordinating and reporting on progress towards equal access “to inform development of effective policy at national, regional and institutional level”. In his written

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5 See for example article in the Herald 10 April 2016: http://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/political_news/14417953.Sturgeon_announces_Fair_Access_Commissioner_to_increase_number_of_poacher_students_at_Scottish_universities/

6 The full text of the motion can be found at this link: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-00431&ResultsPerPage=10

7 See for example recent articles in the Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/profile/peter-scott

8 Recommendations 1, 2, 13, 19 and 33 all make explicit reference to the role of the Commissioner. The Commissioner is also to be play the role of recipient of relevant reports (Recommendations 14 and 34).
submission to the Committee, Professor Scott clarifies how he understands that remit to operate in practice:

“The work of the Commissioner will build on the work of the Commission which has provided a clear road-map to achieve the Scottish Government's ambition of equality of access. The Commission made a large number of recommendations, many of which require action by the Commissioner. That action will predominantly take the form of persuasion - stimulating public debate about ‘fair access’; encouraging research into best practice; assisting with the coordination of the policies adopted, and decisions taken, by the Scottish Government and public agencies; offering a strategic lead to institutions; and, crucially, supporting the work of the very many dedicated professionals already engaged in a wide variety of activities designed to promote fair access.”

He also notes that the role does not provide him with any regulatory powers. He sees this as “a strength rather than a weakness because it enables me to act as a facilitator and ‘honest broker’”

**Themes - Priorities for the Commissioner for Fair Access**

At the time of writing this briefing, submissions had been received from the new Commissioner for Fair Access, the Sutton Trust, NUS Scotland and Early Years Scotland. These along with the Universities Scotland report: *Futures not Backgrounds*, produced in July 2016 in response to the Blueprint report, highlight a number of priorities for the new Commissioner.

**Theme 1: Contextualised admissions**

When someone applies to study at an HEI, each institution or School / Department within that HEI will apply its own admissions criteria. HEIs have historically relied heavily on prior educational attainment in choosing which students to offer a place. However, it is recognised that looking only at qualifications fails to recognise learning potential in the higher education setting. To address this, a contextualised approach involves considering other measures e.g. attainment of an individual who has attended a school that ranks low on attainment, or evidence of other skills, characteristics or experiences that may indicate potential to succeed in a particular area of study.⁹ As Mullen (2011) explains:

> “Some confusion exists about what ‘contextualised admissions’ involves… [It is] about using a range of factors, including comparative school and socio-economic data, to establish ‘relative’ achievement of potential applicants… Take two potential students for example, one from a very low attaining school and another from a relatively high attaining school. If these two individuals achieved the same exam results, it could be argued that the achievement of the individual from the very low attaining school has achieved relatively higher (in comparison to their peers).”

For an HEI to fully engage with an application process involving contextualised admissions involves the relevant admissions officials having available large amounts of data on school

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performance, socio-economic indicators etc. in order to capture the context within which each individual applicant is seeking a place to study.

Within the debate on contextualised admissions is reference to access thresholds. In the Blueprint report it was noted that entry requirements for many courses at Scottish HEIs have risen over the years, which serves to disadvantage pupils that have not reached their full potential in the school environment. In response to this, it recommended that all HEIs by 2019 set access thresholds for all degree programmes “against which learners from the most deprived backgrounds should be assessed” (Recommendation 11). The argument put forward was that access thresholds will expand the pool of applicants from deprived backgrounds and “will provide talented young people with the opportunity to realise their full potential”.

NUS Scotland in its written submission supports the Commission’s recommendation relating to access thresholds. It points out that in recent years there has been an increase in the grade requirements not as a response to rising standards, but rather as a way of managing demand for limited numbers of places. It goes on to point out that “evidence shows how students from more deprived backgrounds or ‘lower performing’ schools, even when offered lower entry requirements, can outperform entrants with higher grades from ‘better’ schools.” Introducing a minimum threshold of attainment for these applicants is suggested to be a way of achieving fair access.

In Futures not Backgrounds, Universities Scotland raises concerns about this approach:

“Judgements about adjusted offers are best made by admissions professionals, using their experience and knowledge to take full account of an individual’s circumstances, their potential and their commitment to the course... Every applicant is an individual and these important factors make the difference between a student who does or does not thrive at university. We think this has a better chance of success than a uniform application of access thresholds for a certain group of applicants based primarily on a single measure of disadvantage. This would limit consideration of the applicant as an individual and limit the scope for professional judgement”

Professor Scott’s written submission picks up on the tension that the recommendation on access thresholds raises. Essentially, while he notes that it is a ‘bold’ recommendation, he recognises that access thresholds have differential impacts on different institutions. For example, post-1992 HEIs will be less likely to face difficulties with this approach, while the more selective HEIs (offering high demand courses) will face greater dilemmas operationalising a system that straightforwardly puts preference on those with lower formal qualifications at the point of entry. On the other hand he acknowledges that an application process that uses only the highest qualification achieved as the basis of offers continues the bias toward applicants from more affluent backgrounds simply due to their access to “stronger family, peer and community support” and attendance at higher-performing schools. His suggestion is that access thresholds are part of a wider contextual admissions approach:

“Some of the concerns about access thresholds might be mitigated by linking them to the broader idea of contextualised admissions... The principle is that institutions should establish thresholds for individual courses in terms of formal qualifications - and, more broadly, adequate educational preparation - that are sufficiently demanding to ensure that students can successfully complete these courses and benefit from the experience. There is no point setting students up to fail, although research suggests that students who come through access routes, given the right support, perform as well as those with
more conventional entry qualifications. Over-and-above these formal thresholds universities should take into account a range of other factors... Seen in this light access thresholds can be seen as one, although an important, element in contextualised admissions."

Universities Scotland suggests that more needs to be done to share understanding of the contextualised admissions approach and sharing best practice in use of contextualised admissions. Further work is also needed to make sure that markers are in place to allow admissions professionals to consider adjusted offers to those identified as from a deprived area or from another underrepresented grouping.10

Theme 2: Entrance and Progression Routes

In Scotland at present there are a wide range of programmes available, mainly delivered at the regional / individual institution level aimed at widening access to university. These include bridging programmes (e.g. school pupils participating in a university summer school), access courses (an alternative qualification route for adults seeking to access university) and articulation pathways (direct entry to second or third year at university having achieved HNC or HND level qualifications at college).

Programmes aimed at raising awareness / aspirations to attend university are argued by the Sutton Trust to be ‘crucial’. Universities Scotland also highlights the importance of these programmes, but suggests more could be done to make programmes more transferable across Scotland, between different regions and also across different HEIs.

Colleges play a central role in many of these activities, which Peter Scott notes as a key strength of the approach in Scotland where colleges play an important role in higher education through delivery of HNC and HND programmes. He points out that HN level qualifications need to remain recognised as “respected vocational qualifications in their own right” as qualifications that are “strongly supported by employers”. Given this, policy measures that treat HN qualifications as merely ‘feeder’ courses for progression to degree study would, he notes, be ‘retrograde’.

Universities Scotland highlights a similar point in its Futures not Backgrounds report. Articulation is argued to work really well for a lot of students and the associated institutions (colleges and HEIs). However, HN level qualifications were originally created for employment, not for further study. The result is that:

“They are now considered to be ‘dual purpose’ qualifications but there are big differences in the curricula and learning styles between HNs and undergraduate degrees as well as some differences at subject level. This means that, for the purpose of articulation, there is not necessarily a straight read-across when moving from one institution to the other, which takes considerable work from colleges and universities to get the ‘fit’ right to ensure smooth transitions for students.”

NUS Scotland in its written submission suggests that “articulation is a success story of Scottish education and fair access, but far from the complete success it should be”. It points to the differentials in practice between institutions - – for example cases where HND qualifiers, having completed two years of study at college, are required to enter the degree

10 From Futures not Backgrounds report
programme at second year rather than third year. Universities Scotland recognises that more needs to be done to ensure that credit from colleges to HEIs is fully transferred:

“At the moment, where credit is given for the HN qualification 82 per cent of students get full credit. However, that still leaves some receiving only partial credit and some students progress with no credit given for their HN qualification. It is important to consider that where no credit is given this can be for a variety of reasons including student choice. Universities see scope to improve on the number of students given full credit for their prior study and reducing the number who receive no credit at all. We are committed to addressing this.”

