



National Articulation Forum Final Report 2020



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Joint Foreword from the Conveners of the National Articulation Forum



The genesis of the work of the National Articulation Forum was *A Blueprint for Fairness*, the final report of the Commission on Widening Access, chaired by Dame Ruth Silver. This report identified increased articulation – the progression of students from college to university with academic credit for their college work – as an important way to improve social mobility through education.

Our report is, in essence, about accelerating progress. Articulation is an established feature of tertiary education in Scotland, and there is considerable innovation in Scotland’s colleges and universities as they look for ways to offer articulation opportunities to students. In our focus groups with students, we heard of many positive experiences of articulation between colleges and universities, and of the support the students had received. We feel there is considerable scope to build on this to improve opportunities for students, and in doing so to further contribute to social mobility. This will be achieved by changes in practice in colleges and universities, reinforced by evolving institutional cultures, so that supporting articulation is seen to be as central to the mission of all Scottish universities as admitting students directly from school.

Successful articulation requires strategic collaboration and a sustained partnership effort in finding what works best for students. Different colleges and universities have their own particular contributions to make to articulation, and will have different visions for how articulation contributes to their institutional strategies. But if we are to succeed in doing our best for our students, articulation will have to be seen as a mainstream activity across the whole of the Scottish higher-education sector. This report has been written to inform policy makers, practitioners and all those interested in giving a more integrated experience to learners moving from college to university.

As well as changes in practice in colleges and universities, our report makes a number of other recommendations for the Scottish Government and its agencies, related to the management and dissemination of data, the provision of information to students, the reform of HN curricula, and the measurement of articulation. While we do not make any specific recommendations on public funding for articulation, it is clear that the capacity of colleges and universities to deliver in this area, and the way they address articulation along with their other priorities, will be influenced by the funding environment; we encourage the Scottish Government to consider this.

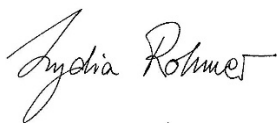
As Joint Conveners, we would like to thank the members of the Forum, who brought such a rich set of insights to our discussions and who approached their task in the spirit of collaboration we think is reflected throughout the report. We would like to acknowledge in particular the leadership of Liz McIntyre, who was Joint Convener until her retirement in December. On behalf of all the members of the

Forum, we would like to thank the members of the Joint Secretariat provided by Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland that ably supported our work. We would particularly like to thank Anna Wallace of the Scottish Funding Council, who designed and executed the programme of work that was the foundation of the report, and who contributed so much to the report itself. Finally, we would like to thank our colleagues in the colleges and universities, and the students who took part in the focus groups, all of whom gave generously of their time.

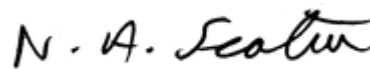
As we write this Foreword, we are in week 17 of the Covid-19 lockdown, and the restrictions are progressively being relaxed. Society will look rather different as we emerge from this crisis, in ways that at present we see only dimly, and this will also be true for tertiary education in Scotland. This is not the time to make predictions, which would surely and quickly be overtaken by reality. We would, nonetheless, like to close with a reflection on the importance of articulation in the post-Covid world.

As we face an uncertain future, it is surely more important than ever to help students to pursue their education in an adaptable way, responding both to their aspirations and opportunities and to the evolving needs of society. We need a tertiary-education system that really does put the learner at the centre, and one that is efficient, both in terms of the resources consumed and – critically – in valuing the time of the students, avoiding unnecessary duplication in their academic journey.

Scotland's colleges and universities are doing great work in supporting articulation. This report is about doing even better, in a time in which this matters even more.



Lydia Rohmer
Principal and Chief Executive,
West Highland College UHI



Professor Nigel Seaton
Principal, Abertay University

Executive Summary

Building on the *Blueprint*: The National Articulation Forum and COWA

Articulation is a pathway that opens university up to thousands of students in Scotland every year. The opportunity to study for a degree upon completion of an HN qualification is a vital way to ensure learners have various routes and pathways into university. In its final report, the Commission on Widening Access (COWA) described articulation as: “...a distinctive and much admired feature of Scottish post-16 education,” with the expansion of articulation pathways “a real success story of Scottish higher education and a powerful means of advancing fair access.”

The Commission recognised that an expansion in articulation pathways was one of a number of ways in which the learner journey could be made more effective for learners. Commission members saw it as having an important role to play in achieving its target to widen access and ensure that students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds (SIMD20¹) should represent 20% of entrants to higher education.

Following the publication of the Commission’s report, Universities Scotland published *Working to Widen Access* (WTWA)², its action plan for responding to the relevant recommendations contained in *A Blueprint for Fairness*. WTWA proposed the establishment of the National Articulation Forum in order to examine how full-credit articulation can be offered to more students, looking at specific subjects and expanding the current model to include other qualifications in addition to Higher Nationals. Investigating student perspectives on articulation was identified as a key part of the Forum’s work.

Articulating Actions

To inform the Forum’s findings, desk-based research on institutional websites took place, as well as telephone and face-to-face interviews with Access and Admissions staff working in Scottish colleges and universities to explore available pathways, expansion work and partnership arrangements currently in place. The Scottish Funding Council’s data from the newly launched National Articulation Database have also been used to provide statistical evidence around the current state of play.

Additionally, around 90 students took part in 13 focus groups held across Scotland. The experiences they shared clearly demonstrated the value of articulation and its role in empowering learners to achieve their potential, opening doors to opportunities that, in some cases, students had not previously known were there.

This report shows that all colleges and universities are taking action on articulation, working constructively together and providing the collective leadership required to bring about change. This has moved beyond those institutions with a long history of articulation; universities with less previous involvement in articulation are developing new pathways. It is clear from the case studies at these

¹ The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) ranks data zones from most deprived (ranked 1) to least deprived (ranked 6,976). People using SIMD will often focus on the data zones below a certain rank, for example, the 5%, 10%, 15% or 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland. SIMD is an area-based measure of relative deprivation; not every person in a highly deprived area will themselves be experiencing high levels of deprivation.

² Universities Scotland (2017) [Working to Widen Access](#)

institutions that setting up one articulation agreement lays the groundwork for more, sparking ideas and setting off discussions.

The Forum's findings paint an encouraging picture of the current landscape of articulation in Scotland. This report seeks to build on these foundations, setting out how articulation might be expanded and further improved, moving toward an approach where all available pathways are visible to learners and support is in place to enable them to succeed.

