



## Brief for Ministerial Statement on Widening Access: Universities Scotland action

May 2017

**Universities Scotland is hugely committed to widening access to Scotland’s higher education institutions. We want a fully diverse and inclusive student population in our universities; one that reflects every aspect of the communities that they are part of.**

This briefing is an update to Members of the Scottish Parliament on the work undertaken by Universities Scotland since the publication of [A Blueprint for Fairness](#): The Final Report of the Commission on Widening Access in March 2016.

### In summary:

- We have set up three working groups on admissions, articulation and bridging programmes to deliver on the Commission’s recommendations that point to universities. They are each led by a Principal and include students, colleges, the Funding Council and others.
- The groups will report in the early autumn with action taken from then. We are on track to meet the earliest of the deadlines in the *Blueprint* report.
- Care leavers/care experienced applicants are given extra consideration during the admissions process as part of contextual admissions by 17 of Scotland’s universities that have entry requirements. Every university gives extra support to care leavers.
- More underrepresented students are going to university. The number of SIMD20 entrants is up (amongst 18 year olds and overall) and retention rates for this group are also improving.

<p><b>Welcoming A Blueprint for Fairness</b></p>	<p>Universities Scotland <a href="#">welcomed the Blueprint report</a> when it was published in March 2016.</p> <p>We said that some of the recommendations were very challenging but we would not shy away from that and we would be bolder in the way we work.</p>
<p><b>Our response: Futures Not Backgrounds</b></p>	<p>Universities Scotland published <a href="#">Futures not Backgrounds</a> in the summer of 2016 as a response to the Blueprint’s recommendations that pointed to universities. In Futures not Backgrounds there was a commitment to take action in three broad areas that sit within universities’ influence which are: <b>admissions, articulation and bridging programmes</b>. When taken together, action in these areas will address or contribute to a total of 17 (50%) of the Blueprint’s recommendations. Not all recommendations in the Blueprint point to universities.</p> <p>Universities Scotland discussed its approach at length with Dame Ruth Silver, at an early stage and in her capacity as former Commissioner for Fair Access. She gave <a href="#">her support</a> for the sector’s plans saying we “have already started the process in well chosen, strategic areas with pleasing speed.”<sup>1</sup></p>

<sup>1</sup> Universities Scotland: Futures Not Backgrounds: <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/10537-%E2%80%A2-Futures-Not-Backgrounds-web.pdf>

<p><b>Our next move: three work streams</b></p>	<p>Since the summer of 2016, three working groups have been established to lead each of the three projects. They are meeting regularly and each is chaired by a Principal to give the work the priority it deserves.</p> <p>We're doing this work with partners. Colleges, NUS Scotland, School Leaders Scotland and SFC are represented across all three groups, as are Directors of admissions, outreach officers and articulation managers within universities. Other partners are included where they have a direct role (the SCQF on the articulation group and Children 1st on the bridging programmes group for example).</p> <p>The groups' membership reflects the initial holistic vision that the Commission had and the sector's absolute belief that addressing the challenges of widening access holistically offers the best chance to make a substantial difference.</p>
<p><b>The admissions work stream</b></p>	<p>The group, chaired by Professor Sally Mapstone of University of St Andrews has been looking really closely at how universities already do contextual admissions.</p> <p>The group is now pushing to agree a 'core' set of contextual indicators and to agree key terms like 'minimum requirements' across all universities so there is more consistency from university to university.</p> <p>Sorting this out would then form the basis of a coordinated public information campaign so contextual admissions can be understood and used more effectively by applicants, their teachers and parents and guardians.</p> <p>The group is also considering the evidence around adjusted offers and retention rates so universities can make adjusted offers to underrepresented students with the confidence that the students will have successful outcomes.</p>
<p><b>The articulation work stream</b></p>	<p>Chaired by Susan Stewart of the Open University in Scotland, the articulation work stream has been analysing articulation data at subject level to a degree that has not previously been undertaken. The group is trying to identify where there may be blockages at subject level. It is also open-minded on whether there are other qualifications, in addition to Higher Nationals, that can be used to 'articulate' students into university.</p>
<p><b>The Bridging work stream</b></p>	<p>Professor Petra Wend of Queen Margaret University Edinburgh is chairing our Bridging work stream. It is mapping the numerous bridging programmes offered across Scotland. The group will use this to see where there are a lack of opportunities and how universities can join up activities to give learners more choices. The idea is that universities should collaborate more on a regional basis so that the experience at summer schools and bridging programmes are transferrable between universities to enable students to have more options available to them. This will also ensure they come with recognition, and ultimately, so that economies of scale might be achieved and more opportunities can be offered.</p>
<p><b>Our work on those with care experience</b></p>	<p>Care leavers are one of the priority underrepresented groups in our existing access and admissions work.</p> <p>17 of 18 HEIs currently include care leavers/those with care experience as a flag or marker within their contextual admissions policy. This means that care leavers are already receiving additional consideration during the admissions process, including adjusted offers in many cases.</p>

	All 18 HEIs provide support for care leavers/care experienced students in other ways, in addition to their admission policies. This includes pre-entry support, year-round accommodation, financial support and other ongoing guidance and support. All 18 have named members of staff for students and prospective students to contact.
<b>Our next steps</b>	All three work streams will report over the summer into early autumn. Universities will then start to implement the group's recommendations. We believe these changes will provide meaningful change that will deliver the 2030 target.
<b>Progress that pre-dates the Commission</b>	<p>The statistics are showing progress is being made on widening access and retention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proportion of SIMD20 students attending university in 2014-15 is 14.1%<sup>2</sup>.</li> <li>• More young students from SIMD20 are starting university. 18 year-olds from SIMD20 areas were 12% more likely to enter university in 2016 than the year before. This takes the SIMD entry rate for 18 year olds to the highest level yet at 10.9 per cent.</li> <li>• More students with HNs are given full credit for their qualification. There has been a 6% increase in the number of HN students given full credit when they articulate into university compared to the year before. A total of 3,999 students were given full credit. This is within touching distance of the 4,100 target for 2016/17.</li> <li>• Students from SIMD20 areas are closing the retention gap. The improvement in the retention rate of SIMD20 students in our universities has been at a faster rate than the improved retention of all students which means the gap in retention rates has been closing. The retention 'gap' between SIMD20 students to the overall rate now stands at only 3.2 percentage points, down from 4.7% in 2011/12.</li> </ul>

**ENDS**

**For further information please contact:**

Duncan McKay, Senior Public Affairs Officer

T: 0131 225 0714 M: 07445 747222 [duncan@universities-scotland.ac.uk](mailto:duncan@universities-scotland.ac.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Funding Council: Learning for All 2016:

[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)