Theme 3: Targeting specific groups for intervention

The third priority raised in submissions, which links back to the focus of the Commission’s work, is the focus on socio-economic deprivation as the indictor for measuring inequality in Scottish universities. NUS Scotland lists statistics on the disparity in articulation activity between institutions and the impact of this on student form ‘the most deprived backgrounds’, calling on the new Commissioner to play a key role in ensuring articulation routes continue to grow across all HEIs and that all HEIs are challenged to do more.

The Sutton Trust raises concern about the use of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) as the way to track educational inequality. Notably, this measure is criticised for not capturing the opportunities available to those who face disadvantage in accessing higher education that do not live in one of the most deprived areas of Scotland. It suggests that SIMD data should be complemented by other sources e.g. parental occupation and level of education to better capture participation rates. There is also wider policy recognition of the disadvantages / lower participation rates among other groups’ e.g. young people in care, disabled young people, BSL users etc.

Peter Scott also refers to the focus on SIMD that has dominated policy in Scotland. He notes that measurable targets are necessary to track progress, and that SIMD is a ‘sophisticated metric’. However, like all metrics it has its limitations. Notably (as discussed above) SIMD risks missing out those who live outside the most deprived areas. It may also give advantage to individuals who happen to live in an SIMD postcode area, but do not face any disadvantage in gaining entry to university. Further, people living in rural areas are recognised as not being well covered by this approach.

Linking this discussion on SIMD back to the issue of contextualised admissions, Peter Scott suggests:

“Although meeting SFC outcome agreement and national targets are very important drivers of fair access policies of institutions, they should not entirely determine these policies. Through their use of contextualised admissions, institutions can reach out to all socially disadvantaged students, whether or not they ‘count’ toward meeting particular targets”

Suzi Macpherson
SPICE
20 January 2017
Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. These papers provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest. They are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP  www.parliament.scot
ANNEXE: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COMMISSION ON WIDENING ACCESS

Recommendation 1: The Scottish Government should appoint a Commissioner for Fair Access by the end of 2016 to:

- Lead cohesive and system wide efforts to drive fair access in Scotland; acting as an advocate for access for disadvantaged learners and holding to account those with a role to play in achieving equal access.
- Coordinate and prioritise the development of a more substantial evidence base on the issues most pertinent to fair access, including the commissioning and publication of independent research. The Scottish Government should ensure an appropriate annual budget is made available to support this work.
- Publish, annually, a report to Ministers outlining the Commissioner's views on progress towards equal access in Scotland to inform development of effective policy at national, regional and institutional level.

Recommendation 2: By 2018, the Commissioner for Fair Access, working with experts, should publish a Scottish Framework for Fair Access. This authoritative, evidence based framework should identify the most impactful forms of access activity at each stage of the learner journey, from early learning through to higher education and provide best practice guidelines on its delivery and evaluation.

Recommendation 3: Public funding for access programmes - either through specific external funding or funding from core budgets - should focus on programmes that are consistent with the Scottish Framework for Fair Access.

Recommendation 4: Universities, colleges, local authorities, schools, the SFC funded access programmes and early years providers should work together to deliver a coordinated approach to access which removes duplication and provides a coherent and comprehensive offer to learners. This should include:

- The development of mechanisms by which access programmes undertaken at one institution, or in one part of the country, can be recognised by other institutions, while also serving institutional and local needs. Credit rating programmes on the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) should be considered where appropriate.

Recommendation 5: 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. This should be monitored by the SFC through the outcome agreement process.

Recommendation 6: The Scottish Government, working with key stakeholders, should ensure the key transitions phases around SCQF levels 6 to 8 are better used to provide students from disadvantaged backgrounds with the qualifications and experiences required to support fair access.

Recommendation 7: The Scottish Funding Council, working with professionals, should develop a model of how bridging programmes can be expanded nationally to match need.

- Given the clear benefits to the learner, the model should ensure that academic credit awarded through the completion of such programmes is transferrable between universities.
- Successful completion of such programmes may form one of the conditions of the access thresholds to be developed in line with Recommendation 11.
This model should have particular regard to the evidence that bridging programmes are especially beneficial when delivered earlier in the education journey.

**Recommendation 8:** The SFC should seek more demanding articulation targets from those universities that have not traditionally been significant players in articulation.

- These targets should have a clear focus on the benefits, both to learners and the public purse, of awarding full credit for prior study.
- In establishing new articulation pathways, colleges and HEIs should build upon best practice models already in place to secure the curricular alignment necessary to ensure that learners are equipped with the necessary prior learning and academic skills to enable them to succeed in degree level study.
- For the purposes of more effective IAG, the SFC should develop, or commission, an articulation 'map', setting out all of the available pathways across Scotland.

**Recommendation 9:** Universities, colleges and the SFC should closely monitor the expansion of articulation to ensure it continues to support disadvantaged learners to progress to degree level study. Should this not be the case a proportion of articulation places should be prioritised for disadvantaged learners.

**Recommendation 10:** The Scottish Funding Council, working with HEIs and colleges, should explore more efficient, flexible and learner centred models of articulation which provide learners with the choice of a broader range of institutions and courses.

**Recommendation 11:** By 2019 all universities should set access thresholds for all degree programmes against which learners from the most deprived backgrounds should be assessed. These access thresholds should be separate to standard entrance requirements and 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.

- The impact of access thresholds and wider contextual admissions policies should be monitored and evaluated by the SFC as part of the outcome agreement process. In particular, the SFC should monitor the extent to which access thresholds differ from standard requirements, the number of applicants receiving adjusted offers and whether the introduction of access thresholds leads to any unintended consequences.
- Should the access threshold fail to deliver the intended outcomes by the end of 2022, Ministers should consider options for providing disadvantaged learners who meet a certain level of attainment with an entitlement to the offer of a place in a university.
- The implementation of access thresholds and more robust arrangements for monitoring and evaluation of impact will make an important contribution to the emerging evidence base in this area. Universities should therefore continually refine their contextual admissions policies and, where necessary, access thresholds in line with this evidence.

**Recommendation 12:** All Universities should be as open and transparent as possible over their use of access thresholds and wider contextual admissions policies. In particular, they should seek to maximise applications from disadvantaged learners by proactively promoting the access thresholds to the relevant schools, pupils, parents, local authorities and teachers.

**Recommendation 13:** The Commissioner for Fair Access should engage with those compiling key university rankings to ensure greater priority is given to socioeconomic diversity within the rankings and to ensure that institutions who take the actions necessary to achieve fair access are not penalised.
Recommendation 14: The SFC should undertake an independent review of the processes - such as personal statements and interviews - that are used to evaluate non-academic factors in applications, with the aim of assessing whether, and to what extent, they unfairly disadvantage access applicants.

- This review should also consider whether there are other processes or assessment techniques that would increase fairness and more accurately evaluate the potential of applicants. The outcome of the review should be reported to the Commissioner for Fair Access.

Recommendation 15: Universities and colleges should increase engagement with our youngest children and their families as part of the provision of a coordinated package of support for those in our most deprived communities in line with Recommendation 4.

Recommendation 16: Universities, working with schools, should take greater responsibility for the development of the pool of applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds by delivering academically based programmes to support highly able learners, who are at risk of not fulfilling their academic potential.

Recommendation 17: SDS and schools should work together to provide a more coordinated, tailored offer of information, advice and guidance to disadvantaged learners at key transition phases throughout their education. Specifically:

- SDS should ensure that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are provided with one-to-one personal interviews, not just when making subject choices, but also at all key transition stages including P7 / S1.

Schools should:

- Identify a lead person to coordinate links with fair access programmes and to provide direction to key sources of information on student support and the higher education admissions process. Keep parents informed of key decisions and transition phases throughout the learner journey, to ensure that they are equipped with the information necessary to support learners to make informed decisions
- Consider the role that universities, SFC funded access programmes and mentoring schemes can play in providing IAG.

