



Learner Journey Review:

Proposals from Universities Scotland

April 2017

**Universities
Scotland**



Universities Scotland welcomes a creative discussion of learner journey issues in the five projects set out by the Scottish Government. We are keen that this work is done in a holistic way that considers the contributions of schools, colleges and higher education institutions to meeting learners' needs.

We believe the review should be informed by shared values, and we have creative ideas for changes that are consistent with these values.

Shared values

We believe the following progressive values should underpin the work and outcomes of the Review.

i Putting the learner at the centre.

This was, rightly, the core value of the 2011 Scottish Government White Paper on post-16 education. It should be the informing principle of the current review. Policy-making should prioritise the effectiveness of the available 'learner journeys' in meeting the diverse needs and aspirations of diverse learners. This needs to include the learners for whom part-time study is the right option (currently 13% of undergraduate entrants to Scottish higher education institutions¹), opening up options to learners who have diverse and often complex demands on their time.

ii Widening access to higher education

As a university sector, and as a society, we are committed to enabling more learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to access our universities. To achieve this, Universities Scotland has set up an ambitious programme to develop new policy and practice so that more disadvantaged learners enter university and succeed. We are working closely with partners including colleges, schools and NUS Scotland to address the challenges and opportunities set by the Commission on Widening Access.

We believe that every proposal generated in the review needs to be tested to ensure that it promotes wide access to higher education for everyone who can benefit. Our document will flag where there are widening access implications or where widening access should be considered using this abbreviation [\(WA\)](#).

iii Commitment to excellence.

Every learner should have a high quality of education, whatever their learner journey.

Scotland's universities have a proud and central contribution to the excellence of Scottish education. We are internationally recognised for the quality of our teaching, and regularly out-perform our UK peers with, for instance 8 out of the top 50 UK universities for teaching being in Scotland².

At the heart of universities' commitment to excellence, the flexible four-year degree structure is an internationally recognised standard. It offers learners flexible entry points

¹ HEIDI data on part-time students: excludes the Open University

² Times Higher university league tables 2016-17

to university-level study and certificated exit points at a range of SCQF levels – from certificate of higher education up to the option to pursue integrated Masters in a range of subjects. The flexible four-year degree structure allows students to gain a broad education and then specialise, and gives them time to develop their graduate attributes.

Our commitment to excellence is also sustained by teaching that is informed by the latest research, by a quality enhancement framework that puts students at the heart of continual enhancement of the learning experience, and by the diversity of our institutions which enables concentration on diverse areas of excellence.

Taken together, these factors mean the sector as a whole offers a wide variety of distinctive routes, with a flexible range of entry and exit points, to meet learners' diverse needs – including articulation, part-time and distance study, accelerated degrees, work-based learning, and in many cases a wide range of options within the degree course itself.

The outcomes of the review need to promote the excellence of what Scotland is able to offer diverse learners.

iv Commitment to successful educational outcomes.

Higher education institutions are building on a strong foundation of commitment to learners' success in their chosen programmes, and in achieving their career ambitions. 91% of degree-level students successfully complete their studies. 91% of Scottish university graduates are in positive destinations within six months, and 88% of Scottish employers say our graduates are well-prepared for work.

v Developing learners' broad capacity to succeed in life and work.

Education should be a broad 'passport' to opportunity. Higher education institutions are committed to enabling learners to develop a broad set of graduate attributes including academic abilities, personal qualities and transferable skills. These attributes help graduates to succeed in a dynamic economy where people will change career several times in their lifetimes and where most graduate vacancies do not specify a particular degree discipline. This is broader than the review's proposed aim of ensuring that *'all learners are on the right route to the right job, through the right course via the right information'*. We would prefer an aim along the lines that:

'all learners have the right opportunities and the right information to choose the right routes through tertiary education, and to develop the skills and attributes that will enable them to succeed in their future careers.'

vi Commitment to lifelong learning.

Higher education must be an opportunity that learners can access at diverse stages of their lives and careers – and building a commitment to lifelong learning in our graduates is important. Many people choose to enter and return to education at different stages for a variety of reasons. This is particularly important for learners from more deprived

backgrounds or in more challenging circumstances, who may not have been in a position to access university when they were young. In a changing economy, many people take advantage of higher education to re-skill for a change of career. 33% of first degree entrants at higher education institutions are 'mature', i.e. 21 or over, and a high-skills economy will be increasingly dependent on the postgraduate-level skills attained by mature learners. The opportunities for mature learners must be protected and enhanced by any policies flowing from this review, even though the review's stated focus is on young learners.

vii Giving learners the time they need to find the right path.

Some learners will have a clear path from subject choice at school to their preferred tertiary education option and career. Others will have a less linear, and potentially longer, journey. For instance, they may take longer than some of their peers to achieve qualifications for entry to higher education; they may not find their final subject specialism until part-way through tertiary education; or they may not aspire to higher education until some years after they have left school. While policy-making should enable learners to have accelerated pathways where that meets their needs, policies flowing from the learner journey review should also protect the interests of learners for whom an accelerated pathway would not meet their needs.

viii Openness to the world.

Scotland is part of an open society and economy where people and ideas cross borders. This is a value that Scotland has strongly re-affirmed in the debate on our future relationship with the EU.

Many of our learners will have careers that require them to be internationally aware and internationally mobile. Our economy will require the skills of people who choose to come to Scotland to make a contribution.

Scotland's universities are an exceptionally strong part of Scotland's openness to the world. We are proud to welcome 8% of our students from the EU and 11% from the wider world, in addition to the 11% we welcome from the rest of the UK. These flows of students across borders are culturally, socially and economically important to Scotland.

The review needs to develop policies that are consistent with our international openness and our international reputation for excellence.

ix Value, not price.

While we should seek to use public resources as efficiently as possible, the review's first priority must be that we are meeting learners' diverse needs effectively, in ways that are consistent with the values set out here.

