

Access Delivery Group

Wednesday 21 March 2018, 10:00 – 12:00

The minute of the third meeting of the Access Delivery Group, held at Scottish Government, St Andrews House, Edinburgh.

Present

Shirley-Anne Somerville, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education & Science (Chair)
Susan Stewart, Open University in Scotland
Professor Petra Wend, Queen Margaret University
Alastair Sim, Universities Scotland
Linda Somerville, NUS Scotland
Jodie Waite, NUS Scotland
Peter MacLeod, Renfrewshire Council
Dr Ken Thomson, Forth Valley College
Shona Struthers, Colleges Scotland
Murdo Mathison, UCU Scotland
Greg Dempster, AHDS
Dr Rebekah Widdowfield, RSE
Dr Stephanie McKendry, University of Strathclyde (*substituting for Conor Ryan*)
Mick Wilson, Scottish Government
Lynn MacMillan, Scottish Government
Laura Duffy, Scottish Government
Lynn Brown, Scottish Government (secretariat)
Karen Frew, Scottish Government
Roddy MacDonald, Scottish Government
Murray McVicar, Scottish Government
Ryan Scott, Scottish Government
Colin McAllister, Scottish Government (observer)
Michael Cross, Scottish Funding Council
Fiona Burns, Scottish Funding Council

Apologies

Prof Sir Peter Scott, Commissioner for Fair Access
Prof Sally Mapstone, University of St Andrews
Liz McIntyre, North East College Scotland
Jim Thewliss, School Leaders Scotland
Katie Burke, Scottish Youth Parliament
Conor Ryan, Sutton Trust
Professor Vikki Boliver, Durham University

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, introduced members attending for the first time, and conveyed apologies for those unable to attend.

2. Minute of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minute of the previous meeting was agreed. In the absence of Professor Mapstone, who was responsible for the last meeting's single action point, the Group agreed to carry it forward to the following meeting. The Chair stated that the minute would be published on the Access Delivery Group page of the Scottish Government website.

3. Commissioner for Fair Access Annual Report

The Chair noted that although the Commissioner for Fair Access was unable to attend the meeting he had requested that his agenda items still stand. The Chair introduced the Commissioner's annual report noting that its recommendations build upon the recommendations of the Commission on Widening Access as well as introducing new areas. The Chair highlighted that she had hoped to discuss the report with the Group ahead of her Statement to Parliament on 6 March, which responded to the Commissioner's recommendations for Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council; however, the rescheduling of the meeting due to adverse weather meant that could not happen. The Chair indicated that she had, however, discussed the report with the Commissioner in advance of her Parliamentary Statement.

Lynn MacMillan provided an update on the Commissioner's behalf and agreed to take any outstanding questions back to him, noting that some members had already discussed the report with the Commissioner. Lynn made the following points:

- As this was the first annual report from the Commissioner there was no precedent for its format or focus, and the Commissioner wanted the report to be comprehensive and address most of the main issues around access in Scotland. Future reports will be more focused and selective;
- The Commissioner did not touch on the school sector within his first report but this is an area he intends to look at in the coming year;
- The Commissioner has been questioned about the need for further recommendations in addition to the CoWA recommendations; however, he has noted that many of his recommendations seek to build on the areas covered by CoWA and he clarified that some do not require action and are points for discussion.

Comments and questions from the subsequent group discussion included the following:

- The discussion around integrated tertiary education was welcomed, though it was noted that the report could have included the work done by colleges, HEI's, and the SFC on 2 + 2 qualifications, in particular the core strategic role the colleges had in this work;
- It was noted that students need to be supported through to graduation. Universities Scotland will look into the concept of 'stepping out' during the coming year;
- It is too simplistic to say that all HN students can articulate directly into second year as some will be changing subject areas (35%). In addition some professional qualifications, like Allied Health Professionals, need to complete the full degree;
- Very pleasing to note that the Commissioner will look at schools; it is hoped that he will take a joined up approach in looking at schools/colleges/universities;
- It was suggested that the language needs clarified to specify whether widening access means access to university or access to higher education at university or college;
- Interest was expressed in regional and local targets. It was noted that SFC's establishment of regional Outcome Agreement managers has led to transparency in discussions regarding targets and may help to reduce some regional competition;
- It was noted that there have been a number of recommendations made - by CoWA, the Commissioner and Universities Scotland. Some map on to each other, and others don't. There is a need to look at this. It was suggested that the Access Delivery Group can take this forward as it should not only deliver the CoWA recommendations, but also respond to developments within the access agenda;
- Intensification will be a continuing process, with the SFC Letter of Guidance currently being finalised. SFC is to hold institutions to account;