Recommendation 18: Universities, colleges and local authorities should work together to provide access to a range of Higher and Advanced Higher subjects, which ensures that those from disadvantaged backgrounds or living in rural areas are not restricted in their ability to access higher education by the subject choices available to them.

Recommendation 19: The Commissioner for Fair Access should commission research, within three months of appointment, to assess how student finance impacts on the participation of disadvantaged learners in higher education. This research should consider in particular:

- Whether, and to what extent, levels of student finance impact upon access, retention and choice of institution.
- Whether, and to what extent, the balance between loan and bursary impacts upon access, retention and choice of institution.
- International practice on student finance and the impact this has on access and retention.

Recommendation 20: Disadvantaged learners and their parents should be provided with clear, accurate information on both the availability of student finance and the conditions for
restitution. This should be taken forward by the bodies identified in Recommendation 17 and the Student Awards Agency Scotland.

**Recommendation 21:** By 2017, those with a care experience, who meet the access threshold, should be entitled to the offer of a place at a Scottish university. Entitlement should also apply to those with a care experience who have had to take a break from higher education and wish to return. Learners should be assessed at the minimum entry levels in 2017 and 2018 and the access thresholds thereafter.

A guaranteed offer of a place in itself is insufficient and we must also support those with care experience to access and sustain this opportunity through improved financial support and more flexibility within the system.

**Recommendation 22:** The Scottish Government should replace student living costs loans with a non-repayable bursary and provide a more flexible package of student support for learners with a care experience from academic year 2017/18. This should include:

- Amending the previous study rules to allow those with a care experience more than one extra year of full funding where circumstances require this.
- Options for those with a care experience to extend a year of their course to complete it part-time over two years with full funding, similar to the arrangements already in place for those with disabilities and elite athletes.

**Recommendation 23:** The Scottish Government should develop an approach to allow those with a care experience to be identified from early years to post-school and on to employment to enable additional support, for example, a marker or flag. Young people with care experience must be included in the development of how this would be used and shared.

**Recommendation 24:** The SFC should review the best use of its funds, specifically the Access and Retention Fund, to deliver the implementation of the Commission’s recommendations.

**Recommendation 25:** The SFC should monitor how institution spend, from core funding, is being used to support access through the Outcome Agreement process.

**Recommendation 26:** By 2021, the SFC, in consultation with the Scottish Government, should explore options for more targeted funding models to better support the recruitment and retention of greater numbers of access students.

**Recommendation 27:** The SFC should make more extensive use of their existing regulatory powers, where appropriate, to drive greater progress. The Scottish Government should ensure that it provides the SFC with the necessary mandate to take this action.

**Recommendation 28:** The Scottish Government should ensure that objectives relating to fair access are embedded in the regulatory frameworks of other agencies/public bodies with a role to play in advancing equal access.

**Recommendation 29:** The Scottish Government should improve mechanisms to track learners and share data to support fair access. Specifically, the Government should:

- Lead the work necessary to develop and implement the use of a unique learner number to be used to track learners’ progress from early learning, throughout education and onwards into employment.
- Review data access arrangements to provide a national process for the provision of information to practitioners and policy makers working on fair access. This review should consider access to and sharing of data held by local authorities, schools, UCAS and SAAS.
**Recommendation 30:** The Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government should enhance the analyses and publication of data on fair access. This should include:

- Enhanced monitoring of fair access at key stages of the learner journey including analyses by socioeconomic background of: early learning and school attainment; UCAS applications, offers and acceptances; entrants to higher education; qualifiers from higher education and their destinations.
- Publication of a coherent and consistent set of statistics to show progress on fair access, either through development of the SFC's Learning for All publication or a successor publication.
- Working with UK producers of statistics, including HESA and UCAS, to develop an agreed method of comparing progress on fair access over time and across UK nations.
- Exploring with The Data Lab the feasibility of a project to develop a data science solution to support fair access e.g. a schools based data solution to identify those from a disadvantaged background with the potential to succeed in higher education and who could most benefit from additional support.

**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.

- In addition to SIMD, this should include a measure for school environment, a marker for income and a marker for care experience.
- The development of these measures should take account of the findings from SFC funded research on the use of contextual data in undergraduate university admissions being undertaken by Durham University and due to report in 2016
- The SFC should review the measures it uses within outcome agreements and the access work it funds in light of the outcome of this work.

**Recommendation 32:** The Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council should implement the following targets to drive forward the delivery of equal access in Scotland:

To realise the First Minister's ambition of equality of access to higher education in Scotland:

- By 2030, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds\(^{11}\) should represent 20% of entrants to higher education. Equality of access should be seen in both the college sector and the university sector.

To drive progress toward this goal:

- 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.
- By 2021, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 10% of full-time first degree entrants to every individual Scottish university.
- By 2026, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 18% of full-time first degree entrants to Scottish universities as a whole.

\(^{11}\) For the purpose of these targets, students from the most deprived backgrounds are defined as those from SIMD20 areas. We recognise, however, the particular challenge that the use of SIMD as a marker for deprivation presents to institutions in the north east of Scotland. SFC should therefore consider additional measure(s) to SIMD when monitoring the progress of Robert Gordon University and the University of Aberdeen towards the above targets, which better reflects the link between deprivation and access in the local population.
• In 2022, the target of 10% for individual Scottish universities should be reviewed and a higher level target should be considered for the subsequent years.

**Recommendation 33:** 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.

• Consider what further work is required to support equal outcomes after study for those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with a care experience.

**Recommendation 34:** The Scottish Government should report on progress against the recommendations it accepts from this report, 12 months after issuing its response. Thereafter, progress towards equal access should be reported on annually by the Commissioner for Fair Access.
The first panel is made up of the Chair of the Commission on Widening Access and accompanying Commission members. The reports of the Commission serve as written submissions for this panel.

Reports

Commission on Widening Access Interim Report (November 2015)

Commission on Widening Access A Blueprint for Fairness (March 2016)

The Committee will then hear from the Commissioner, who has made a written submission.

In addition, a number of Commission members who will not be in attendance have made written submissions to inform the session.

Submissions

Commissioner for Fair Access (Professor Peter Scott)

Early Years Scotland

NUS Scotland

Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC)

Sutton Trust

Universities Scotland
Introduction

1. It is an honour to be appointed Scotland’s first Commissioner for Fair Access following the recommendation made in the final report of the Commission on Widening Access and accepted by the Scottish Government. It is also a challenge. Fair access to higher education is an issue that all education systems struggle to address - here in Scotland, across the UK, throughout Europe and across the world. There are no simple solutions. Yet ensuring fair access is a key task - both in terms of ensuring everyone, regardless of social background, is able to fulfil their potential and realise their ambitions and for all citizens to be able to participate in our democratic society (so it is not an exaggeration to regard fair access as a ‘human right’ in the 21st century); and also in terms of using the skills of the whole population, not simply a section of that population, to develop a dynamic and prosperous economy (because universities and colleges are key players in building the ‘knowledge economy’).

2. The work of the Commissioner will build on the work of the Commission which has provided a clear road-map to achieve the Scottish Government's ambition of equality of access. The Commission made a large number of recommendations, many of which require action by the Commissioner. That action will predominantly take the form of persuasion - stimulating public debate about ‘fair access'; encouraging research into best practice; assisting with the coordination of the policies adopted, and decisions taken, by the Scottish Government and public agencies; offering a strategic lead to institutions; and, crucially, supporting the work of the very many dedicated professionals already engaged in a wide variety of activities designed to promote fair access. The Commissioner has no regulatory powers, which is a strength rather than a weakness because it enables me to act as a facilitator and ‘honest broker’.