Proposals for change

We recognise the need for public resources to be used efficiently and effectively, and we look forward to exploring options for improving the productivity of public investment in ways that are consistent with the values outlined above. Any examination of productivity issues needs to be systemic across school, college and university, and to preserve or improve standards and educational outcomes.

We only comment here on options where higher education institutions can contribute to change for the better.

We believe there is room for further growth in routes that shorten learner journeys, building on the structure of the flexible four year degree.

This could include a blend of:

- Increased progression from S5 directly to university.
- Increased progression from S6 to year 2 of university.
- Increased use of models that give school students enhanced access to SCQF level 7 opportunities.
- Increased articulation with full credit from college to university, including the examination of new models of articulation.
- Graduate level apprenticeships.
- Accelerated degrees.

These possibilities are of very different scale relative to each other and are explored further in this paper, under [project 4: provision and transition](#).

They will be part of a blend of different learner journeys appropriate to different learners' needs, and will have different capacity to meet the needs of part-time and mature learners. Progression from school to SCQF level 7 at university will still be a core element of the possible learners' journeys, among diverse routes to qualifications for learners with diverse needs and aspirations.

The outcomes of this review will need to be implemented in schools, colleges and universities, which will require detailed planning and design work by educationalists, and must be consistent with the values in this paper. Implementation will involve a lead-in time, which the review must take into account. We believe that the review should take stock of what already works well and should look for opportunities to add value to this.

The review must be radical in its ambition for learners' success and practical in developing policies that will realise this ambition.

Project 1: Learner choice and application

We are committed to good information for prospective students. Supporting learners to make informed choices is a central part of 'putting learners at the centre'.

We seek to provide information through institutional websites, UCAS, Unistats and other sources. We support reviewing information to ensure we are providing the information prospective applicants need in an accessible way.

Applications and fair access (WA)

We think this is particularly important for students from disadvantaged backgrounds because they may come from families and communities with less experience of university, and may therefore require more guidance from other sources.

For example, as part of our response to the Commission on Widening Access, we have instigated a programme of work comprising 3 work streams, one of which is considering admissions policy and practice and how entry requirements are presented. We expect to develop a recommendation for the sector on making this information more accessible to learners, in a more standardised way. We also intend to look at how we can better explain admissions, particularly contextual admissions, across the Scottish sector as a whole, so it is easier for applicants, advisors and families to understand.

We think there is a need to improve information on routes into university for learners who do not come directly from school, including mature learners. Some routes involve other qualifications, such as HNs. It is important to communicate clearly the opportunities to enter universities with HNs, while also recognising the value of an HN as a qualification in its own right.

Information for learners should include information on the range of career opportunities open to them with different qualifications, including by different SCQF level (where relevant). This will help learners make choices informed by employment prospects.

The value offered by UCAS

UCAS is a UK-wide admissions process, and it is important that any reform of the provision of information and advice to applicants retains this UK-wide role. This has important advantages for Scottish institutions.

- Firstly, it enables learners to fill in just one form to apply to universities across the UK.
- Second, it is a quality process recognised internationally.
- Third, UCAS enables institutions to manage student numbers because applicants need to choose which offer to accept or hold as firm and insurance offers, and cannot accept offers across all institutions. It is important that continues to apply across the UK.

Project 2: Review of the delivery of careers information awareness and guidance in colleges and universities

Universities work hard to prepare learners for success in the world of work. The review should recognise this and look for opportunities to build on this success.

The review should also look closely at how diverse learner journeys are signposted to learners prior to college and university, so that they can make clear choices about the route that will best enable them to meet their aspirations, and so that the scope for lifelong learning is clear as well as the range of post-school offerings.

(WA) We believe that the scope of this review of careers information, awareness and guidance in colleges and universities ought to include specific consideration of the needs of different groups of learners – including, for example, mature learners, part-time learners, disabled learners and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Some learners may not have the same access to informal networks that can provide advice or internship opportunities, and may have more difficulty participating in such opportunities if these involve living away from home, or are unpaid (which we do not endorse, but is still an unfortunate fact in some professions).

Careers development at university

The review should be aware of work done at university level in relation to careers advice and development.

The evidence shows that our learners are successful in the jobs market and in other fields. 91% of graduates from Scotland's universities were in positive destinations within six months, they have the highest average starting salaries in the UK, and a lower unemployment rate than Scotland overall.³ The 2014 UKCES Employer Perspectives Survey found that 88% of Scottish employers reported leavers of Scottish universities to be 'very well prepared' or 'well prepared' for work⁴.

University careers services play an essential role in this, harbouring a wealth of knowledge and experience, as well as key networks of contacts with employers. This role has been evolving and expanding in recent years, embracing all aspects of the employability agenda. Amongst other activities, careers services offer learners one-to-one advice; provide detailed guidance on applications and interview technique; broker work placements; advertise vacancies for graduate jobs, work placements, and other opportunities (typically at no cost to the employer); run careers fairs and other employer events; and publish up-to-date comprehensive information, including subject-specific labour market intelligence. Most careers services are members of the Association of Graduate Careers

³ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/30-06-2016/sfr237-destinations-of-leavers>

⁴

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/373769/14.11.11_EPS_2014_-_Main_Report_full_V2.pdf

Advisory Services (AGCAS) which acts as a focal point for sector-wide research and intelligence on the labour market, and promotes standards for ensuring excellence in service delivery.

Additionally, as part of the Quality Enhancement Framework, all Scottish universities are periodically required to review their careers services⁵. The UK-wide HE Quality Code, overseen by the QAA, also includes guidance on providing careers information.⁶

In addition to the essential role of careers services, it is important also to highlight the wider work of universities to secure excellent employment outcomes for learners by ensuring the development of key graduate skills and attributes is embedded in learning and teaching across the curriculum. This work is underpinned by close partnership with employers in areas including curriculum development, degree accreditation, programme review, and provision of work-based learning opportunities. It is also enhanced by research-teaching links that provide a distinctive edge in employability. Across the curriculum, learners are encouraged to develop an entrepreneurial mind-set – the Universities Scotland publication [Making it Happen](#) sets out how universities develop and support our students and graduates to be entrepreneurs, or to be ‘intra-preneurs’ when they work within someone else’s business.