- Interest was expressed in the social covenant and how it might lean towards Regional Improvement Collaboratives. There needs to be a cultural and step change with a message of momentum behind the whole system. The relationship between the school sector and colleges can allow scope for local and regional working together.

Action 1: Universities Scotland will look at the concept of 'stepping-out' [AS]

Action 2: All points from the discussion will be noted and fed back to the Commissioner [SG officials]

Action 3: Monitor developments in the access agenda on an on-going basis [SG officials]

4. Commissioner for Fair Access Discussion Paper: Retention, Outcomes and Destinations

The Chair provided a brief introduction to the Discussion paper noting that widening access must be about access to, throughout and beyond university. Ryan Scott was invited to provide background to the Discussion Paper. This included the following points:

- The paper focused on full-time first degree university students, in line with the Commission on Widening Access targets and shifts the focus to beyond entrant numbers;
- The data used is from academic years 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16 and therefore pre-dates the Commission's final report;
- It examines how outcomes vary by institution type and subject and whether there are any consistent trends;
- The trends observed amongst SIMD20 pupils included the following: lower attainment; less likely to get into university; less likely to progress into second year; less likely to obtain an Honours degree; two-thirds attend a post-92 university; less likely to obtain a professional-level job;
- The findings suggest an issue around achievement rather than aspirations;
- An overall consistent picture was uncovered across the different stages, which shows that there is still work to be done.

A discussion followed and members were asked to consider what actions could or should be taken. The discussion included the following points:

- Many students can't afford to study for an additional year to achieve an Honours degree, particularly adult returners. It's therefore important to ask *why* people leave after third year;
- Many access students don't leave university on a level playing field; this is an issue the sector could look at in terms of the careers service, and cultural and social capital for students;
- Can existing DYW work be developed to find out learners' destinations?
- It was noted that organisations such as the Robertson Trust, Sutton Trust Scholars, MCR Pathways help to support the education system and that the associate degree model works so well because it's more supportive to the individual; we must always be mindful of what works for the learner;
- The paper takes the discussion elsewhere, for example the attainment gap. The questions at the end of the paper are welcomed regarding next steps;
- Colleges are being encouraged to look at improvement and retention work; for example is leaving for a job classed as dropping out or a positive outcome? We can learn from colleges in this respect, though there's also existing good practice at universities around retention.

5. Coordinating and Monitoring Delivery

The Chair thanked members for their work in completing the templates, noting their importance in aiding understanding about what the work will involve. The Chair explained

that the templates had been separated into two groups, with group one to be discussed now and group two to be issued by email to members for comments, with further discussion of both groups, as necessary, at the next meeting.

The Chair highlighted to members that the purpose of the session was to enable them to discuss the templates frankly and ensure that the planned activity is on the right track. Officials will then take forward discussions with Lead Delivery Partners.