Recognition of Diverse Articulation Routes

Throughout the Forum's work the current definition of articulation was raised as being restrictive due to its narrow focus, which is a barrier to innovation. Institutions suggested that moving beyond focusing on HN qualifications and the college-to-university pathway would enable other routes to be considered and promoted as articulation. Doing this would provide learners with even more potential routes into university. The Forum recommends that the current definition should be reviewed to include students on other pathways into university.

1. The Scottish Funding Council should consider revising the current definition of articulation to:
 - Expand the focus on product (Higher National Qualifications) and institutions (college to university) to include: students enrolled in the Open University in Scotland, Scotland's Rural College and the University of the Highlands and Islands, which are presently not included; students on Additional Funded Places/Associate Student Paths; students entering Graduate Apprenticeships with previous study at SCQF level 7 and above qualifications; and entrants with Foundation Apprenticeships and other relevant pathways (using the SCQF as a framework).
 - Emphasise that articulation is about giving credit for previous study so that the same SCQF level in the same subject area is not repeated, opening up the potential for new and innovative approaches (such as transferring credit from any pre-university experience) that support the objective of articulation.
2. Scottish colleges and universities should engage with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) in exploring, developing and building pathways from Foundation Apprenticeships to HN and in-work to Graduate Apprenticeships.

Subject Alignment

Subject alignment (that is, achieving a match between corresponding college and university curricula) is pivotal to the creation and success of articulation pathways. Most students taking part in the Forum's focus groups reported that they did feel the curriculum on their articulation journey was well-matched and they felt equipped to study at their chosen level. However, a mismatch of curricula can be a reason given for why articulation does not happen in certain subjects and/or at certain institutions; feedback from higher education institutions (HEIs) gathered during the Forum's work identified the lack of a corresponding HN course as one of the three main reasons for lower rates of articulation in certain subjects. The Scottish Qualifications Authority's (SQA) HN Review represents a substantial opportunity to address some of these issues. The Forum recommends the following steps to improve issues around subject alignment:

3. The SQA's HN Review has great potential to facilitate improved subject alignment between college and university, thereby improving both the volume of articulation and reducing the discontinuity of learning style that is often experienced by articulating students. The National Articulation Forum believes this work should be taken forward as a matter of priority, with meaningful involvement from both the college and university sectors.
4. Colleges and universities should make use of available evidence to develop new articulation routes, including:
 - Evidence of student demand for articulation. This should be evident within the National Articulation Database and should be used to inform planning for further articulation opportunities. Universities are also encouraged to look at advanced progression figures for their own institutions as evidence of demand for development of further pathways.
 - Evidence of skills gaps in the Scottish economy should be used as supplementary information when building new and reviewing existing articulation pathways.
 - Existing data and intelligence on articulation pathways and activity across the sector should be used for planning of new articulation pathways.
5. Universities should consider ring-fencing some places on undergraduate and Graduate Apprenticeship degrees to give articulating students more certainty about their prospects for advanced entry into university from partner colleges and from the range of work-based learning programmes. This might be in the form of a guaranteed place to an applicant who is articulating from a partner college. It is recognised that this is challenging for universities when set in a context of a capped number of places. The Scottish Government and the SFC should carefully consider how this is supported, linking to recommendation 6.
6. The Scottish Government should consider how it might support the recommendations made by the National Articulation Forum in the way it provides financial support to the universities and colleges.

Transition Support

Support for articulating students is necessary to ensure learners feel equipped to make a success of the move from college to university. Every student's individual learning journey is different, and this makes a uniform approach to transition support difficult to put in place. However, students consistently highlighted college-level support on study skills as being appreciated where it was provided and missed where it was not. In addition, having opportunities to get to know other articulating students was also highlighted as a benefit.

The establishment of the National Articulation Database gives an opportunity to learn more about the retention, progression and outcomes of articulating students. More understanding of the use of the Database throughout both sectors would enable support for transitioning students to be further strengthened.

The Forum recommends:

7. The SFC should use data from the National Articulation Database and other available sources to publish data on the retention and outcomes of articulating students, which has not previously been available.
8. All Scottish colleges and universities should ensure that appropriate support is in place for all stages of the articulation pathway (pre-transition from college to university, and post-transition) including provision of study skills, academic writing practice, and research skills. This should also include robust retention support arrangements.

Information, Advice and Guidance

A strong theme emerging from the Forum's work has been around the need for clear information, advice and guidance (IAG) on articulation. Every learner – along with their schools and colleges – must be able to access this information, and details must also be provided about financial support available. It is therefore vital that wider work being taken forward on IAG by the Scottish Government and other public sector agencies ensures information about articulation is incorporated into existing sources, including My World of Work and guidance provided through Careers Advisors. In addition, Forum members agreed that a public-facing campaign to highlight articulation would help raise awareness of the opportunities that exist.

Forum members also agreed that the development of a national articulation map will help encourage and promote cross-region articulation, as currently, the majority of articulation takes place between colleges and universities within the same region.

The Forum recommends the following steps to improve IAG:

9. All sources of information, advice and guidance (IAG) for students who are considering study at Scottish colleges or universities should highlight articulation as a pathway. This should include existing resources such as Skills Development Scotland's (SDS) My World of Work, college and university prospectuses, and the Scottish Government's Learner Journey work.
10. To support consistency of understanding for students in both sectors, Scottish colleges and universities should use the terminology outlined in the glossary in Appendix A of this report when referring to articulation.
11. The Scottish Government, in partnership with SDS Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) staff, colleges and universities, should coordinate and fund a public-facing Scotland-wide campaign to raise awareness of articulation as an available and desirable route into university and promote this to pupils and students of all backgrounds.
12. Scottish schools, colleges and universities should continue to engage with their school transitions contacts, local authorities and other relevant organisations (such as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership and their related programmes, such as the SCQFP School Ambassador Programme) with practical information, advice and guidance (IAG) on articulation. Colleges and universities, in conjunction with SDS, should also distribute and display information on articulation and student support throughout their local/partnership schools and their institutional campuses.

13. The Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council should work together on the provision of appropriate resources to support the development of a national articulation map, based on the National Articulation Database, taking account of pilots undertaken to-date and on consideration of further pilots, with implementation of their findings as appropriate.

Sharing Good Practice

To build on and improve knowledge about articulation opportunities across the country and enable practitioners to share best practice, the Forum recommends that a Community of Practice for practitioners involved in articulation work should be developed by Scotland's Community of Access and Participation Practitioners (SCAPP), to ensure colleges and universities have access to the support required to build on success.