5

https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20131011230331/http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Circulars_SFC142012/SFC142012.pdf (this is the current version despite being archived)

⁶ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code> (Chapter B4)

Project 3: College application process

Reform of the college application process is primarily a matter for the colleges themselves.

We support the objective of ensuring equity. Equity in any part of the learner journey determines equity in the whole. In the same vein we support the aspiration to ensure that college applicants are as well informed as possible on the awards and pathways available to them including the broad range of pathways to study at university.

We believe that it would be worth considering UCAS as a vehicle for college applications. There may be advantages in joining up college and university applications. In the rest of the UK, college HE provision is included in the main UCAS system and UCAS has other regional systems for FE provision.

Project 4: Provision and transitions

Universities Scotland is committed to the development of learner journeys that meet the diverse needs of learners (including mature and part-time learners); that enable wider access to higher education; and that avoid unproductive duplication of SCQF levels.

This section sets out our initial analysis of options for reform of the learner journey involving higher education institutions. We want to explore these options with partners through this project. As set out earlier, we believe evolution of the learner journey could include a blend of:

- A. [Increased progression from S5 directly to university.](#)
- B. [Increased progression from S6 to year 2 of university.](#)
- C. [Increased use of models that give school students enhanced access to SCQF level 7 opportunities.](#)
- D. [Increased articulation with full credit from college to university, including the examination of new models of articulation.](#)
- E. [Graduate level apprenticeships.](#)
- F. [Accelerated degrees.](#)

Provision and transitions are both big issues, reaching across all levels of the education, skills and training sectors. We have restricted our comments on provision and transitions to areas in which higher education institutions can be part of improvements to the range of learner journeys. We have not commented on other potential reforms as part of this landscape e.g. reform of the senior phase at school to enhance the value of 6th year for some learners, or the development of new pathways from school to training and employment.

Any learner's journey involving higher education institutions brings Scotland's four year undergraduate degree structure into play. It is worth briefly considering the four year degree as an important part of the context to this review and the options for reform.

Context for improvement: Building on the flexibility of the four year degree structure

We believe the flexible structure of the four-year degree is a key part of the context within which our proposals should be considered.

Key benefits of the flexible four year degree structure include:

- It offers learners multiple entry points at years 1, 2 and 3.
- It offers multiple certificated exit points. Learners can complete with a successful outcome at HN/certificate/diploma level, at Ordinary Degree level, at Honours Degree level, and for some courses the option to pursue an integrated Masters degree at SCQF level 11.
- It offers learners a great breadth of subjects in years 1 and 2. This allows learners to explore different subjects, including those not available to them in school and the development of diverse skills and more rounded learners.

- It offers more time for learners to mature and the time for other opportunities such as work placements or study abroad to be incorporated into the degree more easily.
- Having provided scope for a breadth of learning, early on, it then provides a depth of subject knowledge (or subjects) in the final two years of study.
- It provides the opportunity for graduate attributes to be developed across 4 years.
- It offers international comparability as four-year undergraduate degrees are the commonly expected length.

The flexible four year degree is also essential to meeting the needs of the majority of Scottish school pupils who do not have the opportunity to study a full range of Advanced Highers.

Scottish higher education is deeply connected across borders, and the flexibility of the four-year degree also gives it distinctive appeal to RUK and international students. The attraction of students from across the UK and internationally is a key part of universities' academic, cultural and financial strength.

Within the flexible structure of the Scottish degree, we identify below a range of opportunities for streamlining the learner journey for some learners.

Evolving the learner journey through:

A. Increased progression from S5 directly to university

Universities Scotland supports exploration of the scope for more learners to progress from S5 at school directly to university.

Currently there is a very low proportion of learners progressing directly from S5 to university. There may be scope to grow this proportion, from the pool of candidates who achieve a good range of Highers by the end of S5. However it should be noted that some schools now encourage some learners to spread their Highers over the senior phase for reasons that may be well founded in enabling individual learners to realise their full potential.

Scottish Government data indicates 1,103 Scottish school leavers (2.1%) moved from S5 into HE in 2014-15 – though this includes those starting HNs. S5 leavers accounted for 5.7% of all HE entrants, while S6 leavers accounted for 94.1% of all HE entrants.⁷

(WA) Anecdotally, admissions officers tell us learners from more deprived backgrounds are more likely to receive offers based on both S5 and S6 achievement, meaning that any growth in S5 entrants may be more heavily skewed towards learners from more privileged backgrounds. However, there is no published data available on this.

Historically, the S5 to university route was a relatively well-worn pathway. However, the proportion of learners choosing to continue into S6 has grown for a variety of reasons. Scottish Government data shows that for over a decade prior to 2008, the proportion of Scottish school

⁷ Scottish Government (2016) Attainment and Leaver Destinations Supplementary Data 14/15

pupils staying on to S6 was relatively stable at just under 45% – but then it started to climb rapidly, from 44.6% in 2008 to 62.7% in 2015. Of course, not all S6 pupils enter university. The percentage of leavers progressing to HE has risen from around 30 per cent in 2007-08 to 39 per cent in 2015-16, less than the overall rise in the staying on rate. We have heard from schools that since the economic downturn in 2008, there has been an increase in the number of pupils staying on to S6 who do not intend to directly enter university from school, and the Scottish Government itself has speculated that the staying on rate has increased because of the recession.⁸

Offering more choice

More transitions from S5 to university could expand learners' choices. A recent survey of schools for the Scottish Parliament's Education & Skills Committee found that three quarters of the schools responding said that difficulties recruiting teachers constrained subject choice at S4 either a great deal or to some extent.⁹ If that is a factor at S4, it is also likely to limit the subjects that can be offered later in the senior phase, including Advanced Highers. The same paper also comments on focus groups run by Glasgow Caledonian University with students from their Advanced Higher hub. GCU states that 'many pupils struggle to take their preferred subject choices in S5 and S6' and the SPICe paper comments that 'choice appears far more restricted at Advanced Higher than at Higher'.¹⁰

There are data needs that should help to inform examination of the scope for growth of the S5 to university route. These include:

- Information on the number of S5 to HE learners who are going to university rather than HN (including by SIMD quintile) (WA).
- Information on the number and proportion of S5 learners who achieve sufficient Highers and grades in S5 to get into the course of their choice (including by SIMD quintile) – and how this has changed as a result of Curriculum for Excellence (WA). It appears to universities that there is an increasing trend for learners to study Highers over multiple years in the senior phase, which meets the needs of many learners but which restricts the growth of the S5 to university route.