General comments

3. The role of the Commissioner is to promote fair access - for all students regardless of their social backgrounds and other characteristics. It is not to encourage experiments in social engineering. The goal is to produce a ‘level playing field’ not to favour one group of potential students at the expense of other groups. However, the evidence is clear. In Scotland, as in nearly every country with a developed system of higher and further education, young people from more socially advantaged backgrounds are much more likely to participate than those from less advantaged backgrounds. Therefore it is right for the Scottish Government to focus its efforts on increasing participation by those from these less advantaged groups, although it is also important to recognise that there may be other, less obvious, forms of disadvantage (for example, older students, those with a disability or those who can only study part-time).

4. This access gap exists regardless of the overall level of participation (the size of the system) and of the funding arrangements (free, low or high tuition). It would be premature for me to comment in any detail on the debates that are currently taking place about how fair access can be best achieved in the particular circumstances that
apply in Scotland, although I am aware of these debates. At this stage I would offer only four comments.

5. The first is that a vigorous debate on these issues should be encouraged. Only through vigorous debate can a consensus be arrived at on the best ways forward, and general support for that consensus strengthened; and, where consensus cannot be achieved, at any rate there will be clearer understanding of the differences that remain.

6. The second is that care needs to be taken with comparisons across the UK that seem to suggest that one nation is doing ‘better’ than another. For example, if the access gap between the most advantaged and least advantaged students in universities is compared, it appears that the 4:1 gap in Scotland is wider than the gap in England (2.4:1). But this is largely explained by the fact that the colleges play a much smaller role in higher education in England, and universities a correspondingly larger role. In England post-1992 universities enrol a higher proportion of students and also continue to offer Higher Nationals (and the two-year equivalent, Foundation degrees). So it is not a like-for-like comparison. Overall Scotland has the highest level of higher education participation in the UK.

7. The third is that some of the issues that are being debated are neither new nor unique to Scotland.

- The most lively debate is about ‘displacement’ - whether, as a result of efforts to recruit more students from socially disadvantaged groups and the overall cap on student numbers other potential students are being denied places. There are two issues - the question of ‘fairness’ given the historically much lower levels of participation by students from disadvantaged backgrounds and the extent to which action can reasonably be taken to address that access gap; and the particular effect of the cap. Even when there is no formal cap (as is now the case in England), there will always be limits on the capacity of institutions to admit students - for example, space limitations especially in equipment intensive subjects but also some subjects subject to professional accreditation. In other words there will always be capacity constraints. This means that, if efforts to recruit more students from disadvantaged groups are successful, places for other students will potentially be reduced - which raises the prospect of the so-called ‘squeezed middle’. That potentially happens in all higher education systems, even those that are formally ‘open access’. Although an increase in funded places, which is a political decision, may mitigate the dilemma, it cannot make it disappear entirely.

- A related concern may be that, while the number of Scots domiciled students and also students from the European Union, apart from the rest of the UK, (who enjoy free tuition) is capped, the number of students from the rest of the UK (who pay fees) is not. Although rUK students fill additional places and, therefore, are not displacing Scots domiciled students (unlike other-EU students, potentially), it is possible that levels of attainment required by the former will be different from the levels required by the latter. But this has been true in the case of students from outside the EU for more than half a century, and generally the concern has been that the fees paid by international students have subsidised ‘home’ students. The fact that in aggregate the ratio between applications and places, the offer rate, is lower for Scots students than rUK students is not necessarily conclusive proof that
attainment levels are diverging on a significant scale, without more detailed analysis of the subject choices and qualification status of both groups.

8. The final comment - perhaps a footnote - is my personal commitment to maintaining free access to higher education. In my view, in the long term it is impossible to have fair access without free access. There may be superficial attractions in a fee-based system, because resources can then be recycled into programmes to promote wider participation by under-represented groups. But the overall effect of a fee-based system is to strengthen the view that higher education is a private good and to weaken the view that, although conferring substantial advantages on individual students, higher education is also a public good that confers benefits on the whole of society. In the end this shift weakens the case for fair access, except as a politically enforced compensatory strategy, as well as seeping into the priorities and behaviour of institutions:

More detailed proposals

9. The Commission made a large number of recommendations. At this stage I would like to highlight only three - the proposal to establish access thresholds, which I link with contextualised admissions; the importance of articulation; and the use of SCottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to set targets.

Access thresholds and contextualised admissions

10. The proposal to establish access thresholds is bold. It will clearly affect universities in different ways. Although all universities have courses that are in high demand, the disparity between access thresholds and what might be called supply-and-demand thresholds is likely to be less in post-1992 than in longer established universities. Potentially this will lead to greater dilemmas for more selective universities because they would be in the position of preferring applicants with formally inferior qualifications. However, if access to high-demand courses is simply rationed by admitting without exception applicants with the best qualifications, the effect will be a continuing strong bias in favour of applicants from more socially advantaged background, who benefit from stronger family, peer and community support and from attending higher-performing schools.

11. Some of the concerns about access thresholds might be mitigated by linking them to the broader idea of contextualised admissions, which are emphasised in the Commission’s Final Report but can also be seen as long-standing good practice in universities. The principle is that institutions should establish thresholds for individual courses in terms of formal qualifications - and, more broadly, adequate educational preparation - that are sufficiently demanding to ensure that students can successfully complete these courses and benefit from the experience. There is no point setting students up to fail, although research suggests that students who come through access routes, given the right support, perform as well as those with more conventional entry qualifications. Over-and-above these formal thresholds universities should take into account a range of other factors. The title of Universities Scotland’s recent report - ‘Futures not Backgrounds’ - emphasises that in admitting students universities are not rewarding past success but assessing future potential. Seen in this light access thresholds can be seen as one, although an important, element in contextualised admissions.
Articulation

12. The strength of the colleges is a notable feature of Scottish higher education and is the major reason that Scotland’s overall participation rate is the highest in the UK. Policies that had the, maybe unintended, effect of undermining their status and independence by placing them in a more subordinate relationship to universities, as arguably is the case in England, would be retrograde. Similarly HNs are respected vocational qualifications in their own right and strongly supported by employers. Policies that had the effect of treating them more as ‘feeder’ courses leading to Bachelors’ courses in universities would also be retrograde. But both potentially can make articulation more difficult.

13. There is clearly a need to improve articulation arrangements between colleges and universities, in Scotland, as there is everywhere. For many HN students, particularly perhaps those studying more generic subjects such as business, HNs represent one stage in a longer learner journey. The risks is that, if these students are required to prolong their journeys through higher education (without always compelling educational justification on a detailed course-by-course basis), their journeys will be disrupted, leading to a potential erosion of fair access - and also that resources will be wasted through duplication, leading to a loss of valuable funded places. There are no simple answers. It is perhaps a question of striking the right balance.

SIMD

14. The third issue is the use of SIMD to determine fair access targets in outcome agreements between the Scottish Funding Council and institutions, and also to set national targets. Measurable targets are clearly necessary and the overall targets, although challenging, strike me as realistic and achievable. SIMD is also a sophisticated metric. Of course, there are drawbacks to all metrics, and care must be taken to monitor for unintended, and especially perverse, consequences. All metrics based on some version of postcodes will produce ‘false positives / negatives’, i.e. socially advantaged students living in officially designated deprived areas and, more worryingly, socially disadvantaged students living in other areas (and the Commission recognised this problem with regard to more sparsely populated / rural areas). But there is no way in which this ‘postcode lottery' can be avoided entirely.

15. It is argued that tracking individuals rather than targeting deprived areas would be more accurate, although this poses issues in terms of data protection and may also depend to some extent on self-reporting by applicants. However, although meeting SFC outcome agreement and national targets are very important drivers of fair access policies of institutions, they should not entirely determine these policies. Through their use of contextualised admissions, institutions can reach out to all socially disadvantaged students, whether or not they ‘count’ towards meeting particular targets.

Conclusion

16. I recognise there are several other important issues on which I have not commented at this stage, particularly with regard to student funding and support.
17. I would like to end with two thoughts. The first is that achieving fair access should be a strategic goal for all institutions. Although their individual policies will inevitably differ, fair access should never be a peripheral concern - or seen as a task predominantly for only a sub-set of institutions. The second is, although inequalities in access reflect deeper structural inequalities and can only be fully addressed by longer-term changes in attitudes and aspirations, it is important to maintain a sense of urgency by focusing on challenging but achievable goals (and also to ensure that all policies, across Government, are access-proofed).
Commission on Widening Access

Submission from Early Years Scotland

Early Years Scotland would like to congratulate Professor Peter Scott on his appointment as the new Commissioner for Fair Access to Higher Education.

