

Access Delivery Group

Wednesday 6 February 2019, 10:00 – 12:00

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

Present

Richard Lochhead, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education & Science (Chair)
Professor Sir Peter Scott, Commissioner for Fair Access
Alastair Sim, Universities Scotland
Susan Stewart, Open University in Scotland
Shona Struthers, Colleges Scotland
Liz McIntyre, North East College Scotland
Liam McCabe, National Union of Students Scotland
Fiona Brown, Forth Valley College (*attending for Ken Thomson*)
Murdo Mathison, University and College Union Scotland
Greg Dempster, Association of Head Teachers and Deputies in Scotland
Jim Thewliss, School Leaders Scotland
Professor Vikki Boliver, Durham University
Lynn MacMillan, Scottish Government
Laura Duffy, Scottish Government
Roddy MacDonald, Scottish Government
Ryan Scott, Scottish Government
Lynn Brown, Scottish Government
Christine Johnson, Scottish Government (*attending for Murray McVicar*)
Colin McAllister, Scottish Government
Fiona Burns, Scottish Funding Council
Michael Cross, Scottish Funding Council

Apologies

Professor Petra Wend, Queen Margaret University
Professor Sally Mapstone, University of St Andrews
Alan Armstrong, Education Scotland
Mick Wilson, Scottish Government
Linda Somerville, National Union of Students Scotland
Dr Stephanie McKendry, University of Strathclyde
Murray McVicar, Scottish Government
Dr Ken Thomson, Forth Valley College

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and conveyed apologies for those unable to attend. He welcomed the return of Professor Scott following his recent absence and invited attendees to introduce themselves. The Chair also provided an update on the Group membership, noting that Katie Burke, Rebekah Widdowfield and Peter Macleod have all stood down and that new members are being considered. The Chair acknowledged the positive progress on fair access published in recent HESA statistics, then gave a brief outline of what he hoped to cover during the meeting.

2. Minute of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minute of the previous meeting was agreed, with no matters arising.

It was noted that of the eight actions arising from the previous meeting, four - which were for the Scottish Government - are complete. The Chair noted that one would be discussed further during the meeting and he invited updates on the remaining three.

Liz McIntyre provided an update on the National Articulation Forum, noting that the joint post between Universities Scotland, Colleges Scotland and Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has been filled and a work plan is being developed. It will include researching existing good practice and barriers to articulation.

Alastair Sim noted that Sally Mapstone's action from the previous meeting on institutions' data sharing is in progress and Fiona Burns informed the Group that a holding line on the Widening Access and Retention Fund Review will be circulated as soon as possible.

3. Access Measures: Report from the Access Data Working Group

Ryan Scott provided an overview of the work of the Access Data Working Group. This was followed by a discussion which included the following points:

- The project has been completed well and the recognition of adult learners' disadvantage was welcome. There is however still some way to go to obtain robust data for older learners. It is important to uncover a true picture and there is more work required on college data.
- Data on the discrepancy between Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility and applications would be helpful but this is difficult to pin down. Local Authorities generally apply a national criterion though there is discrepancy in how they promote FSM except, for example, in special schools.
- Primary 4 uptake of FSM is not as expected yet hopefully this will have caught up by secondary school. However, it was also noted that FSM claims drop as pupils move through secondary school. It's therefore important to encourage people to access what's available to them and more work on this is required by Local Authorities. It would also be worthwhile linking up with the Scottish Government-led Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) working group.
- Although it is positive that FSM has been included as a measure, this should still be treated with caution. Some people live in SIMD20 areas yet are not disadvantaged. There are benefits in area *and* individual based metrics and the way universities respond will be important – for example, encouraging potential. However, SAAS asking candidates to complete additional forms on income at the application stage may deter them from applying.
- There is an issue with rural poverty not being recognised by FSM uptake or SIMD, however it is still right to look at FSM uptake during secondary education. Noted that urban rural definition has been excluded.
- There is no perfect system however including FSM will capture more disadvantaged applicants than at present. The Access Data Working Group (ADWG) will continue if it is deemed to be required. Other issues – such as rurality, older and part-time learners – will be considered in parallel.
- Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) is currently estimating timescales with regard to collecting income data earlier in the process and there will also be some quality assurance and data sharing issues to address in moving this work forward, which will also take some time.