Universities Scotland is committed to a creative examination with partners of the scope for growth in this route. Growth here has the potential to benefit some learners and the potential to increase productivity in the education system as a whole as it would enable some learners to make quicker progress from school to graduation. However, growth in this route is likely to be incremental rather than revolutionary.

Ambitions for growth in this route need to take careful account of a number of issues including:

- The increased burden on universities of looking after people who are still children in the eyes of the law.
- Loss of social/ academic 'broadening' in S6.
- Students (or their parents) may be reluctant to leave home aged 16-17, and this may hamper progression to higher education.

⁸ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/06/9242>

⁹ http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/General%20Documents/20170308ES.SeniorPhase_Surveys.pdf

¹⁰ The GCU survey paper is available here:

www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/General%20Documents/20170317GCUSubjectChoiceSubmission.pdf

- Retention risks might be heightened by a less mature student population
- (WA) There are potentially significant implications for widening access if S5 to Y1 is promoted as the 'norm', since learners from challenged backgrounds typically need longer to attain the Highers needed for university entry.

Implementation issues would also require careful thought including more signposting of routes, increased pastoral facilities at university, and the impact on the admissions cycle.

B. Increased progression from S6 directly to Year 2 of university

Universities Scotland supports exploration of the scope for growth in the number of learners who progress from Advanced Higher directly into Year 2 of the flexible 4 year degree.

SFC has estimated that 125 Scottish school leavers a year move from S6 into Y2.¹¹ A range of universities offer specific pathways for suitably-qualified students who wish to progress from school to Y2 of university. Typically, these will be students who have two or three good Advanced Highers. They are drawn from a small pool of candidates. In 2014-15 only 7.9% of Scottish school leavers achieved at least 2 Advanced Highers, and only 2.5% achieved at least 3.¹² Numbers of rest-of-UK students who take up the option to enter university at Year 2 are also reported by institutions as very low, even though this route is specifically promoted to A-level qualified learners.

US would support discussion of further growth of this route for learners with the prior qualifications and confidence to use it successfully.

There are a number of considerations to be taken into account as this option is examined. Firstly, (WA) this is a route that is likely to be accessible principally to learners from more privileged backgrounds, since there is a wide gap in Advanced Higher attainment by the most and least deprived school leavers (and a gap in Advanced Higher provision between schools in privileged and underprivileged areas). In 2014-15, 18.8% of school leavers obtained at least one Advanced Higher – but in the most deprived SIMD quintile this figure was 7.8%, compared to 33.7%¹³ in the least deprived quintile. That is, the least deprived learners were over four times more likely to leave school with an Advanced Higher. Unless this attainment gap closes (and we are, of course, aware of the work to close the attainment gap), there are real risks that significant growth in this area could result in more stratified routes into university. We would need to explore how to mitigate this risk.

Secondly, the scale of growth is likely to be modest unless there is a major increase in the proportion of learners who are able to study a range of Advanced Highers. This would require major investment in schools (or in alternative provision of Advanced Highers or other suitable level 7 qualifications) to allow learners to take a suitable number of Advanced Highers in subjects of their choice.

¹¹ SFC (2011) Flexible entry into higher education

¹² Scottish Government (2016) Attainment and Leaver Destinations Supplementary Data 14/15

¹³ Scottish Government (2016) Attainment and Leaver Destinations Supplementary Data 14/15

Other key issues would need to be addressed if the S6 – Y2 route is to grow, including:

- **SCQF level 7 credits don't equate.** Whilst study at Advanced Higher level and the first year of university both technically sit on level 7 of the SCQF framework, study towards Advanced Highers requires far fewer level 7 credits than study in first year of an undergraduate degree. A learner doing 3 Advanced Highers still only amounts to 96 credits, compared to 120 credits for Y1 at university.
- **Curriculum fit.** Core knowledge or skills developed in year 1 of university can be very different from the Advanced Higher curriculum. Advanced Highers are not available to all learners in all subjects – and do not exist in all academic disciplines – so learners are often unable to select a set of qualifications to provide close curriculum match for Y2 entry.
- **Integration.** Universities' work to make it easier for new students to integrate when they enter university in year 2 – both academically and socially.
- **Unequal access to a range of Advanced Highers (WA).** Some schools offering only a small number of Advanced Highers (particularly in rural areas, smaller schools and schools with fewer students progressing to HE).
- **Unequal delivery of Highers in schools (WA).** Some schools offer dedicated Advanced Higher classes and others may involve joint Higher/Advanced Higher classes, which may impact on student learning and success.
- **The loss of breadth of study.** Many university programmes deliver a broad range of study in year 1 at SCQF level 7, which may limit which degree programmes can be entered.
- **Widening Access (WA).** The implications of this route being less accessible to those from more deprived backgrounds.

It would also be useful to better understand what qualifications learners are studying for in S6. Published data does not distinguish between qualifications earned in different years. However, based on the proportions of school leavers achieving Advanced Highers, it is evident that many learners are mainly or only undertaking Highers in S6, which would not enable them to enter Y2.

C. Increased use of models that give school pupils more opportunities at SCQF level 7

Opportunities to progress from school to university without duplication of years spent at the same SCQF level could be grown through increased use of models that blend the school and university experience and draw on the resources of each.