We look forward to working with him as we continue the critical task of striving to ensure that children born into our most disadvantaged communities have the same chance of going to university as children from the most affluent.

We welcomed the fact that the Commission on Widening Access included Early Years, and also that Early Years Scotland was invited to represent the sector. All too often, our shameful attainment gap is regarded as a ‘school’ issue. Strategies to address the gap then begin half way up the ladder of cause, rather than focusing on a more preventative approach at the very earliest stages. By starting with pre-birth and babies where seeds are sown, we could truly achieve transformational change and stop the gap well before a child starts school, and when the roots have become established.

Early Years Scotland acknowledges that there is no single magic bullet. However, there are combinational factors and a plethora of research pointing to particular conditions, which, if present, provide a fairer start and more positive outcomes for children.

We would therefore appreciate if the Commissioner’s office could ensure that there is a continued and explicit emphasis on early years as a priority as this critical work goes forward.

In particular, we would welcome a significant and ongoing focus on the following:

- The importance of family learning and parents being engaged and involved in their child’s learning from the earliest possible stage.
- The need for higher and further education and SQA to ensure that initial training programmes and ongoing professional development for the early learning and childcare workforce include a strong emphasis on the impact of deprivation and disadvantage on a child’s learning, and also an emphasis on how to work with parents to support the enrichment of the home learning environment.
- The need for the workforce to be upskilled with regard to working most effectively with Scotland’s babies and children under 3 years of age and their families. This is of particular importance with the forthcoming expansion of government funded Early Learning and Childcare for all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds.
- A greater shift towards all Early Learning and Childcare providers ensuring that meaningful parental engagement, which can lead to the improvement and enhancement of the home learning environment, is an integral part of all provision.
- Increased efforts and energies towards more collaboration between higher and further education providers working with Early Learning and Childcare settings to engage with young children and their families, especially in areas
of disadvantage. We know that this engagement can help familiarise parents and their children to the idea of higher education and this in turn can support parents’ aspirations and expectations for young children to participate in higher education.

Jean Carwood-Edwards
CEO, Early Years Scotland

End
Commission on Widening Access

Submission from NUS Scotland

Introduction

Fair access has been a priority for NUS Scotland for a significant time now, and we were extremely pleased with the creation of the Commission on Widening Access, the publication of its final report, and most recently, the appointment of Sir Peter Scott as Scotland’s inaugural Fair Access Commissioner. CoWA’s report was a bold challenge for a fairer Scotland, where access to education is only ever determined by potential. It means that we have a clear set of recommendations to create a fairer education system, now we need to see those matched by an equally strong response. Part of that rests with having the necessary leadership, drive and vision to push government, universities and colleges to secure greater progress through bold action – and the appointment of Professor Scott is a significant step in that.

As we look to the forthcoming one-year anniversary of publication of CoWA’s final report, we are extremely pleased to see Sir Peter take up post and look forward to engaging with him to ensure we implement those recommendations in full, and that the Blueprint for Fairness presented by CoWA becomes a reality. Below we consider what we believe are some of the most pressing recommendations from the Commission, and priorities for the Commissioner.

Development of the Scottish Framework for Fair Access

One of the key recommendations of CoWA, and for the Commissioner, is the development and publication of Scottish Framework for Fair Access. This, in the words of CoWA, should be a “…authoritative, evidence based framework [to] identify the most impactful forms of access activity at each stage of the learner journey”. This is an important recommendation – and one that many of us in the sector are looking to the development of as a matter of priority – to ensure that we are best able to evidence and implement the appropriate actions to deliver on the targets and activities proposed by CoWA. That should not be something that looks to revise or rewrite the recommendations, but ensures a clear framework for their achievement. As CoWA’s final report noted, there is a huge range of programmes and activities designed to improve fair access, but these can often be fragmented or cluttered, not just within institutions but also across them, and their wider regions – creating confusion for learners – and at times have little evaluation or clear and tangible outcomes. Given the sheer effort, and sums of money, involved in these programmes it is vital that we can evidence the outcomes they secure and build on good practice where it exists.

As part of the development of this framework, while the focus will undoubtedly (and has to) be focussed externally, we also believe it should present an opportunity to clarify the internal arrangements for the Commissioner, and the structures and framework that exist to support their work. These include the budget (particularly for research, as recommended by CoWA) and resources provided to the post; the scope and remit they have to challenge stakeholders (including government and its
agencies) and drive forward progress; and, the interrelationships, with the sector and stakeholders, and accountabilities in place, which will guide and inform their work.

The identification and scaling up of best practice

As noted above, it is clear that there is a great deal of good work being undertaken by institutions. However, it is also clear that we must significantly expand widening access activity in Scotland, focusing that activity on those who would otherwise not enter university (rather than those who may otherwise go anyway), and we must align target groups across Scotland. In doing so, institutions should look at how they could focus existing activity to gain greater impact. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has undertaken a great deal of work on this area and found that aspirations are high and realistic among young people and that often it is structural and informational barriers that stand in the way of these aspirations being met. As such, we must move away from aspiration-raising work towards work to remove the barriers preventing those from disadvantaged backgrounds from fulfilling their aspirations. NUS Scotland believes that more should be done to ensure that government-funded, and institution-funded, outreach work is focused on tackling information barriers, working with parents, and on narrowing the attainment gap.

Equally, bridging provision, such as summer schools and access courses, are proven ways to successfully widen access. However, we believe they need to be expanded in size and that equal provision needs to be put in place across Scotland, with a summer school/bridging support place, for every school leaver from a deprived background who has fallen short of their required grades. We should use the appointment of the Commissioner, and the ‘critical friend’ role they can bring to fair access, to ensure that these are delivered in more innovative ways. For example, if expansion is beyond the physical limitations of some universities then franchising this to alternative providers – such as the Open University, local colleges and schools – could not only expand this activity, it could reach a wider pool of potential students.

We believe this upscaling of activity and identification of best practice should be a key priority for the Commissioner, and should underpin and inform the development and outcomes of the Framework for Fair Access.

Ensuring success against targets

While it’s positive that access rates for our poorest students are going up, that progress is marginal and not great enough if we’re to achieve our ambitions. The most recent figures show that university entrants from the 20% and 40% most deprived areas increased respectively to 14.1% (from 14% in 2014/15) and 30.8% (from 30% in 2014/15) – and this must be read against the targets set by CoWA. Those ambitious, but achievable, targets will require resources and places to ensure they are met, and to allow for the system to grow as part of that. UCAS statistics show that there persists a gap in the conversion rate of university applications to acceptances between the most deprived (63%) and least deprived (75%) and there is a real risk that without additional places that gap continues and targets are missed.
Some of the greatest progress we have seen in recent years has undoubtedly been as result of the introduction of additional funded places specifically for access and articulation. While fair access should be core to what universities are doing, those additional places have provided the necessary catalyst for greater action. However, as we are now in the final year of those additional places, we must look at how we carry them on in future, ensuring a place in education for all those with the potential to succeed.

CoWA’s final report noted that “It is for the Scottish Government to determine the size of higher education sector required to deliver the skills necessary for economic growth” - through the development of the Framework we believe those considerations should also fall to the Commissioner, working closely together with SFC, government and stakeholders, to determine the necessary funding and places required to deliver on our ambitions and those targets.

The role of colleges in fair access

As the most recently available figures show, 29% of students studying in college are from the 20% most deprived backgrounds. For just those studying higher education in college the figure is 23%. As noted above, and in light of those figures, along with additional places for widening access, the Scottish Government also introduced additional places for articulation. Since 2013/14, the SFC has funded 4,310 such places, boosting the numbers of students articulating from college to university.

