



Nine things to know about the new report on articulation from the National Articulation Forum.

Colleges and universities want to create more opportunities for students to progress seamlessly between study in further and higher education. This means more students need to be supported to avoid repeating levels of study across different qualifications. Known as “articulation”, this has been an option for learners for over twenty years and runs very effectively between some institutions and as a route into some courses. Over 4,000 students articulated from college into university, with full credit for their Higher National qualification in 2017/18.

The current challenge is how to scale-up this route, make it more accessible in every college and university and make it more desirable to a much bigger group of students. Achieving this would offer learners more choice and help to widen access to university education. Colleges and universities worked together, and with other stakeholders, as part of a National Articulation Forum throughout 2019/20 to listen to student views, review progress and to put together a set of 14 recommendations which will accelerate progress with articulation. This has been pulled together in a report, with thanks to considerable support from the Scottish Funding Council, called the [National Articulation Forum Final Report](#). This builds on, and from, the Commission on Widening Access.

We recommend that you read the full report, but this is your quick guide to the nine things you need to know:

1

Articulation has a role in Scotland’s recovery and renewal after COVID-19, particularly in supporting young adults.

The Forum was completing its work just as the coronavirus pandemic hit the UK. The situation created by the pandemic and the disproportionate impact it is likely to have on young adults and the already disadvantaged, makes these findings and recommendations even more urgent as they are focused on creating more flexible opportunities for learners and closer collaboration between colleges and universities. Arguably, the report’s recommendations have taken on even greater importance than when they were written just a few months ago.

2

The National Articulation Forum’s work was done with students, for students.

Almost 100 college and university students shared their experience of articulation, the good and the bad, to inform the research. In total, the Forum held 13 focus groups in locations across Scotland. On the whole, students felt that articulation had been an empowering experience, helping them to achieve their potential. The importance of well-managed transitions was one of the strongest recurring themes. Students also told us that they felt supported to make decisions if they knew about the options and support that would be available. Another strong theme was the need to have good articulation options locally; many students said they wouldn’t want to or couldn’t move to pursue articulation in another area of Scotland due to family and caring responsibilities and/or a job.

▶ **Student videos. Hear from Joanna and Myles on their experience articulating from college into university.**

📄 **See where the Forum held the focus groups.**

3

Learners now have articulation options at a broader range of universities.

This is perhaps the biggest, noticeable change to have occurred since the Commission on Widening Access recommended that learners who want to articulate should have a broader choice of institutions and courses. Institutions which previously had no, or very limited, engagement in articulation before are developing new pathways. The extent of articulation still varies significantly between institutions; it’s likely that articulation will always be a major progression route for some colleges and universities whilst at others it will be available in a smaller number of courses. The significance of this shift is that it creates more options for students and creates a test bed for further development. Universities told the Forum that once staff see that articulation can work well in their institution, it sparks genuine interest and take-up from other departments. One articulation agreement lays the groundwork for more.

🔍 **Case studies from the University of St Andrews, Edinburgh and Glasgow show new and emerging articulation routes into the ancients.**

🔍 **Abertay University and Glasgow Caledonian are two of the universities which have made articulation an integral entry route.**

4

Scotland needs to shout about articulation.

There should be a Scotland-wide marketing campaign to highlight articulation as a post-16 option. Students told us they felt like articulation was too much of a secret, that they had been lucky to find out about it from a lecturer or a friend. Articulation needs to be promoted as an option when universities do outreach into schools and pupils need to hear about it in third year of secondary school (S3), before they make their subject choices for National 4 or 5 exams. Career activities aimed at school pupils, young adults and mature learners, including the advice offered through *My School of Work*, should do more to promote articulation.

The Forum calls on the Scottish Government to work with Skills Development Scotland, colleges and universities to fund and launch a public-facing, Scotland-wide campaign to promote articulation as an available and desirable route into university. It should aim to make articulation as familiar to the public as apprenticeships. The impact of the pandemic means it has never been more important to support young people towards opportunities; an awareness raising campaign about articulation in 2020/21 would be well-timed as part of the recovery.