There are various examples of this in place or being developed:

Provision of curriculum

[Glasgow Caledonian University's Advanced Higher Hub](#) offers a selection of Advanced Highers to pupils from across Glasgow using teachers employed by the university. These pupils are able to access all GCU facilities and there was a 91 per cent pass rate in 2016. This is a partnership with the local authority.

[The Open University in Scotland offers the Young Applicants Scheme Scotland \(YASS\)](#) where pupils in school can take university modules at SCQF level 7 alongside other options at school in a variety of subjects.

[Queen Margaret University runs an academy model in three subjects](#) (Hospitality & Tourism, Health & Social Care, and Creative Industries) jointly with Edinburgh College and in collaboration with East Lothian Council, Midlothian Council, Scottish Borders Council, Borders College, West Lothian Council and City of Edinburgh Council. Pupils in S5 and S6 take part on a part-time basis and are eligible to progress to university or college or employment once they finish. The programmes all work with employers and offer placement opportunities.

Support for curriculum

The University of Dundee and Abertay University both provide facilities for the Advanced Highers delivered as part of Dundee City Campus.

[Heriot-Watt University offers the SCHOLAR programme](#), which provides additional e-learning material for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications in a range of subjects.

Models like these could support widening access by opening up a wider range of SCQF level 7 opportunities than are available at many schools, and also help smooth the journey to self-directed university-level study (WA).

Growth in these routes will depend a sustainable funding model for funding provision that blends school, college and university provision. At the moment this is highly dependent on goodwill and as each sector's resources tighten it will be harder for the various partners to fund these initiatives.

Again, these routes will only be suitable for some learners. Many learners will require the full senior phase to achieve qualifications at SCQF Level 6 that enable them to access the next level at college or university. Moreover, many (though not all) of these solutions would be more difficult in remote and rural areas.

D. Increased articulation with full credit from college to university, including the examination of new models of articulation

Universities Scotland members are committed to the further progress in articulation.

We are currently leading a work stream to consider how to achieve a step-change in current levels of articulation as part of our response to the Blueprint for Fair Access. We are examining articulation data by subject and institution. This is a closer level of examination that we have undertaken at sector level. We intend to identify gaps where articulation is not working well, particularly at subject level and where partial or no credit recognition occurs and why. The goal is to achieve more credit recognition for these learners, where this is also the learner's goal.

We also intend to look at whether there are other qualifications that could be used for articulation, for example, Modern Apprenticeships or university qualifications.

Managing the fit

Many universities and college partners have worked hard to make articulation work for learners. This work is necessary to ensure learners have a smooth transition between college and university because although the SCQF level and credit may be the same, the learning experience can be quite different – and rightly so, given the role of HNs as a vocational qualification for employment.

This means that colleges and universities need to work together to support articulating students to adapt to different learning and teaching and assessment styles, including, for example, more independent study or different expectation for referencing, that can otherwise be difficult for students to navigate. Most often this work starts while the students are still in the college. Universities are keen to do this, but it is an additional cost to university budgets.

7,671 Scottish domiciled learners with HN qualifications moved into degree courses in 2013/14 – up from 6,345 four years earlier. Over 49 per cent received full credit for their HN.

This group of articulators, with full credit, accounted for more than one in every ten Scottish entrants to university. We believe there is scope to grow this even further. ¹

Examples of universities working to manage the fit between college and university level study:

Edinburgh Napier University	Glasgow Caledonian University	The University of Strathclyde
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Offers a range of pre-entry interventions to support students, including drop-in lectures, team teaching with college staff, campus visits and the use of social media. A Coming from College resource can be accessed through the University's virtual learning environment and is open for any student to self-enrol. It provides additional signposting to relevant services, such as employer mentoring, study abroad, and study skills support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•A programme of activities in College Connect is designed to help with the transition from college to university, including: UCAS and Transition Support Workshops, open days, masterclasses, online learning resources, student social activities, induction events and mentoring support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Its Engineering Academy offers an articulation route, which it hopes will attract widening access students who may not have the grades for the standard entry route. This involves an 'enhanced HNC' at a partner college.•There are also opportunities for placement and industry sponsorship.

Addressing the challenges

There are some challenges to be addressed to enable articulation to realise its full potential. Including:

- Refining HN content so that HN qualifications efficiently serve their dual purpose as preparations for employment or for advanced study at university.
- Enabling HN qualifications to lead to articulation at a wider range of universities.
- Universities and colleges working together to smooth the pathway between what can be very different learning styles at HN and degree level and also assessment methods.
- Acknowledging and addressing the challenges that a range of institutions have in matching HN subjects and curriculum with the subjects and curriculum provided at particular higher education institutions.

We should also recognise that while some learners start an HN qualification with the intention of progressing to a degree, others make that decision at a later date. Reforms should maintain flexibility for learners' decisions at whatever stage in the journey they are. Similarly, some students do not enter university in the same year that they finish their HN – they may enter employment and then return to study at a later point. Policy-making needs to accommodate these diverse journeys.

The further development of articulation should make a contribution to widening access to university for learners from challenged backgrounds (**WA**). Not all articulating students are widening access students. The SFC identifies 23% of articulating students as coming from SIMD20 postcode areas.

Learners as individuals with a full range of options

Articulation with full credit can and should expand, but there will always be learners for whom an accelerated route from college into university, through articulation with full credit, is not right. Reforms need to keep room for them too. There are many legitimate reasons why this might be the case, including:

- Because the learner has decided to change subject after one or two years of study;
- Because the HN course that the learner has studied does not have the right content to enable articulation with full credit within their subject area at university;
- Because the subject they studied at HN has no direct university equivalent; or
- Because they judge that they will be more likely to have a successful degree outcome if they progress to university without full credit.

Universities Scotland has work in hand to analyse data about the subjects studied at HN by students who progress to university, to enable informed analysis of the most promising routes for the further development of articulation with full credit.

E. Graduate-level apprenticeships

Universities Scotland strongly supports the growth of graduate-level apprenticeships.