14. To share good practice, Scotland's Community of Access and Participation Practitioners (SCAPP) should develop a sub-group and network for practitioners involved in articulation work at colleges and universities.

The National Articulation Forum has not included timescales for the above recommendations as the expectation is for colleges, universities, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Scotland's Community of Access and Participation Practitioners (SCAPP) and other organisations to progress them as a matter of importance.

Background

Brief History of Scottish Articulation

The movement of students between colleges and universities is an established method of enhancing qualifications and employment prospects, and many HEIs in Scotland offer routes that recognise previous HE study from college. This is referred to as ‘articulation’, which is defined by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) as the granting of **full-credit for a Higher National Diploma (HND) into third year of a degree programme, and a Higher National Certificate (HNC) into second year of a degree programme.**

The SFC provided specific funding for articulation in 2003 when universities received set amounts based on approximate numbers of students receiving advanced standing onto degree programmes. This funding developed in 2008 into the five regional articulation hubs, which were consortia of colleges and universities focused on improving articulation opportunities and pathways in their local regional areas. In 2016, this funding came to an end and, subsequently, expectations that all institutions would support articulation were transmitted through the Outcome Agreement process.

In 2012, the SFC announced the availability of Additional Funded Places to further support articulation, with the funding being shared between both colleges and universities. These are now part of the institutions’ core funding as opposed to being separate funds. However, it should be noted that this is only one way in which articulation is funded and the majority of articulating students are not part of this scheme.

Origins of the National Articulation Forum

In November 2017, Universities Scotland published *Working to Widen Access (WTWA)*³, its action plan for responding to the relevant recommendations contained in *A Blueprint for Fairness*. The actions agreed in WTWA were informed by the work of three working groups on articulation, admissions and bridging programmes. The working group on articulation was chaired by Susan Stewart, Director of the Open University in Scotland, and included representation from Colleges Scotland and other key stakeholders, including SFC and NUS⁴.

For ease of reference, the WTWA actions on articulation are summarised below. These actions can be seen as the Forum’s initial priorities:

- *“We will create a National Articulation Forum to be co-owned by Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland and with the Scottish Funding Council and NUS Scotland also taking a strategic role. It will provide strategic guidance to further the work on articulation and a structure within which expert practitioner work can be taken forward to increase the range and diversity of articulation pathways.”*
- *“The National Articulation Forum will examine how we can offer full-credit articulation to more students. It will do this by looking at opportunities to improve articulation in specific subjects as well as considering how to expand the model of articulation to include other qualifications in addition to Higher Nationals.”*

³ Universities Scotland (2017) [Working to Widen Access](#)

⁴ *Working to Widen Access*, p 37.

- *“The National Articulation Forum will investigate student perspectives on articulation.”*
- *“The National Articulation Forum will develop clear information about articulation.”*

The National Articulation Forum met for the first time in November 2018 with joint Conveners from Colleges Scotland, Liz McIntyre (then Principal, North East Scotland College) and Universities Scotland, Nigel Seaton (Principal, Abertay University). Representatives from both college and university sectors were nominated and invited, as well as other stakeholders from the Scottish Government, the SFC, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications (SCQF) Partnership and Skills Development Scotland (SDS). The membership of the Forum is noted below.

The National Articulation Forum first agreed the remit and terms of reference (attached at Appendix B), then formulated a work plan and commissioned and oversaw a programme of research and evidence gathering, with a strong focus on hearing the voice of articulating students. With the help of staff at colleges and universities, 13 articulating student focus groups were established between November 2019 and February 2020.

Approximately 90 students, at various stages of their learner journey, participated in the focus groups and spoke frankly about their experiences of articulation at college and university. These views have helped shape this final report.

Structure of Report

The chapters in this report have been compiled to share as much information and research as possible, with the recommendations that have arisen from this work outlined in the next section.

- The first chapter is entitled **Recognition of Diverse Articulation Routes** and looks at the current state of articulation and the definition presently in use, as well as the other models that could be applied more widely.
- The second chapter is entitled **Subject Mapping**, highlights the importance of partnership, which is fundamental to creating robust articulation pathways for students.
- Students are at the heart of this report and the third and fourth chapters, entitled **Transition Support and Information, Advice and Guidance**, respectively explore the support required during all stages of the journey and what information, advice and guidance (IAG) are required for students to make clear and considered choices in relation to their studies.
- Finally, the chapter on **Sharing Good Practice** considers how the work of the National Articulation Forum can be evolved into the college and university sectors. There is also further information, evidence and examples of good practice given throughout this report in the form of case studies from Scottish colleges and universities.

This technical terms used in this report to describe different forms of transition from college to university are defined in the Glossary (Appendix A).

Membership of the National Articulation Forum

Liz McIntyre, Principal and Chief Executive, North East Scotland College (Joint Forum Convener until December 2019)

Lydia Rohmer, Principal and Chief Executive of West Highland College UHI and Vice Principal (Tertiary) of the University of the Highlands and Islands (Joint Forum Convener from January 2020, and a member of the Forum prior to that.)

Nigel Seaton, Principal, Abertay University (Joint Forum Convener)

Fiona Andrews, Head of Recruitment, Admissions and Participation, University of the West of Scotland

Fiona Burns, Assistant Director, Access, Scottish Funding Council

Joanna Campbell, Principal, Dumfries & Galloway College

Risga Carson, Policy and Public Affairs, National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland

Sheila Dunn, Head of Quality and International Development, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership

Diane Greenlees, Director of Critical Skills and Occupations, Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

Lynn MacMillan, Strategic Lead, Access to Higher Education, Scottish Government

Douglas McMillan, Director, Faculty of Creative Industries, Fife College

Sally Middleton, Access & Articulation Manager, University of Aberdeen

Liz Scott, Head of Widening Participation, Edinburgh Napier University

Tim Whalley, Dean of Student Experience, University of Stirling.

Secretariat/National Articulation Forum Support

Kirsty Conlon, Head of Learning and Teaching and Widening Access, Universities Scotland

Lynne Currie, Senior Policy Officer, Learning and Teaching and Widening Access, Universities Scotland*

Frances Harrower, Senior Policy Officer, Colleges Scotland*

Mark McCahill, Policy Officer, Colleges Scotland*

Trudi Tokarczyk, Policy Officer, Colleges Scotland*

Anna Wallace, Senior Policy Officer, Tri-partite post: Universities Scotland, Colleges Scotland and Scottish Funding Council

Andy Witty, Director of Sector Policy, Colleges Scotland.

*Indicates staff at Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland who supported the Forum at various stages throughout its work.