Action 1: SG officials to speak with officials supporting the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) working group regarding take-up of FSM. [SG officials]

4. Admissions

Lynn MacMillan provided an introduction to the agenda item, which was followed by an update from Alastair Sim on universities' admissions processes. He confirmed that university prospectuses will be published between February and April this year and will include new minimum entry requirements. This will allow an adjustment for SIMD students; possibly two grades will be lowered or one Higher will be dropped.

Discussion included the following comments:

- SFC is examining what data institutions are currently collecting from information included in Outcome Agreements and any gaps will be addressed with HEIs during the coming months.
- The Group welcomed the high level summary sharing which contextual indicators are used and the differences across HEIs. Also welcomed the language used.

Action 2: Once all prospectuses are published, provide an update on contextual indicators used by respective HEIs [A Sim].

Action 3: Alastair and Vikki will have a discussion on admissions data including grade adjustments and how they are set, which indicators are being used and what data can be brought back to the group [A Sim, V Boliver].

5. Commissioner for Fair Access Discussion Paper: Disabled Students at University

Professor Scott and Ryan Scott provided an overview of the discussion paper. The subsequent discussion included the following points:

- The paper shows a rapid increase in the reporting of mental health and learning difficulties; however, there are issues around self-reporting and prevalence in the general population.
- The outcomes for disabled students are striking, although socio-economic deprivation has a larger impact on degree outcome than disability status.
- This is a sensitive issue and the disability categories were determined by the small sample size, in consultation with disability stakeholders. Good to have a broad classification system as prevalence of disability is not fixed and can change during the student life cycle.
- In general terms there are discrepancies in disability prevalence across different age groups; need to drill down further and join up better with health services. Pamela Gillies, Principal of Glasgow Caledonian University, is leading a working group on this.
- Disappointment was noted in the exclusion of part-time students from the discussion paper as 22% of Open University students are disabled. It was explained that the focus was on full-time study as the challenges in accessing this are more acute than in part-time study. HEIs need to take action.
- The Group raised the issue of longevity and follow-up reporting following the Commissioner's discussion papers in general. Professor Scott indicated that he would return to some of these issues in his annual report.
- Wider issues exist for disabled people than those raised in the discussion paper e.g. the training of support staff. A working group led by SFC and Lead Scotland is examining such issues.

Action 4: Discuss Discussion Paper findings with Minister for Mental Health during meeting later that day [R Lochhead].

Action 5: Consider which issues should be followed up or reported on regularly [SG officials and P Scott].

Action 6: Invite Commissioner for Fair Access and / or his supporting officials to the next Lead Scotland meeting [F Burns].

6. Coordinating and Monitoring Delivery

Laura Duffy led the agenda item and noted the following points:

- Laura thanked delivery partners for the effort put in to monitoring returns, noting that she had met Lead Delivery Partners to discuss the monitoring process and their future work. Monitoring will be kept simple with reporting to the Access Delivery Group on an exceptions basis only.
- Over the programme as a whole there are 45 recommendations and sub-recommendations, with almost 200 milestones. The overall status of the programme over the period is green. Over the reporting period 45 milestones were scheduled for completion over a total of 25 recommendations and sub recommendations. Of the 45 milestones, 30 were successfully achieved.
- With Delivery Group members' agreement, Jim Thewliss will take over from Peter Macleod as the lead for recommendations 17b and 17c. Good progress has been made so far, with all but one Local Authority having agreed to a 'lead person' on widening access in each secondary school.
- As the work of the Commissioner for Fair Access had paused, his annual report will now be published later this year. Work on the Framework for Fair Access – comprising a Toolkit and Community of Practice – is now almost complete and the launch will take place in early May.

The Chair noted the good progress in moving towards the 2021 target of 16%.

Action 7: Laura Duffy will link with Fiona Burns separately regarding access leads in schools. [L Duffy]

7. AOB and Date of Next Meeting

Points raised included the following:

- The Commissioner for Fair Access is still to confirm his future work programme but this will include looking at the impact of school reforms on Higher Education.
- Research has been conducted into Further Education student loans but this is not yet at consultation stage.
- A concern was raised that the FE bursary uplift in academic year 2019/20 may only be applied to the maximum rate of bursary.
- Members agreed that future meetings would be held every four months instead of quarterly.

The Chair thanked members for their contribution and closed the meeting.

Action 8: Discuss Further Education loans research separately with Shona Struthers [R MacDonald].

Action 9: Look into issue around FE bursary uplift [SG officials].