Approached with ambition and agility, they should provide new opportunities for learners who are in employment to access higher education. This should realise opportunities for an increased number of 'learner journeys' that successfully combine work with relevant study. These journeys may not be shorter in absolute terms, but for some learners they will be a more accessible or attractive route to relevant higher education and they also enable those learners to combine a track record in employment with their qualification. In order to achieve this, we will need more flexibility and a wider subject range than at present.

As these programmes are so new, there is currently no information on the socio-economic profile of the learners following these routes [\(WA\)](#).

F. Accelerated degrees

Some Scottish universities are already offering the option of accelerated degrees in some subjects, and Universities Scotland supports exploration of the scope for growth of this route.

Some examples include:

[Abertay University is currently running an accelerated degree pilot](#) on the following model:

- Students offered a choice between a four year Honours degree course or an accelerated Honours degree course taking only 3 years.
- All students study at the same pace for the first two years but those on the accelerated course move to an accelerated programme in what would otherwise be the summer vacation between 2nd and 3rd year.
- Instead of 4 years of 2 15 week terms, the accelerated programme has one year of 2 terms (30 weeks total) and then two years of 3 terms (45 weeks total).
- Course content is the same.

In the first pilot cohort there were 43 students across the seven degree programmes the university is offering with the accelerated option. Uptake has varied across the seven degree programmes. The most popular have included BA Business Studies, BSc Food and Consumer Studies, and BSc Ethical Hacking. To address student finance issues, following negotiations with the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS), student loans / grants are paid monthly over the full calendar rather than the academic year, to provide a constant source of income. While the students receive the same funded support across the whole of their degree as students on non-accelerated degrees, the students receive less per month (and, without a summer vacation, have less potential to boost this income).

Queen Margaret University offers a [3 years Honours degree fast track option](#) in Business Management, alongside the 4 year degree. Students study the same subjects in both options and have the same academic year, but those in the fast track undertake two additional modules per year. That is, the workload is greater each semester, rather than there being an additional semester over the summer.

The University of the Highlands & Islands has an [accelerated degree in Geography](#). In the second and third year there are three semesters rather than two, enabling completion faster.

The University of the West of Scotland offers an accelerated degree in Business at its London campus. This is a 2 year degree, with three semesters per year and the entry requirements are equivalent to Y2 entry on a four year programme

Accelerated degrees will offer some learners the opportunity to progress to degree-level qualifications quicker, with savings on their living costs over the qualification as a whole and a reduced 'opportunity cost' of being out of the full-time labour market.

The numbers on accelerated degrees are currently small. This may be a niche product with scope to grow, but its potential is currently uncertain. We know that some universities have reported limited demand for accelerated courses. There is no public data on the socio-economic profile of the learners pursuing accelerated degrees as opposed to those pursuing more traditional degrees (WA).

Issues to consider include:

- **The funding model.** An accelerated degree has the same number of credits as a 'normal' degree, and teaching needs to be funded at a level that reflects this. Presently this is often a bespoke negotiation with SFC and this may be a barrier to increased activity.
- **Student support.** This can be complicated to agree with SAAS and should be simplified. Additionally, some students are reliant on the opportunity to work during the academic year and in the summers to contribute to their term-time living costs. An accelerated degree may mean summer vacations are too short to offer the opportunity of employment and/or the workload may be heavier over the rest of the academic year meaning students may not be able to work during term time. This can have implications for widening access students for whom this is an important source of income (WA). However, other students may find it more beneficial to study over a shorter period of time and then enter the workforce earlier.
- **Pace of learning.** Where the accelerated course requires additional study load in the normal academic year, it will not be suitable for all learners, although it will be appropriate for some.
- **The co-curriculum.** For many learners, the activities they do alongside studying are important their development of a wide portfolio of skills for employment and for life. Depending on the model used for the accelerated degree, some learners may have less opportunity for this.
- **Work experience and study abroad.** An accelerated degree may require a period of study abroad that might be more difficult with an accelerated timescale. And for some students paid vacation internships are a route to future employment.

A need for careful management of provision and transitions

Across all options for change, there are issues that will need to be managed if changes to learners' journeys are to be successful in meeting learners' needs:

- **Progressing widening access (WA)** There is a risk of adverse impacts on widening access if learners are expected to reduce the time spent in education. Many learners benefit from the full senior phase and 4 years of higher education to enable them to realise their full potential.
- **Potential reduction in subject choices at university (WA).** Many schools are unable to provide a full range of subject choice in the senior phase, and colleges' HN provision is narrower than the subject choice available at university. Learners from all backgrounds deserve the breadth of opportunity that the 4 year degree can provide, with its scope for learners to choose subjects and specialisms as their understanding of their own capacities and aspirations increases.
- **Premature subject choice limiting future opportunities (WA).** Choices made from a restricted range of senior-phase subjects or with poor advice at school can narrow learners' opportunities. We need to retain learners' capacity to follow diverse journeys from their senior phase subject choices to their eventual higher education qualification, with the opportunity to change subject specialism. This is a particular widening access risk if students progressing from schools with narrow senior phase choices to college HN study are expected to stay on this path of subject when progressing to university rather than having the option to choose a different pathway that may require studying a different subject at SCQF level 7 or 8.
- **Successful completion of study.** HN students have markedly lower success rates in completing their studies than degree students, and within universities the transition from college to university for articulating students is a retention risk period that needs intensive management.
- **Loss of educational coherence of the 4 year degree offering.** Successful undertaking of advanced studies in years 3 and 4 has a foundation in learning undertaken in years 1 and 2.
- **Too much focus on school leavers at the expense of other learners? (WA).** This is a risk if there is too much focus on streamlining the learner journey in a way that does not meet the diverse commitments to work, care responsibilities and study that adult and part-time learners invariably have.

We should also recognise that apparent duplication is not necessarily inefficient if it supports improved outcomes, retention and progression. Students from deprived backgrounds in particular may follow non-linear learner journeys for a variety of reasons, as the Commission on Widening Access recognised (WA). Recommendations in relation to the earlier stages of the learner journey must be considered with respect to their impact on progression to the later stages and into employment or self-employment.