Recommendations

Recognition of Diverse Articulation Routes

1. The Scottish Funding Council should consider revising the current definition of articulation to:
 - Expand the focus on product (Higher National Qualifications) and institutions (college to university); and include students enrolled in the Open University in Scotland, Scotland's Rural College and the University of the Highlands and Islands, which are presently not included; students on Additional Funded Places/Associate Student Paths; students entering Graduate Apprenticeships with previous study at SCQF level 7 and above qualifications; entrants with Foundation Apprenticeships and other relevant pathways (using the SCQF as a framework).
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2. Scottish colleges and universities should engage with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) in exploring, developing and building pathways from Foundation Apprenticeships to HN and in-work to Graduate Apprenticeships.

Subject Alignment

3. The SQA's HN Review has great potential to facilitate improved subject alignment between college and university, therefore improving both the volume of articulation and reducing the discontinuity of learning style that is often experienced by articulating students. The National Articulation Forum believes this work should be taken forward as a matter of priority, with meaningful involvement from both the college and university sectors.
4. Colleges and universities should make use of available evidence to develop new articulation routes, including:
 - Evidence of student demand for articulation. This should be evident within the National Articulation Database and should be used to inform planning for further articulation opportunities. Universities are also encouraged to look at advanced progression figures for their own institutions as evidence of demand for development of further pathways.
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Sharing Good Practice

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The recommendations are highlighted in purple text for ease of reference as they appear throughout the rest of the report.



Recognition of Diverse Articulation Routes

Learner Focus

"I didn't do well at school but this is showing me I can do this."

Student, Dundee and Angus College

Discussions around models of articulation with learners on articulation pathways considered the level of credit that learners are offered, where students had been told they would require additional units to qualify for degree entry, and if any students had articulated to a degree programme out of their college region (i.e. to a university not considered a local partner to the college). A focus group was also held with students studying a BA (Hons) Social Sciences degree with the **Open University in Scotland (OUiS)**, which has a mixed model of delivery including on-college campus delivery and distance learning (see later in this chapter for more detail).

All college students involved in focus group discussions were interested in the potential for articulation, even if they were still undecided or considering employment following their Higher National (HN) qualification. For those who had decided on articulation or had already moved to their degree study, the majority were offered and took articulation with full-credit. Some HNC students felt that entry into second year was manageable for them, from an academic perspective. In terms of additional study for entry requirements on top of their HN qualification, most students didn't have additional requirements; however, one noted the receiving university had been *"quite insistent that I had the Maths for Engineering."* Where additional study was required for entry to the degree, it was welcomed by some students and provided experience of the university and study level, yet others were restricted in their ability to undertake them due to childcare and/or work commitments. This suggests that subject mapping and alignment that creates barriers to entry that are difficult to overcome within the HN framework creates additional work for students, with only a slight gain in articulation. Overall, however, the students believed that *"subjects have been well-mapped."*

During discussion, many students would come back to the need for more complete IAG on all aspects of articulation, including what they could study, what their course linked to, what funding would be available and where they could study. For one student, their college lecturer knew a university lecturer and encouraged students to apply to that university, which was out of their local region yet offered full articulation, which is not always easy to do if students have work/family commitments. Others were happy to travel and wanted to know about options further afield rather than feel they could only study at one university.

The student focus groups highlighted the diversity of students who are looking at articulation as an option and the fact that travel outwith their home or college region is not always an issue for them. However, some students noted that the full range of articulation options was not always made clear to them, with many feeling they could only articulate to a local university, and that any further investigation or IAG gathering had to be done on their own. In considering the offer of articulation at any university, most students accepted the amount of credit that was offered.

Current State of Articulation

Data published in *Articulation from Scottish Colleges to Scottish Universities 2017-18 (Experimental Statistics)*⁵ by the Scottish Funding Council in 2019 show the national figure for 2017-18 to be 4,021 students who moved from an HNC or HND into second or third year, respectively, of a degree programme (in broadly the same subject area). For undergraduates entering HEIs from college with Higher National Qualifications (which includes advanced standing – full credit – and advanced progression – partial credit), it was around 7,800; and, through targets provided in Outcome Agreements, institutions have given their commitment to increase this to around 7,900 by 2021-22. Ways in which these numbers might be further increased, including through models that operate less widely but do not contribute to national articulation figures, are explored below.

Meeting National Ambitions

All colleges and universities are asked to demonstrate commitment to articulation within their Outcome Agreements, which are publicly available, and findings from the focus groups suggest that students felt articulation options were expanding. Many institutions provide details of their targets and the work that supports them; however, there are still some universities that either do not reference articulation or suggest that articulation as a form of entry to their specific degrees may not work, as they are seeking to provide an immersive experience from day one of the degree programme – this is particularly the case for creative arts and theatre.

Between the college and university sectors a number of formal and informal pathways exist that learners can use for articulation with full credit. Where articulation pathways have been formalised and recognised by institutions, these should continue to be maintained and reviewed as appropriate with partners and learners in mind.

The informal routes could be considered as those that do not have articulation agreements between institutions yet have developed organically and the degree programmes accept HNs as entry qualifications into second and third year. This does not necessarily mean there are large numbers of students using this route, but they could present opportunities for development in institutions to strengthen informal pathways and increase the numbers of students who are aware of and using them.

Defining Articulation

Articulation from Scottish Colleges to Scottish Universities 2017-18 (Experimental Statistics) was the first publication following revisions to the National Articulation Database, and it provided all relevant stakeholders with information on articulation movement and activity, highlighting the mapping of the learner journey and work on widening access. It included the current definition of articulation:

Articulation is defined as a student gaining entry into second year of a degree with a Higher National Certificate (HNC) gained at a college, or into third year with a Higher National Diploma (HND) gained at college.

This definition is used when measuring articulation through the SFC's National Articulation Database and for the purposes of meeting targets in institutional Outcome Agreements. However, discussions

⁵ Scottish Funding Council (2019) [Articulation from Scottish Colleges to Scottish Universities 2017-18](#)

with colleges and universities have highlighted that this is too narrow a definition as it does not allow for recognition of movement between anything other than Higher National qualifications and degree programmes. It also means that currently not included in the national articulation figures is activity through the Open University in Scotland (OUiS), which provides students with credit transfer onto their own degrees, and at the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). These institutions' degrees have a structure that embraces the collaborative nature between college and university and provides coherent pathways onto degrees at each partner college. Therefore the current definition effectively under-reports the extent of articulation opportunities open to students.