If Scotland starts shouting about articulation the message must be clear. The term “articulation” is not well-used by students who articulate; it is not self-explanatory. Our research found that it is used interchangeably with 17 alternatives that mean much the same thing. That adds to the confusion for students looking to find options. The Forum calls for colleges and universities to adopt a standard and consistent set of terminology and has done the hard work of setting that out in its report.

“I don’t think the Government advertises this enough to adults. Since I’ve started, so many of my friends have gone to college, inspired by me doing it.”

Student, Dundee & Angus College

🔗 **This links to recommendations 9, 10, 11 & 12 as found in the full report.**

▶ **Student videos: Myles tells us he hadn’t heard the term “articulation” used during his route into university.**

5

Scotland should change the way it defines articulation so it puts more emphasis on the benefit it offers to students.

The real purpose of articulation is to recognise a student’s existing learning and help them to avoid repeating the same level of study unnecessarily. Yet the current definition puts too much emphasis on one sort of qualification, the Higher National, and is too centred on students’ progression between a college and a university as two separate organisations rather than focus on progression between levels of study. As a result, the current definition does not count all of the articulation taking place across Scotland and it disincentivises the creation of new and different pathways to progress through learning. As examples, the advanced standing that UHI and SRUC offer their students is overlooked by the current definition because it happens within one tertiary institution rather than a separate college and university. The Open University’s role is understated because many of its entrants are returning to education after a gap in learning rather than starting direct from college. Learners have to enter into a full degree at a defined level in order to be included in the current definition of articulation rather than start a degree in a more bitesize way with a module or enter part way through a level/year of study. The different qualification and credit structure used by the Open University also makes direct comparison difficult.

Members of the National Articulation Forum believe the definition should change. If we choose to emphasise the real purpose of articulation in the definition it could open more pathways into university from other qualifications like Foundation Apprenticeships and Modern Apprenticeships. This could become more important in terms of offering young adults meaningful pathways through education and training in response to the impact of the pandemic. It would be for the Scottish Funding Council to change the definition. The members of the National Articulation Forum would like to see this change as quickly as possible.

🔗 **This links to recommendations 1 & 2 as found in the full report.**

🔗 **Read the current definition on page 18 of the full report.**

🔍 **The University of the Highlands and Islands has a tertiary model of articulation.**

🔍 **The Open University takes a different approach to qualification and credit structure.**

6

Universities are finding ways to offer students more subject choice. There are no quick fixes but there is a big opportunity for the SQA to help.

Articulation between HNs and degrees works really well in some subjects but has been a challenge to get right in others.

The Forum felt a lot of time considering how to offer a broader choice of subjects to students who want to articulate. In some subjects, like accountancy, there’s already a 75% average full-credit articulation rate, yet options for those interested in music or drama, physics or English degrees have been very limited as there aren’t HNs with close enough content to progress. Additionally, there have been specific challenges to overcome with routes into nursing, teaching and law, either because the professional bodies require specific SQA qualifications for entry or because they make progression conditional on placement hours, which the university degree programme has been designed to meet in year one or two but which are not part of the HN qualification.

Colleges and universities are now working increasingly creatively to overcome these challenges and create new routes. St Andrews has found a way to map and support articulation into medieval history or social anthropology from an HN in social sciences and Aberdeen is looking at how to align degrees to the HN in Applied Sciences. Glasgow Caledonian now offers advanced standing into specialist nursing fields. Offering a unique approach, Robert Gordon University has created “Top Up Degrees” in photography, computing and sport so students studying for HNs in those subjects now have a direct progression route into a degree, if that is what they want.

There are opportunities to achieve more on a national scale. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Scottish Qualifications Agency had started a review of Higher National Qualifications. The Forum sees that review as an opportunity to address some of the persistent issues around subject match whilst preserving the value of the HN as a stand-alone qualification. Colleges and universities hope the SQA is able to pick that up quickly after the more immediate issues caused by the pandemic have been resolved. Further and higher education should be closely involved in a review of the HN qualification.