Project 5: Funding

Decisions about educational provision in Scotland need to be made on the basis of values and value, not simply on price.

At a level of values, we want every learner to have the best possible opportunities consistent with their abilities and ambitions. We draw attention again to the values set out earlier in this paper:

- Putting the learner at the centre.
- Widening access to higher education.
- Commitment to excellence.
- Commitment to successful educational outcomes.
- Developing learners' broad capacity to succeed in life and work.
- Commitment to lifelong learning.
- Giving learners the time they need to find the right path.
- Openness to the world
- Value, not price.

Consistent with these, there are distinctive things to value in what higher education institutions are able to offer learners, which we can only summarise briefly here.

The distinctive value of university-sector higher education

A choice of types of provision and learning environments is important to successful learner journeys and there are important and distinctive things to value from a university education at SCQF levels 7 and above. Important elements of this include:

- **Research-teaching links**, meaning curricula are informed by the latest developments in every discipline and enquiry-led learning¹⁴, where learners are acting as researchers and developing skills that will enable them to learn and re-learn throughout their careers.
- **A strong focus on student retention and success**: HN students have a 71% successful completion rate¹⁵, compared to 91% for degree students.¹⁶
- **Interdisciplinary community**. Being part of an interdisciplinary community of students learning from each other.
- **The integration of broad employability skills** in every degree, developing graduates who can succeed in multiple careers.
- **Self-guided study**. As articulating students often identify, universities place much more emphasis on self-guided study, preparing students for the world of work.
- **The co-curriculum**: the opportunity for a rich variety of experience outside formal study.

¹⁴ Examples of this include the University of Strathclyde's Vertically Integrated Projects where teams of students from first year to postgraduate level work together as a team on research projects, often in interdisciplinary teams for credit, developing many employability skills. More information is available here:

<http://www.strath.ac.uk/viprojects/>

¹⁵ http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Funding_Outcome_Agreements_2016-17/College_Outcome_Agreements_Summary_2015-16.pdf

¹⁶

http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical_publications_SFCST062016_LearningforAll/SFCST062016_Learning_for_All.pdf

The university curriculum is designed to provide learners with choice and opportunity, and the development of a wide portfolio of skills for employment and for life.

All Scottish universities have developed a set of Graduate Attributes that their students acquire over the course of their degree. These are different in each institution, but common themes across the sector are lifelong learning; research, scholarship and enquiry; employability and career development; global citizenship; communication and information literacy; ethical, social and professional understanding; personal and intellectual autonomy; and collaboration, teamwork and leadership. These skills map well to the employability skills sought by employers, which we explored in more detail in *Taking Pride in the Job*¹⁷.

A key strength of university study is that curriculum development involves close links between research and teaching, both in course content and delivery – exposing learners to the latest developments in the field, and also to the idea that knowledge is always evolving, a key feature in working life.

Universities work with employers, students and other external bodies as they review and develop their curriculum. Often industry liaison groups are set up, ensuring that graduates have the skills employers need. Universities also use external reference points such as the QAA Quality Code, which provides a wide range of guidance, including benchmark statements for different subject areas, and strong encouragement to engage with employers. In many subjects, universities also work with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies to gain recognition of courses.

Universities work hard to support transitions into, during, and out of study for all students. This was recently the subject of QAA Enhancement Theme, bringing the Scottish sector together over a three-year period to share a wealth of good practice, and collectively generate ideas and models for continuous improvement and innovation.

Economic value to learners and society

On a value basis, degree-level study in Scotland already offers exceptional value for money, and is currently funded at only around 90% of cost. As the Auditor General noted in her July 2016 audit of higher education in Scotland, on the basis of current funding levels universities are finding it increasingly difficult to meet the financial sustainability objective of ‘operating today without damaging the ability to do so tomorrow’.¹⁸

The value to the wider economy, society and the exchequer of graduates is well evidenced.

“There are broad employability skills in every degree, developing graduates who can succeed in multiple careers.”

¹⁷ <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/uploads/TakingPrideintheJobApril13.pdf>

¹⁸ Audit of higher education in Scottish universities, paragraph 80

A series of Government studies summarises the evidence for this:

[BIS Research Paper 110](#) 'The relationship between graduates and economic growth across countries' specifically examined the relationship between the proportion of graduates in an international range

of economies and the productivity of those economies including relevant comparators to Scotland such as Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, and Sweden. It took account of a range of economic methodologies and found a consistent strong correlation between improved productivity and an increased share of workers with tertiary education. For the UK, it estimated that 'graduate skills accumulation contributed to roughly 20% of GDP growth in the UK from 1982-2005'.

[BIS Research Paper 112](#) 'The impact of university degrees on the lifecycle of earnings' found that the 'graduate premium' remained high even as higher education expanded. This is important as evidence that the demand for graduate-level skills is increasing as the proportion of people attaining graduate-level skills increases. Relative to a person with qualifications equivalent to SCQF level 7 but no degree, male graduates would typically earn 28% more over the course of employment (£168k) and women typically 53% more (£252k).