The National Articulation Database also does not currently include the Additional Funded Places for articulation that were introduced by the SFC in 2013-14 (see below); therefore there is concern that the current measure of articulation (and subsequent reported numbers) does not fully reflect all articulation activity or movement by students.

The Forum recommends that the Scottish Funding Council should consider revising the current definition of articulation to:

- Expand the focus on product (Higher National Qualifications) and institutions (college to university); and include students enrolled in the Open University in Scotland, Scotland's Rural College and the University of the Highlands and Islands, which are presently not included; students on Additional Funded Places/Associate Student Paths; students entering Graduate Apprenticeships with previous study at SCQF level 7 and above qualifications; entrants with Foundation Apprenticeships and other relevant pathways (using the SCQF as a framework).
- Emphasise that articulation is about giving credit for previous study so that the same SCQF level in the same subject area is not repeated, opening up the potential for new and innovative approaches (such as transferring credit from any pre-university experience) that support the objective of articulation.

To support this recommendation, the Forum also suggests that:

- Scottish colleges and universities should engage with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) in exploring, developing and building pathways from Foundation Apprenticeships to HN and in-work to Graduate Apprenticeships.

Articulation in Practice

Current Models of College to University Transition in Operation

The majority of articulation in Scotland takes place using the 1+3 and 2+2 models, which represent the current definition (HNC into second year of a degree, HND into third year of a degree). These routes focus on mapping the curricula and ensuring that learning and teaching outcomes match, to enable learners who enter their degree with advanced standing – at either level – to seamlessly join the university cohort.

However, whilst these are the most common and well-known pathways, some universities have been looking at how different forms of articulation can be used to meet skills needs as well as providing shorter routes to degrees for people who already hold Higher National qualifications. One example is

considering articulation from a work-based approach, such as the BA Business Enterprise⁶ offered by **Edinburgh Napier University**, which gives credit for previous HE study and can be done part-time whilst the student is in employment. This degree is offered as a distance-learning, work-based model with time spent on the university campus for modules and workshops, with entry directly into third year with any qualifications at SCQF Level 8.

Online and Distance Learning

The **Open University in Scotland (OUiS)** provides distance learning and online degree courses and has operated a system of credit transfer for several years. It also offers articulation with on-campus delivery at some colleges, such as the BA (Hons) Social Sciences with Ayrshire College and Fife College.

The campus-based teaching module was developed with partner colleges to provide students with the opportunity to articulate to a degree programme in a subject area related to their HN qualification, benefiting from flexible online study provided by OUiS and face-to-face tutorials facilitated by and held at their local college. Tutorials at the college are typically held once per week and students are able to fit the distance learning elements of their study around other commitments, such as employment and/or family and caring responsibilities.

Students gain full credit recognition for their HND, entering the OUiS degree at year 3, and can complete an Honours degree in either 1 or 2 years depending on their circumstances and how many modules they can commit to. This model currently operates for Social Sciences students (HND Social Sciences articulating into BA (Hons) Social Sciences) at Ayrshire, Fife and North East Scotland College, and a similar programme operates at City of Glasgow with the OU Open degree with a variety of Social Sciences and Arts modules. OUiS is also piloting a BA (Hons) Social Work model at Ayrshire College in 2019-20 to support students articulating from HNC Social Services, and this activity complements the range of articulation pathways the OUiS has in place with all 15 regional colleges.

Tertiary

University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)

UHI is the only university based in its region, covering the Highlands and Islands, Perth and Kinross and Moray. UHI's mission statement is *"to have a transformational impact on the prospects of our region, its economy, its people and its communities."*

Access to their undergraduate and postgraduate study and research opportunities is through a distinctive educational partnership of colleges and research institutions. Each academic partner has its own character and contributes to the distinctive organisation that is the University of the Highlands and Islands. Some are relatively large colleges in the urban centres of the region such as Perth, Elgin and Inverness; others are smaller institutions, including those in island communities, and specialist institutions. Most also provide access to further education, while some have a primary focus on research. All, however, have a student-centred culture and unique approach to student learning, as the UHI model, crucially, does not have a transition between different institutions as the student progresses from HN to degree study. Therefore, students having to adjust to a different academic culture or different teaching methods is not a factor when they transition from Higher National study

⁶ [Edinburgh Napier University BA in Business & Enterprise \[webpage\]](#)

to degree study. There is an additional benefit whereby credit top-up issues do not exist as all courses are fully mapped together. UHI operates a fully inclusive admissions policy, which includes recognition of prior learning (RPL).

SRUC is the newer institution, founded in 2012 through a merger of three colleges - Barony College, Elmwood College and Oatridge College - and an HEI, the Scottish Agricultural College. Both UHI and SRUC have degree-awarding powers, and a key benefit of this model is the consistent culture that is provided to students in terms of teaching and support, making transition to degree study seamless.

At present the movement of students from Higher National qualifications to degree programmes within both UHI and SRUC is not included in the wider articulation numbers. This is because the students are matriculated as HEI students at the start of their course and included on the Higher Statistics Education Agency (HESA) figures. Therefore it is not possible to match student records from Further Education Statistics (FES) to HESA, as per the standard matching for articulation.

SFC is currently in a process of improving the National Articulation Database to enable comparable record structures to be constructed for UHI and SRUC, as the two tertiary institutions in Scotland. These new record structures will allow UHI and SRUC to go through the same matching system as college and university records from FES and HESA respectively. However, until the current definition of articulation changes, these figures will not contribute to the national articulation number. The question of what is considered articulation is important as it impacts both the definition and the measurement of the activity.

This refined process for matching will better capture both the internal and external matches for the tertiary institutions in terms of student articulation and movement. The focus of measuring and counting articulation remains on the product (Higher National Qualifications) and institutions (colleges).

Associate Student Scheme

The Associate Student Scheme was introduced in 2013 with additional funding from SFC to further support and encourage articulation pathways between colleges and universities. Funding was provided for over 1,000 additional articulating student places and institutions had to use the HNC into second year/HND into third year model of articulation.

A specific aspect of the scheme was the focus that was put on the pre- and post-entry support to be provided to students. This was called Associate Student Status and was to enable the student to become familiar with the university campus, processes and teaching methods; this was similar to practice already implemented in universities who were experienced in articulation. It was expected the Associate Student would have ongoing communication with the university whilst on their HN course, including IAG on university life and study. They would also have access to university facilities such as the library, union and gym, as well as access to university tutors on the linked degree course. Recruitment, attainment and retention of the students were expected to be the responsibility of both institutions.