However, it is not just through these additional places that articulation activity occurs, and it is a distinctive feature of Scottish higher education. Looking away from those funded places – which guarantee a student direct entry to university into the appropriate year, and as the Commission on Widening Access showed, it is incredibly disappointing that there continues to be huge disparities in work on articulation between our different types of university. Figures from the SFC show that:

- Overall, our ancient universities account for only 6% of students from the most deprived backgrounds moving from college to university;
- Making that figure even starker is the fact that, of those 113 students, 91 are made to start over again in first year (‘progression only’);
- A further 10 are made to duplicate a year of study (‘advanced progression’, typically this is HND students who are made to repeat 2\textsuperscript{nd} year);
- Overall, across all institutions, 51% of articulating students are forced to repeat years of study – only 49% enter university from college at the year and level they should.

Articulation is a success story of Scottish education and fair access, but far from the complete success it should be. Countless students (often from our most deprived backgrounds) are made to repeat years of study, taking on the extra debt, workload, and costs coming with that. That should be a matter of urgency to address as it comes at a huge cost – to the student and society as a whole. In light of pressures on budgets, it is a huge waste of resource, as SFC has to fund extra years of study and it takes up an extra university place that could otherwise have been accessed by someone else. Equally, as CoWA stated, there is “…no good reason why Scotland
should persist with an essentially stratified higher education system...we believe that all universities should be required to engage meaningfully with articulation."

We believe the Commissioner should have a key role in ensuring articulation routes continue to grow and that this growth occurs across all institutions and that all our universities are challenged to do more, ensuring no student sees penalties or disadvantages as a result of the route they take through higher education.

Reassessing the definition of fair access

Within the issues identified above – the role of colleges, and ensuring the necessary investment in, and availability of, university places – there is also a need to reassess what we mean by fair access. When CoWA’s final report was published, it was disappointing, if not surprising, that so much attention was paid (at times negatively) to one recommendation – introducing a minimum access threshold, potentially below existing entry requirements. As the Commission’s report noted, increasing entry requirements haven’t necessarily been a response to increasing ‘standards’, but simply as a way to manage increasing demand for those places – as noted above, the gap between applications and acceptances has been growing, as more students aspire to university, but the available supply of places fails to match this. However, that entry requirement inflation fails to take account of the context of a pupils achievements.

NUS Scotland’s report into fair access in 2012, Unlocking Scotland’s Potential, looked at a range of evidence available then, and CoWA saw plenty more now, showing what a pupil from a disadvantaged background achieves at school is far from the best predictor of their future attainment at university. The evidence shows how students from more deprived backgrounds or ‘lower performing’ schools, even when offered lower entry requirements, can outperform entrants with higher grades from ‘better’ schools. In this way, fair access can bring the most talented students into our universities and boost the attainment of our graduates. That should mean, in return for those achievements by students from lower performing schools or communities, ensuring a minimum threshold. Moreover, while CoWA’s recommendation was bold, innovative ways to get the admissions system to recognise potential have existed for years – across all institution types – with no drop in quality or standards or outcomes.

As such, we believe that the system must be invested in, and more places made available, because that allows for both fair access to grow while also investing in higher level skills and knowledge that we need, as a country. But we shouldn’t view that growth through a narrow prism of ‘displacement’, or even treat the risk of displacement as a new concept – as the figures show, every single year thousands of potential students miss out on a university place. As such, fair access should not simply look at how we boost the numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds into university – those who are most likely to be ‘displaced’ under the status quo – but why parity of esteem between further and higher education, and vocational routes, remains so elusive that those routes remain seen as lesser options. In the words of CoWA, it is about breaking down ‘entrenched privilege’
within the system, and boosting that parity of esteem – a key role for the Commissioner, working with partners across the sector.

Ensuring genuine outcomes

Often the focus of fair access is the numbers of students getting into education; however, retention, and ensuring students are supported to continue their studies and achieve a qualification at the end of a high quality learning experience, is just as important as access. As HESA statistics show, Scotland persists with higher levels of student drop out than the rest of the UK. Moreover, for Scottish domiciled students, there is a worrying retention gap between students from the most deprived backgrounds and all others, of 4 percentage points. While this is a narrowing gap, it requires concerted and urgent action to tackle more.

Similarly, in colleges, as the most recent SFC college performance indicators, show, just 71.3% of college HE students and 64% of college FE students successfully complete their course – far below the equivalent figures in university. This puts fair access at a further risk, given the role of colleges identified previously.

There is clearly much more to do to ensure that colleges and universities take their responsibilities on access seriously, from entry through to exit, and retention must be an equal priority to access for the Commissioner and their work.

Student support

As previous NUS Scotland submissions have detailed, there are a number of injustices within student support and, if we were starting from scratch, we would not aspire to the system we have now. As such, we were extremely pleased when the Scottish Government announced their intention to establish an independent review of student support, which is now underway.

CoWA highlighted that there was strong evidence collected during their work that raised concerns around the impact of student support on access and retention, as well as student choices. Given detailed recommendations on student support fell outwith their remit, they recommended the Commissioner “…should commission research within three months of appointment, to assess how student finance impacts on the participation of disadvantaged learners in higher education.”

We do not believe the establishment of the review should preclude this recommendation and research – indeed, it would serve as an helpful basis for the review’s ongoing work and could take place in tandem with (or even as part of) the review. Moreover, we believe there is potential for the co-option of the Commissioner onto the review group, or involvement in its work, now they have been appointed.
COMMISSION ON WIDENING ACCESS

SUBMISSION FROM STUC

The STUC is Scotland’s trade union centre. Its purpose is to co-ordinate, develop and articulate the views and policies of the trade union movement in Scotland; reflecting the aspirations of trade unionists as workers and citizens.

The STUC represents over 570,000 working people and their families throughout Scotland. It speaks for trade union members in and out of work, in the community and in the workplace. Our affiliated organisations have interests in all sectors of the economy and our representative structures are constructed to take account of the specific views of women members, young members, Black members, LGBT+ members, and members with a disability, as well as retired and unemployed workers.

Introduction

The STUC is committed to achieving the best possible educational outcomes for children in Scotland and believes strongly that education has a crucial role to play in promoting social mobility and supporting all children to reach their potential for the benefit of the child and the wider Scottish economy. It is a continuing scandal that parental income remains a strong predictor of the outcomes of children. The STUC is committed to addressing this issue and was pleased to have the opportunity to be represented on the Commission for Widening Access.

The Commission for Widening Access made a series of valuable recommendations and the STUC is pleased that a Commissioner for Widening Access has now been appointed. It is essential that this Commissioner now considers what specific actions should be taken to advance access to Higher Education for students within low income households. The Commission for Widening Access correctly identified that a sector wide approach to tackle this problem should be pursued, focusing not just on universities but on colleges, schools and early year’s provision. The targets within the report are particularly useful for driving change forward and the minimum entry threshold for university offers a real and useful tool within the system that can begin to tackle this persistent injustice that has a material effect on the life chances of Scotland’s young people.

It should be noted, however, that the Commission for Widening Access took evidence and made recommendations on the system as it existed at that time, and made little attempt to take into account future budgetary pressures or consider where changes or reduction in provision might occur. It also did not look in detail at closing the attainment gap as work was ongoing on this issue in other parts of Government. While this was entirely appropriate for a short-life Commission that already had a large remit, it cannot be the approach taken by the Commissioner. The Commissioner must seek to understand, and indeed work to eradicate, issues that arise due to financial pressures in the system. It is simply unrealistic to expect to
widen access without considering how young people are supported throughout their whole educational journey.

This evidence therefore, is designed to highlight some of the concerns that exist due to reduced budgets in education. It is not designed to question the work of the Commission but rather to contextualise it within current and real pressures in the system.

**Pressures within the System**

It is increasingly clear that Scottish education is facing challenges and negative impacts as a result of austerity. Audit Scotland’s 2014 Report, School Education set out that, in real terms, Council’s spending on education reduced by 5% between 2010/12 and 2012/13. This itemised a 2% drop in teachers, 5% in Admin and Clerical Staff, 2% in Classroom Assistants, 22% in Business Managers, 12% in Laboratory Assistants and Technicians and 22% in Quality Improvement Officers. The Audit Scotland Report did not report cuts in Instrumental Music Teachers and Educational Psychologists. The Scottish Local Government Benchmarking Framework (January 2016) has reported a reduction in real costs per pupil since 2010/11 of 10.8% in primary and 4.1% in secondary.