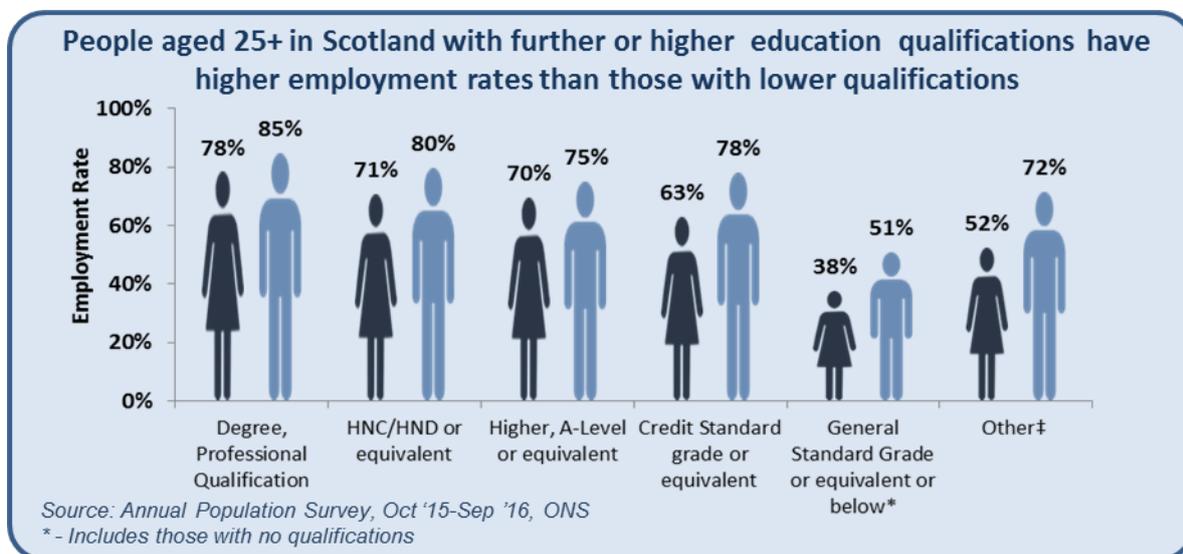
[BIS Research Paper 146](#) 'The benefits of higher education participation for individuals and society' looked at a range of social and economic research. As well as a wide range of non-market benefits, the literature studied identified:

- Net working life benefits to the Exchequer as a result of individuals getting a first degree of £260k for men and £315k for women.
- One-third of the increase in UK labour productivity between 1994 and 2005 being attributable to the rising number of people with a university degree over the period.
- Firms which are innovative have a higher proportion of their workforce with graduate level qualifications. Amongst those firms that are innovation-active around 5% of the workforce are science graduates and a further 8% are graduates in other subjects, compared to only 1% and 3% respectively of firms which are not innovation-active.
- Productivity in enterprises is estimated to be 30% higher if the entire workforce has a degree than if none do.

The Office for National Statistics release [Earnings by Qualification in the UK](#), 2011 showed that in 2010 degree level graduates has a wage premium of 85% relative to those qualified to GCSE level only and those with sub-degree HE qualifications only had a wage premium of 45% relative to those qualified to GCSE level.

“Firms which are innovative have a higher proportion of their workforce with graduate level qualifications.”

Scottish data presented to the Review presents a picture of a sharp gradient in employment rates for people with different levels of qualification:



Skills for a changing economy

Graduates are in demand because of the breadth of their skills and their relevance to a changing economy.

In this context, policymakers should be aware of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills advice in their [Working Futures 2014-2024](#) report published in April 2016. This presents a balanced assessment of ‘a continued trend in favour of more highly skilled, white collar occupations, but with some growth in employment for a number of less skilled occupations too’. Strong growth in managerial and professional occupations is projected along with growth in caring and leisure services. Conversely, employment in skilled trades occupations, and in administrative and secretarial roles, is projected to decline.

Taking a longer perspective, UKCES’s [The Future of Work; jobs and skills in 2030](#) looks at various possible scenarios. A common feature among options examined is the likely development of an ‘hourglass economy’, where jobs at middle levels of skill are lost from the economy e.g. in white collar administrative roles and skilled/ semi-skilled blue collar roles (similar to the ‘hollowed middle’ identified in SG analysis of Scotland’s labour market). UKCES also stress the need for the development of workforce agility, as roles will require an increased ‘hybridisation’ of technical and personal skills and as the demands of the workforce change.

“UKCES also stress the need for the development of workforce agility”

Indeed, most graduate level jobs do not require degrees in specific subjects. A 2015 AGCAS Scotland study and separately, a 2015 AGR members' survey found around 80 per cent of vacancies did not require a specific degree. SDS's 2016 Skills Investment Plan for the financial services sector highlighted that "the industry recruits from a wide range of subject disciplines" and identified a consistent view amongst employers that "subject discipline is less important than appropriate core skills and attitudes"¹⁹

There is evidence of strong demand for graduates in the Scottish economy. As well as evidence of the continued resilience of the graduate premium, the annual survey of the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) shows that the Scottish economy is using and rewarding graduates at a level that exceeds that of other parts of the UK.

- The [2014/15 DLHE survey](#) showed that 91% of graduates from Scottish universities were in positive destinations within six months, and 72% of those in work were in graduate level roles – the highest rate in the UK. Graduates from Scottish universities also had the highest average starting salaries in the UK at £23,000 compared to £22,500 in England. Additionally, graduates from Scotland's universities recorded the lowest unemployment rate in four years, at 5%. This contrasts with the overall Scottish unemployment rate of 5.6% in December 2015.²⁰
- In the 2014 UKCES Employer Perspectives Survey, 88% of Scottish employers reported leavers of Scottish universities to be 'very well prepared' or 'well prepared' for work (compared to 63% for secondary school leavers, and 81% for college leavers).²¹

Costs

Government should also be mindful of the costs of any radical change in the pattern of provision of tertiary education, including:

- Costs (including capital) of increasing the physical and staffing scale of the college sector if it is to absorb a significantly larger share of higher education,
- Inefficiencies built into the university sector if a reduction in students results in under-utilisation of capacity, and
- Reduced economic impact of the Scottish university sector if it has to reduce in scale as a result of a significant shift in provision.
- College HE provision is not available in all subject areas at present, so would need to be developed and need to be agreed with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies, where relevant.
- Costs of additional support for a wider cohort of students progressing from college to university with advanced standing.
- Timescale of change – radical change would have a longer timescale for implementation and delivery of improvements than change that built on the foundations of existing success.

¹⁹ <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/42492/financial-services-sip-nov-2016.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/december-labour-market-statistics-for-scotland--3>

²¹

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/373769/14.11.11_EPS_2014_-_Main_Report_full_V2.pdf

Annex: Learner Journeys: Diverse routes for diverse learners