The additional places were rolled into core funding from 2017, and many institutions with the articulation pathways have maintained the overall student support elements, with many students in the focus groups noting their access to university facilities as being helpful in their transition from HN to degree study. It should be noted that, at present, students who are on Associate Student pathways do not always count towards articulation; this is true when the students have been considered as

university students from the point of matriculation. However, as the Additional Funded Places model operates differently in various universities, some students on these places are included in the national figures. This issue is focused on the funding and not the actual experience of the student; for instance, at **Abertay University**, the 'additional place' students are treated exactly the same as other articulating students before and after transition onto the degree programme.

Franchised and Validated Degrees

A number of colleges offer franchised or validated degrees to students on the college campus. These provide the opportunity for students to study for a degree in familiar surroundings and close to home rather than travelling to a university. These two types of provision are defined as follows:

- A franchised degree is one where a college either partly or fully delivers a university's own programme, leading to a named university degree being awarded.
- A validated degree is one where the college designs and delivers its own programme, with the university overseeing the academic standard and quality of the programme.

Regional Partnerships

The majority of articulation takes place within regions, and this was recognised when the regional articulation hubs were established in 2008. These hubs were formed across five areas in Scotland – North-East, Fife and Tayside, Lothian and Borders, Glasgow and the West – based around the five universities that were most active in articulation at the time – Robert Gordon University, Abertay University, Edinburgh Napier University, Glasgow Caledonian University and the University of the West of Scotland. The Open University in Scotland also received funding to support national part-time delivery of articulation.

When funding for the hubs ended in 2016, these institutions were still responsible for over 80% of articulation activity in Scotland. Since that time, and with the additional onus on articulation from the Scottish Government through agendas such as the Commission on Widening Access and the 15-24 Learner Journey, more colleges and universities are considering how to improve and build articulation pathways, and, whilst learner choice and geographical freedom is essential, regional partnerships remain an important aspect of articulation.

Ayrshire College

Ayrshire College has worked with various partner universities in different ways to offer articulation pathways to their students, including developing a new articulation pathway from HNC Social Services to the BA (Hons) Social Work (Scotland) qualification. After completing the HNC, students can continue to study with the Open University in Scotland as independent students, allowing them to gain a professional Social Work qualification whilst remaining in Ayrshire.

Another successful partnership has been developed with the University of the West of Scotland where students can progress to year three of a degree from an HND in Accounting. The programme is delivered at Ayrshire College by college staff, which allows students to remain in the college and study in familiar surroundings.

Ayrshire College's case study above provides an example of how articulation models can be built by mutually supportive regional partners. Other methods are through groups such as the College University Subject Partnerships (CUSPs). CUSPs were established by the original regional articulation hub in Glasgow to enable discussion at subject level between university and partner college representation; and the Glasgow Caledonian University College Connect Strategy 2013-2020⁷ notes the importance of them in the local region with a commitment to continuing to develop the CUSPs and extend them to all GCU subject areas that admit college students.

Different Forms of Regional Partnerships

To understand the differences, challenges and opportunities that regional partnerships present, some colleges were invited to provide a perspective on how articulation operates in their particular settings: Forth Valley College (urban), Borders College (rural), and Fife College (cross-regional). These case studies are outlined below.

Forth Valley College – articulation in an urban setting

Forth Valley College has developed articulation agreements with the university in the region – the University of Stirling – and beyond, and now has articulation arrangements with 14 universities in Scotland. The college offers some HNC programmes to school pupils who can then directly enter year two.

The college has partnership degree programmes and holds quarterly meetings at both strategic and operational level to ensure the programme is working effectively and has smooth transitions. The programmes include Chemical, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering 2+2 routes with Heriot-Watt University; Heritage and Tourism, Digital Media, Software Development with Cyber Security and Applied Biological Sciences partnership routes with the University of Stirling; BEng Chemical Engineering degree, based on a 1 + 3 model of articulation with the Engineering Academy at the University of Strathclyde; a route between the HND Sound Production and BDes Sound for the Moving Image with the Glasgow School of Art; and for programmes in Computing and Engineering as part of an Associate Student programme with Edinburgh Napier University.

Students find these programmes useful because they have the status of a university student and access to both college and university facilities; they can study locally in the first instance, reducing living and travel costs for local students; class sizes are smaller which can be significant for students who may benefit from the more supportive and structured learning environment offered by the college; and courses are underpinned by important practical and work experience dimensions that complement academic classes. The college has found that having identifiable student cohorts at the outset has been important. Students are admitted largely via UCAS and all students are interviewed, attending a presentation and a one-to-one interview. This enables the college to build a relationship with the applicant from the outset and gives both the interviewer and interviewee a more informed judgement of the student, the course and the institution; the college feels it contributes to the high retention rate for these courses

The performance of students on partnership degree programmes compares favourably and competitively with those of mainstream university degree students. For example, in 2018-19 35% (6

⁷ Glasgow Caledonian University, [College Connect](#) [webpage]

of 17) of Software Development with Cyber Security students achieved a first-class degree and 24% (4 of 17) an upper-second class degree.

Borders College – articulation in a rural setting

Borders College offers a diverse portfolio that meets the needs of students across the Borders region, ranging from care, tourism and hospitality, business and computing, childcare, construction and engineering, art and graphic design, rural studies and sport. For many students, this provides an important step towards local employment and career development. Opportunities to access higher education within the Borders exist through vocational Graduate Apprenticeships, individual learning through the Open University and the programmes offered through Heriot-Watt University (HWU) campus in Galashiels. Borders College has a number of articulation agreements with universities, including HWU, Edinburgh Napier University, Queen Margaret University Edinburgh and the Open University. These routes do not however appear to meet the needs of the vast majority of learners within the Borders.

Each year approximately 7.5% of Borders College graduates articulate to university. The primary destination is progression from care courses at the college to the Nursing programmes at Edinburgh Napier University, an established and successful access route to nursing. Other popular routes include progression to Primary School Education programmes or Business degrees at a range of universities.

Progression to first year at university, rather than Advanced Standing, is the predominant route to university from Borders College. This is typical of rural colleges, where the proportion of students articulating from colleges is consistently low.

The financial and geographical challenges of travelling away from the region often deter students, particularly if they have other responsibilities. Another aspect relates to the unique community environment fostered within the Borders, which is as much of a pull that brings families into the region as it is a barrier to those wanting to experience life elsewhere. This may also explain why HE students from the Borders have a higher dropout rate within their first year of study. Many of those who do complete their university studies do not return to the Borders.