This corresponds to analysis by the Fraser of Allander Institute that reports that more than £1 billion over the last five years has been taken out of local authority budgets.\(^1\) It is also estimated that over the same period there has been £300 million in cuts to schools.\(^2\) Schools are clearly negatively impacted by the direct cut to their budgets, as the Audit Scotland Report highlights, but the cumulative impact of the wider local authorities cuts should not be underestimated, reducing the wider support services that families rely on. A report by SPICe, the Scottish Government’s information centre, shows that almost 50% of the savings made by Scottish Councils come from services used most by lower income groups.\(^3\) In this context the Scottish Government’s commitment to closing the attainment gap looks admirable but unlikely to be achieved due to the reality of budget cuts.

It is also clear that the cuts are not falling equally across the sector. Recent reports from Enable Scotland and the Scottish Children’s Services Coalition (SCSC) highlight the effect that cuts are having on disabled students and students with additional support needs. The SCSC state that the number of pupils with ASN had increased by more than 16% since 2013; however, the number of learning support teachers fell by 13% to 2,936 between 2010 and 2015, while the number of auxiliaries and behaviour support staff dropped by 9% to 17,498 over the same period.\(^4\) Enable Scotland’s study looked at the policy of integration for students who would otherwise be in special school. This research carried out between February and September 2016 found that only 3% of education professionals said the policy

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was working for all children. While 60% said it was working for some, but not all and nearly a quarter, 22%, said it wasn’t working. Of the parents and carers whose children attended mainstream schools, fewer than 12% said their child was receiving enough support to participate in all parts of school life.  

It is not possible to provide inclusive education for disabled young people, without a focus on resourcing this support. Teachers need specific training to support disabled children and crucially teaching assistants and additional support needs specialists must be in place to support the child. Without the vital role of these workers, the ability of the child to participate in education and to achieve their potential is reduced. Too often cuts are eroding support from the system, at a moment when it is essential for this support to grow in order to achieve the desired aims as laid out at Scottish Government level.

It is clear that there are pressures within the education system but the pressures on educational attainment are not simply impacted by decisions taken within the school sector nor can they be traced solely to the activities of schools. Differentials between learners can begin pre-birth through maternal health and lifestyle choices, with further impacts during early childhood when cognitive development is rapid. By age 5, the gap between children from low-income and high-income families can be 10-13 months.

Access to resources at home and family support have a continuing impact on this gap, as can shocks to the family situation such as unemployment or problems with welfare benefits. Subsequent choices around further or higher education or vocational routes are then shaped by parental expectations and experiences, and students continue to be unduly limited by issues around social capital, including opportunities to gain work experience, often a pre-request for entry in certain high-profile degrees such as medicine. Increasingly young people, in the senior phase or in higher or further education, have to combine work and study and student support packages have been eroded meaning a reliance on paid work is increased. Unfortunately the work on offer to young people is increasingly insecure and low paid, which has a direct impact on the young person’s ability to manage their finances and ultimately to maintain their study. Youth differentials in the minimum wage lock in poverty and disadvantage, particularly for those with no family support to fall back on.

The issues that impact a child’s life-chances are therefore varied and can persist throughout school and into adulthood. The effect of poverty should not be underestimated and wider social issues around housing, welfare policy, and access to work will continue to affect the educational outcomes of children. It is clear, however, that schools are key factors in supporting children’s outcomes and it is critical that they are supported to do so. Added to this the role of early years education is essential for ensuring effective early interventions and to close the gaps that have already started to develop by age 5.

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5 http://www.heraldscotland.com/NEWS/14946152.Flagship_policy_to_educate_pupils_with_learning_disabilities_in_mainstream_schools_is_not_working_/?commentSort=score

It should be remembered, however, that Scotland does still have a high quality education system and there is much within the system that is valuable and can be built upon. A key role of the Commissioner for Widening Access must be to work to ensure that schools, colleges and universities are providing sustainable routes through the education system and supporting young people effectively.

Student support packages need to be considered and a continuing focus on lifelong learning and routes back into learning for those who have left it, must also be a priority. The Commission for Widening Access identified the important role that colleges play with regard to articulation and bringing young people from low income households into higher education, yet this too is an area where severe budget pressures have been felt.

An Audit Scotland report found that between 2011 and 2014, when the mergers were taking place, Scottish Government funding to colleges fell by 12.3 per cent in real terms. It also found that there had been a reduction of 48 per cent in part-time students and a reduction of 41 per cent in the number of students aged 25 or older between 2008-09 and 2013-14. Equally staff numbers decreased by 9.3 per cent between 2011-12 and 2013-14. Here too reductions in additional support needs provision can be evidenced, and the reduction of part-time places particularly disadvantages those who combine study and care. Pressures within the system are creating barriers for certain types of students, particularly disabled students and young carers, and it is important that this equality dimension is not lost within the widening access agenda.

Conclusion

We must continue to work to improve access to Higher Education for young people from low income households. The Commissioner for Widening Access has an important role to play in ensuring a whole systems approach to this issue and must work to ensure that all students are supported to meet their potential. Determined effort must be made to counteract, mitigate or reverse budget cuts and we must strive to meet the targets laid down within the Commission for Widening Access report.

STUC
Jan 2017

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7 [http://wwwaudit-scotlandgovuk/docs/central/2015/nr_150402_scotlands_collegespdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2015/nr_150402_scotlands_colleges.pdf)
Commission on Widening Access
Submission from The Sutton Trust

Purpose: Examining the work of the Commission on Widening Access ahead of the Education and Skills Committee’s session on the Commission’s final report.

Date: Friday 13th January 2017

The Commission on Widening Access:

The Sutton Trust contributed to the work of the Commission on Widening Access and welcomed its recommendations. We also welcome the appointment of a Commissioner for Fair Access who will take forward the policies and recommendations of the Commission.

The target from the Commission on Widening Access to ensure that a fifth of all those entering higher education in 2030 should come from the fifth poorest areas in Scotland is an ambitious one, and one which the First Minister has committed to.

With that in mind, we support many of the Commission’s key recommendations including universities each having clearly published policies on contextual admissions which include a minimum academic threshold for less advantaged students.

Sutton Trust – Access Scotland report (May 2016)

In our report, Access in Scotland, commissioned from the University of Edinburgh, we examined which policies and changes needed to be made in order for Scotland to achieve its target of widening access to its higher education institutions.

Key findings:

- In 2013-14, 55% of Scots entered higher education by the age of 30, with 20.9% starting at an FE college and 34.1% going straight to university after school. In England 46.6% entered higher education, with just 6% starting at FE colleges and other non-university providers.

- The gap in university participation between young people from the most and least advantaged areas is higher in Scotland than in the other home nations, although it has closed more quickly than elsewhere. Scottish 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas are still more than four times more likely to go straight to university than those from the least advantaged areas. In
England, those from the most advantaged areas are 2.4 times as likely to go to university as those from the least, and three times as likely in Wales and Northern Ireland.

- Despite this, there has been improved access for disadvantaged students in Scotland as well as in the rest of the UK. Detailed analysis of Scottish Funding Council (SFC) data reveals in Scotland this has been met almost entirely by the expansion of sub-degree programmes in Scottish colleges. Since 2006, 90 per cent of all the growth in entry into Scottish higher education by disadvantaged students has been through sub-degree courses in colleges. The funded places at the ancients are a notable exception, but there have been few other extra university places taken by disadvantaged students.

Below are the main recommendations from the report, and we hope that these will help the Scottish Government and the Commissioner for Fair Access to achieve their ambitious goals tackling the social class gap in higher education in Scotland.