Admissions - Recommendations 5, 11, 11c, 12 and 21

Alastair Sim provided a brief introduction to the templates for recommendations 5, 11, 11c, 12 and 21, for which Universities Scotland is the Lead Delivery Partner. This was followed by a discussion on the templates. A number of points were raised during the discussion, including the following:

- Recommendation 5: noted that information will be much easier to access rather than viewing 19 different websites;
- Recommendation 11: it was clarified that there will be a separate set of thresholds / minimum requirements for access students. The importance of communicating the two defined categories and the need to explore how they will appear in prospectuses was noted. It will be critical for universities to work with schools to minimise confusion around, for example, who is an 'access student';
- The Chair asked if there would be any progress on access thresholds in the interim, noting that Abertay University has already set minimum entry requirements. Alastair Sim agreed to discuss this with Sally Mapstone and noted a need to get a clearer understanding of how many students are already benefitting from contextualised admissions.
- There would also be some benefit in working with young people on the power of personal statements and social capital skills. It was noted that SFC currently engages in work on softer skills;
- Clarified that while colleges are not a lead delivery partner for any of the recommendations they should work in partnership with leads.

Outreach – Recommendations 15, 16, 17b, 17c

Alastair Sim provided a brief introduction to the templates for recommendations 15 and 16 for which Universities Scotland is also the Lead Delivery Partner. The subsequent discussion raised a number of points including the following:

- Bridging programmes work doesn't appear to match recommendation 15, to work with the youngest children and their families. It was clarified that this work didn't just focus on the CoWA recommendations but looked at any systematic intervention that could lead to university, such as the Children's University;
- Some definitions would be useful around children, provision, etc to help unpick this large area;
- Recommendation 15 needs to be developed alongside recommendation 4. SFC suggested they could set up a group to coordinate this;
- SFC and Universities Scotland should look at recommendation 15 again, along with Scottish Government officials, including reviewing the milestones.
- Participation in a bridging programme is often determined by geographical location and accessibility; funding to subsidise travel to the programme of a student's choice would be welcome.

Peter MacLeod provided a brief introduction to the templates for recommendations 17b and 17c for which he is the Lead Delivery Partner. He informed the group that he had arranged a

Schools Engagement Seminar which took place on 12 March at Castlehead High School in Paisley. He noted that the seminar explored recommendations 4, 16, 17 (b) and (c) and 18. Peter noted that outcomes and suggestions from the seminar included the following:

- Peter MacLeod is pursuing agreement for access leads in every secondary school; this is about to be signed off;
- Peter MacLeod and Greg Dempster will work together to define the expectation in the primary sector;
- Peter MacLeod is pursuing agreement that Regional Collaboratives will include widening access within their regional improvement plans;
- Peter MacLeod is developing an action plan, noting positive progress with more to follow. He will invite the Commissioner for Fair Access to a COSLA event in May to encourage schools engagement;
- Primary and secondary school work could learn from existing work, such as DYW, Career Education Standard and Curriculum for Excellence.

Scottish Government's data templates

The chair invited comments, views and feedback on the data templates from the Group. The subsequent discussion included the following points:

- The first meeting of the Data Working Group offered a good exploration and identification of useful data which can be sourced;
- Recommendations 23 & 29: the work on the Unique Learner Number will require individuals' buy-in to share their data;
- The chair suggested there should be a wider discussion on the Data Working Group at the next Access Delivery Group meeting.

Commissioner for Fair Access templates

- It was noted that there is no mention of work, employment or jobs in recommendation 33 (b).

The Chair thanked members for their comments and invited members to feedback any further comments through her officials, noting that officials will be responsible for monitoring and cross-referencing all of the milestones contained within all of the templates, some of which will be brought back to meetings for further discussion.

Action 4: Group two templates to be issued by email to members for comments [SG officials]

Action 5: Officials to discuss written feedback on group one templates with lead delivery partners [SG officials]

Action 6: Explore what interim progress has been/will be made on access thresholds [AS]

Action 7: Recommendation 15 to be considered further by the SFC, Universities Scotland and SG officials [SG officials]

Action 8: Invite the Commissioner for Fair Access to a COSLA event in May to encourage schools engagement [PM]

Action 9: Add a discussion on the Data Working Group to the agenda for the next meeting [SG officials].

6. AOB and Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place in June, dates will be circulated shortly. The Chair noted that the remaining templates and the Data Working Group would be the main topics for

discussion at the next meeting. Members were also invited to submit further suggested agenda items for consideration.

The Chair thanked members for their participation then closed the meeting.