The South of Scotland Enterprise Partnership (SoSEP) recognises that this presents an unsustainable situation if the goal is to upskill the regional population. Therefore, in partnership with both Borders College and Dumfries & Galloway College, SoSEP have funded a Progression Manager to establish frameworks for bringing articulation into the South of Scotland region. Frameworks for local provision are beginning to take shape, involving collaboration between the two regional colleges to consolidate skills, share resources and ensure viability, as well as flexible and virtual delivery across the entire region, employer-led degree programmes, and closer partnerships with Universities, to facilitate joint development and delivery.

Fife College – articulation in a cross-regional setting

Fife College has tripled its formal articulation routes from HNC/D study on to degree courses within the last two years – from 84 to 256. All curriculum areas have at least one articulation route in place for every HND course and, currently, there are articulation routes to degree study with 15 university partners throughout the UK.

One partnership, with Abertay University, is supporting students to study their degree in the Fife College University Hub in Dunfermline in subject areas such as Business, Accounting, Computing, Creative Industries and Learning Disabilities. These degrees, including some at Honours level, are delivered under a franchise agreement between Abertay University and Fife College.

Since September 2019, the college has also been able to offer two new degree programmes – an innovative HND top-up degree for those in employment covering Business and Enterprise with Edinburgh Napier University, and another, for students progressing from HND Social Sciences, an on-campus delivery model of the Open University BA(Hons) Social Sciences degree.

The college has increased its work with partner universities and, subsequently, articulation routes, through the creation of a University Partnership Coordinator. This post underlines the college's commitment to widening education choices for young people and adults in Fife.

This provides the partner universities with a named contact at the college and has allowed for them to streamline their working and build closer relationships with universities. The college also invested in a marketing campaign to raise awareness of higher education and articulation through a '*Start Your Degree in Fife*' campaign, including school road shows and TV advertising.

As a UCAS centre, the college can analyse the application data and choices students make on their university applications, which enables open discussions with the universities where there is significant interest. Where the candidates are largely successful, this indicates a good fit between the HN course and the corresponding degree, and a formal articulation route may be possible.

In instances where students are unsuccessful, curriculum mapping can identify gaps where the college can then make moves to fill or to find alternative routes for the students which may allow them to articulate to university. Through this process, Fife College have approached new partners which have been identified by students and, through the establishment of formal routes, have encouraged other students to consider different options, sometimes further afield.

Making Articulation Work

Developing new articulation pathways is recognised as a resource-intensive process, and this report provides an example of institutional partners who have extensive and practical experience. **Robert Gordon University (RGU)** and **North East Scotland College (NESCol)** have a long tradition of articulation agreements and pathways that grew from the regional articulation hubs.

The **RGU & NESCol** case study below considers how articulation works through a joint approach including the need for subject-level reviews, marketing and transition support. The case study looks at how to consolidate agreements for articulation pathways and how to scope opportunities for new pathways.

Robert Gordon and North East Scotland College – Regional Partnerships

Robert Gordon University and North East Scotland College have demonstrated a lasting commitment to a regional model of articulation, pre-dating the creation of other regional hubs in 2008. Their model has provided alternative opportunities for learners in the region for twenty years, after the first articulation agreement between RGU and Banff and Buchan College was signed in 2001. Over time the partnership has deepened and the model has become more formalised with Associate College status following an initial Memoranda of Understanding. Most recently, RGU and NESCol consolidated their commitment to an inclusive tertiary education system with the formation of the Two Plus Alliance in 2018, aimed at taking the final steps towards a seamless educational pathway for learners.

Over many years, both institutions have formally embedded this agenda in their strategy and operations at every level, including amongst academics, student services, marketing and transitions, all working towards the same shared goal. College and university staff make subject level reviews a joint exercise; they discuss developments to the curriculum, rates of attainment and student satisfaction and transition arrangements on an annual basis. Having a single regional articulation scheme makes joint marketing of articulation pathways, under the Degree Link brand, much simpler. The brand's profile has grown, and now has its own online presence, as well as that found within RGU and NESCol. Degree Link is recognised regionally as a successful pathway for learners in the region.

It is down to the college and university's shared strategy that they have continued to grow and diversify the articulation offer available to students and industry in the region. Recent developments include the creation of a number of bespoke Top Up degrees at the University, specifically for HN leavers, because there wasn't previously a relevant degree programme available to progress into. New Top Up degrees in photography, computing and sports are only available to those with relevant HN qualifications as RGU only delivers these programmes at stage 3 and 4.

Always committed to evolving their partnership, the college and university are also working together to scope progression pathways between foundation apprenticeship and graduate apprenticeships.

These examples demonstrate the scope for creative solutions to be found in improving articulation.

Developing New Models for Articulation

COWA recommendation 10 asks that *"the Scottish Funding Council, working with universities and colleges, should explore more efficient, flexible and learner-centred models of articulation which provide learners with the choice of a broader range of institutions and courses."* In the wider implementation of this recommendation, it was also asked that, where appropriate, funding should be sought to support new models, and that institutions should be able to test and evaluate new models of articulation via a programme of pilots. The National Articulation Forum would propose this be supported through the Scottish Community of Access and Participation Practitioners (SCAPP) network which is outlined in the chapter entitled **Sharing Good Practice**.

Areas of Limited Degree Provision

Some institutions are already exploring new models of articulation, particularly where there is little or no degree provision in the local areas, such as the work carried out between **Borders College** and **Dumfries and Galloway College** examining articulation provision in the South of Scotland. This work,

carried out through their joint *Get That Degree*⁸ programme, explores how the two colleges can make degree provision both available and attractive to learners, through a supported environment.

HEIs Developing Articulation Pathways

The case studies outlining development work being carried out by the **University of Edinburgh** and **University of Glasgow** are given below. The University of Edinburgh is currently looking at opportunities to work with regional college partners on articulation pathways, with the initial focus being on developing 1 + 3 models (HNC into second year of a degree). The University of Glasgow's case study outlines their partnerships with **Glasgow Kelvin College**, **Glasgow Clyde College**, **City of Glasgow College** and **Dumfries and Galloway College** in building articulation opportunities for HNC students into the second year of degree programmes.

The University of Edinburgh

Traditionally, articulation with advanced entry has not been a common entry route to the University of Edinburgh. However, this is changing. The University has now committed to working with regional college partners to establish new and formal entry routes to the university, focusing on a 1+3 model with articulation direct into the second year with an HNC.