1. **The Scottish Government should ensure that additional places are available to meet rising demand.**

   Our report demonstrates that there is a mismatch between supply of higher education places in Scotland and demand, with disproportionately detrimental consequences for those from less advantaged backgrounds. The funding of additional places at the Ancients earmarked for students from disadvantaged backgrounds seems to have been an effective way of improving the participation rates of this group, and it is important that such measures continue. However, this report shows that the growth in higher education provision in Scotland has been largely in the college sector, which caters disproportionately for those from poorer backgrounds. So, there is a need for a more nuanced analysis of the pros and cons of relying on the college sector to drive the expansion of higher education. The money for this should be ring-fenced.

2. **Bridging programmes to encourage successful higher education destinations should be expanded, alongside effective career and subject advice in schools.**

   There is some evidence that students from low-progression schools admitted with lower grades may perform better at university than their counterparts from high participation schools with higher grades, as shown in some contextual admissions programmes in Scotland. Programmes aimed at raising awareness and aspirations for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds – such
as those targeted at the highly able at a younger age and summer schools for students taking Highers - are crucial. Schools and colleges should also have free access to professionally qualified careers advisers including specialist advisers with knowledge of entry to elite universities.

3. **Both the Scottish Funding Council and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills should provide a breakdown of the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate by social class and type of institution attended.**

Our analysis has highlighted significant gaps in the availability of administrative data to inform cross-border comparative analysis. The use of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) as the principal measure of social disadvantage is problematic, since it does not capture data on young people from poorer backgrounds who are living in more advantaged areas. In addition to SIMD, data should be gathered on parental occupation and levels of education.

4. **Widening participation initiatives need to be planned carefully to avoid duplication, and rigorous evaluation needs to run alongside implementation.**

The Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government should evaluate the effectiveness of widening access outcome agreements as a means of achieving social change. In particular, further research into student retention strategies for disadvantaged students and in how best to support higher education students at FE colleges, is critical.

5. **Universities should have clearly published policies on contextual admissions which include a minimum academic threshold for less advantaged students.**

St Andrews University has shown that those students from low progression schools admitted with lower grades may perform better than their counterparts from high participation schools with higher grades. Each Scottish university should, as well as having clearly published policies on contextual admissions, have its own minimum academic threshold, based on its own unique circumstances.

- ENDS-
**Brief for the Education and Skills Committee meeting on Wednesday 25 January 2017: Widening access**

| Universities Scotland welcome the appointment of Professor Peter Scott as Commissioner for Fair Access | On 16 December, the Scottish Government announced its appointment of Professor Peter Scott as its first ever Commissioner for Fair Access. Universities Scotland welcomed the appointment, with our Convener Professor Andrea Nolan saying:

> "Professor Scott is a highly respected educationalist and his work on the widening participation strategic committee in HEFCE will stand him in good stead. As Commissioner we fully expect Professor Scott to challenge us as universities; it will also be important that he offers challenges to the Scottish Government and other stakeholders with a role in widening access...Professor Scott’s role as Commissioner is vital in marshalling schools, colleges and universities and others to address the challenge to close the attainment gap and promote wider access to higher education.” |

| Progress on widening access and retention in Scotland | Applications, admissions and retention rates for students from the most deprived neighbourhoods have all increased over the past five years.

The application rates for Scottish 18 year olds have increased over the past decade for all five quintiles of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. The application rate for Scottish 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas (SIMD20) increased from 9.9 per cent in 2006 to 16.3 per cent in 2016, so Scottish 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas were 65 per cent more likely to apply in 2016 than they were ten years earlier.¹

In terms of the proportion of Scotland-domiciled undergraduate entrants from SIMD20 areas reported in Outcome Agreements, this has increased from 12.8 per cent in 2011/12 to 14.1 per cent in 2014/15.²

Overall, retention rates in Scotland are high, and have been on a gradually increasing trend in recent years. Between 2009/10 and 2014/15 overall retention increased from 89.7 per cent to 91.3 per cent.

Retention rate for SIMD20 increased over the same period and the gap has closed between retention of SIMD20 group and average rate whilst retention rate for all students increases.³ |

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² SFC Learning for All: Measures of Success Tenth update [http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical_publications_SFCST062016_LearningforAll/SFCST062016_Learning_for_All.pdf](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical_publications_SFCST062016_LearningforAll/SFCST062016_Learning_for_All.pdf) (p4)
³ SFC Learning for All: Measures of Success Tenth update
Since the publication of *A blueprint for fairness: the final report of the Commission on Widening Access* in March 2016, Universities Scotland has been working closely with the leaders of Scotland’s 19 higher education institutions, and a range of other key stakeholders, to develop a plan of action for how the sector will address the recommendations from *A blueprint for fairness* that are aimed at universities.

We developed our response to the recommendations in *Futures Not Backgrounds* in July 2016 and identified three work streams which will form the structure of our work:

- Admissions
- Articulation
- Bridging programmes

The Admissions work stream will be led by Professor Sally Mapstone, Principal of University of St Andrews. Susan Stewart, Director of the Open University in Scotland will head the Articulation work stream. Bridging programmes will be overseen by Professor Petra Wend, Principal of Queen Margaret University Edinburgh.

It is the intention that the work streams will develop advice for the Commissioner for Fair Access. This will be done on an ongoing basis so that Professor Scott is kept well informed of our work.

### Action plan on...Admissions

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<td>1. Produce a terms of reference for the review of contextual admissions that will inform elements of best practice</td>
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<td>2. Ensure universities review their own admissions policies and practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Publish a clear collective statement of commitment by Scottish universities to use contextual admissions in a way that ensures fair and consistent consideration of applicants’ characteristics of disadvantage.</td>
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#### Why we are doing this

Scottish universities are keen to review their admissions policies and alter their contextual admissions for several reasons:

a. We recognise there is a core of best practice across the sector when it comes to recognising the academic potential of students from deprived backgrounds. This will be achieved whilst respecting university autonomy in relation to their admissions decisions.

b. To make it easier for applicants, teachers, parents and advisors to understand contextual admissions, which will provide confidence in the application system.

c. We wish to see more applicants from deprived backgrounds with academic potential admitted;

This group will include part-time and mature students as part of its remit.

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<th>Action plan on...Articulation</th>
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1. Undertake analytical work to establish demand for articulation/the extent to which that demand is from ‘widening access’ students.
2. Produce advice to members on articulation that will:
   • Identify different/new articulation pathways (in terms of qualifications)
   • Identify ways of supporting articulation
   • Identify barriers to articulation for institutions
   • Understand the implications of increased articulation for widening access to university for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds
3. Allow universities to consider their own articulation strategies and increase routes.

**Objectives**

To increase opportunities for students from widening access backgrounds to enter university via college and/or via routes other than straight from school. Again, the group will consider mature and part-time learners in its thinking.

**Action plan on...Bridging programmes**

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<td>1. Provide an overview of current Bridging Programmes.</td>
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<td>2. Clearly define what we mean by ‘bridging programme’</td>
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<td>3. Define what we mean by a ‘national’ programme, e.g. one central programme run in one place; one central programme run regionally; a network of local programmes with national recognition.</td>
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<td>4. Explore how, for example, the Scottish Wider Access Programme and the Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools achieved wide recognition within the sector.</td>
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<td>5. Principals to discuss and agree the approach.</td>
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**Objective**

To develop, with regard for the diversity of potential university applicants, a national network of bridging programme(s) which combines local delivery with national recognition.

**Timescales**

These current work streams were established in December 2016, with the first meetings of each stream taking place in February 2017.

The current timescale is that by Autumn 2018 the majority of the work outlined above will be complete, with new admissions policy for 2020 entry going live.

**Questions for the new Commissioner**

Universities Scotland has identified a number of questions it may wish to ask Professor Scott in his appearance at the Committee on the 25 January:

- What were the terms of reference you were given by the Scottish Government?
- How will your office function in regards to secretariat duties and budget?
- The Commission on Widening Access was clear that a joined-up view of the challenges of closing the attainment gap and
widening access to university from the early years onwards of the education system is required. How do you see that being achieved?

- The Commission on Widening Access only examined full-time and young students, what are your plans to look at part-time and mature students?
- What is your assessment of the current widening access situation? What strengths and challenges have you identified so far?

ENDS

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