🔗 **This links to recommendations 3 & 4 as found in the full report.**

🔍 **The University of St Andrews, Aberdeen and Glasgow Caledonian have all taken new approaches to subject-matching to the Higher National. The full report picks up developments with articulation routes into law and teaching.**

▶ **Student video: Myles talks about how more subject options would be useful.**

7

Good management of the transition between college and university really makes the difference to students.

This was the strongest theme coming through from students. Good preparation and transition support can be the confidence boost that makes the difference between direct entry into second or third year for an HND student. Most students said there was lots of support available but their experience of learning in university was very different to their previous experience in college and this took some adjustment, even where the subject alignment was good.

The Forum felt there should be a Scotland-wide baseline level of support made available to every articulating student, to provide that confidence, and the Forum felt this would be possible without enforcing a one-size-fits-all approach. The baseline would include advice on financial matters, anticipated degree options and advice on whether additional study support or entry requirements will be needed. Additional elements could include a mix of campus visits, college students taking part in university lectures, access to university library, union and other facilities.

Students told us that support with university study skills mattered to them, particularly self-directed study and referencing (which came up a lot). Some students felt they were at a disadvantage articulating when it came to support with UCAS applications relative to their friends in schools. Students also wanted more consideration given to the social side of transitions as it is hard to suddenly find yourself amongst a new set of peers who have already had one or two years at university in which to form friendships.

🔗 **This links to recommendation 8 as found in the full report.**

▶ **Student video: Myles says that Edinburgh Napier University’s Countdown to Zero programme was very helpful with his transition into university.**

▶ **Joanna discusses different study skills in college to university.**

🔍 **Glasgow Caledonian and Strathclyde are amongst those offering supportive transitions for students.**

🔍 **Stirling University’s articulation listing provides information on advanced entry routes by subject.**

8

Finding ways to make articulation work regionally and nationally.

Most articulation is offered regionally. For the most part, that has mirrored demand, as many students don’t want to travel for study (see #2) but it can limit options and some students told us they felt steered towards local options when they would have liked broader choices.

Colleges and universities have been expanding the geographical reach of articulation: Queen Margaret University in East Lothian has arrangements with colleges in Glasgow, mid-Scotland and North East College Scotland. To support articulation regionally and nationally, Edinburgh Napier University and Edinburgh College are leading work on a pilot regional “map” of articulation options, launched in July 2020, which could give us the basis to scale up to cover all of Scotland. Called the [Regional Learner Passport Partnership \(RLPP\)](#) the pilot phase covers the south east of Scotland, it includes six colleges, eight universities and looks to make the information available in an app. After a successful pilot, it aims to expand to cover all institutions and routes towards degree level study available nationally.

Members of the Forum believe a national “map” should be properly resourced by the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council as it maps to the recommendations from the Commission on Widening Access and the Government’s continued work on the Learner Journey. This should build from the learning from the RLPP pilot.

🔗 **This links to recommendation 13 as found in the full report.**

🔗 **Read more about the Regional Learner Passport Partnership.**

🔍 **Robert Gordon University has had a regional partnership with North East Scotland College for more than twenty-years.**

9

Student choice matters above all.

Colleges and universities need to do all they can to maximise articulation opportunities and advanced entry for students, but student choice still matters most.

Sometimes students exercise this choice by choosing not to accept an offer of articulation, but instead to enter the first year of the degree. Students told us they chose not to articulate due to a lack of confidence or a desire to have the same experience as others on the degree.

The Scottish Funding Council has a ten-year target to reach 75% of all HN students who move to a degree programme having done so with advanced standing if they choose. The Forum believes that the progress already made and the set of 14 recommendations will help Scotland to close the gap between the current average of 51% and that goal. But, in doing so we cannot afford to lose sight of individual choice.

“The issue is not entering in year two or three; it is important to take it at your own pace.”

Student voice

🔗 **The full report, [National Articulation Forum Final Report](#) can be found online at [Colleges Scotland’s](#) and [Universities Scotland’s](#) websites.**