The first students to benefit from the new, formal articulation agreement will articulate into year two of a degree on September 2021. The University has focused on programmes in the School of Health in Social Science and Edinburgh College of Art, which offer first year students flexibility in module choice, making mapping core modules between the HN and the degree an easier task. Direct entry into year two ensures that the articulating students have a year to immerse themselves in the University's culture before they start their junior Honours. The programmes chosen also have fewer than 50 students on them, which allows more staff-student contact, support and integration into the programme.

Some of the transition support will be discipline-specific, with opportunities created for students before and after they start the degree to cover key concepts and areas that are not part of the HN. Other transition support will be more generic to cover academic study skills, academic culture and ensuring a sense of belonging and community to enable students to succeed and get the most out of their time at the University.

Across the University, degree programme leads and teaching staff have been enthusiastic and engaged in looking at how to support the 1+3 model. It has also sparked interest in potentially developing articulation routes from qualifications other than Higher Nationals, including apprenticeship pathways and part-time upskilling opportunities for those already in employment. A more challenging aspect has been to adapt the admissions processes for programmes that are already highly selective, and ensure fair admissions decisions.

⁸ [Borders College Get That Degree Through Your Local College \[webpage\]](#)

The University of Glasgow

Since 2018, University of Glasgow and Glasgow Regional Colleges Board have worked together to develop an HNC articulation programme for students to progress from an HNC in the three Glasgow Colleges and Dumfries & Galloway College directly into second year of the University. Bespoke 1+3 models, developed jointly by the colleges and university, combine a curriculum-matched 15-credit HNC (which is equivalent to the number of credits in the first year of a degree) with additional teaching/transition days on the University campus and summer school to address any curriculum gaps and provide taught experience of the University's teaching and assessment style. Students working towards the HNC attend regular *'Tuesdays at Glasgow'* throughout the year and are enrolled as University of Glasgow students with access to all resources, including the virtual learning environment, library, gym and the careers service.

The primary objective behind this partnership is to widen access to the University. Students are targeted by widening-participation criteria as part of Glasgow's contextualised admissions policy: SIMD20/40 postcodes, care experience, estrangement, carer, asylum seeker and refugee. Once on the HNC, students apply to Glasgow via UCAS with a guaranteed offer of entry to year two if they pass all HNC modules and summer school, and achieve an A in the HN graded unit and a good college reference. Three broad subject areas were initially targeted: life sciences, social sciences and engineering.

The University and Glasgow Kelvin College produced the first bespoke HNC. Twenty-two students enrolled on the first HNC cohort and 19 are now at Glasgow, 18 direct into life sciences year two and one to the Medicine foundation year programme.

Both Glasgow Kelvin and the University of Glasgow credit the success of this model to several factors. These include: close partnership development and facilitation with continued dialogue at every stage, from creating the 15 credit HN and additional content, to student recruitment and progression to the University; the bespoke nature of the programme also brought a tight-knit, supportive student cohort committed to progression to Glasgow. The approach was also heavily informed by data analysis and review of the performance and retention figures of HNC, HND and Access programme entrants to years one and two of degree study at Glasgow, to assess what level of student support and preparation would be most effective.

Articulation routes have now been set up via this bespoke model for HNCs in Social Sciences at Glasgow Clyde and Engineering at City of Glasgow. Similar curriculum matching for the required 15 HN credits and on-campus academic content has produced articulation routes to year 2 of nearly all Engineering degree courses and Social Sciences degrees including Politics, Sociology, Economic and Social History, Social and Public Policy and Central and Eastern European studies. For example, the Engineering HNC includes Maths taught at HND level to prepare the students for year two entry.

Research and evaluation of the programme has commenced. The progress of all students is being monitored to inform future development and measure the efficacy of the programme in preparing access students to articulate successfully from HNC into Year 2 at Glasgow. Robust articulation pathways will continue to develop in this controlled, evidence-based way.

In this chapter, we have explored both ways in which articulation can be increased, and the merits of having a broader definition of articulation, so that it can be more effectively measured to guide the development of policy.

The National Articulation Forum recommends:

- That colleges and universities search for innovative approaches to support articulation, focusing particularly on opportunities for students to attend universities that currently have few opportunities for articulation, and on geographical areas where there is little degree provision.
- That a broader definition of articulation be introduced, to take into account the wide range of routes by which students receive credit in progressing to degree provision.



Subject Alignment

Learner Focus

"I would have studied Financial Services, but the HN didn't link – perhaps if the HND was more flexible with optional courses to filter, this would help decide where you want to go afterwards."

Student, Edinburgh Napier University

Where colleges and universities have used resources to develop and map curriculums, ensuring a close match between subject areas, the student transition experience is, generally, smoother and simpler as they move from Higher National (HN) qualifications to a degree programme. During the student focus groups, learners who were on or had used an articulation pathway gave their feedback in relation to subject alignment.

Students who were studying on creative courses (Music and Drama) noted a lack of articulation opportunities in their regional areas, in terms of related subjects at degree level; there were instances where students could not find a suitable match for their HN - for example, popular music does not have articulation routes into classical music study - or the university did not offer advanced standing. In the case of drama, there was at least one example of an English university offering articulation to students from Scottish colleges, with students having already attended auditions south of the border.

There was a desire from some students to have a *"full university experience"* and, even when they had been offered advanced standing, they elected to enter at a lower level, with students stating: *"I decided to move straight into first year. I was worried I would miss some stuff; I'm really glad I took the extra year;"* and *"the type of degree it is [teaching], I'd rather not articulate – I'd like to get as much experience as possible."* The students who had articulated also suggested that potential entrants consider lower years of entry if they are unsure of what they wish to study. This view was expressed by students from various degrees who voiced a desire to be able to choose their entry points where possible.

Another difficulty highlighted was the difference between the academic work in colleges and universities (as experienced by the student) and feeling it was more difficult to move from HND into third year than from HNC into second year. One student, who elected to enter their degree in the second year, noted: *"I definitely wouldn't have wanted to go into third year, as the academic work was too different."* Other students - from various different subject areas - agreed the difference in study from an HND into third year without appropriate academic support and preparation was a challenge. The need for support around essay writing and referencing was raised by many, but not all students, and where this support did exist students highlighted its importance. In general, students called for additional support where it did not exist and were receptive to taking up support where it did exist.

There is more to be done in the college and university subject-mapping work to ensure students feel confident about their abilities at each stage of the articulation offer. This could involve increased levels of self-directed study and referencing at college: *"Law uses different referencing and that wasn't taught at college."* Some students also described feeling *"babied"* at college, making transition more difficult. They called for study skills appropriate to university study to be taught at college.

When students made the transition, some noted that tutors on their degree programme were aware of the student make-up in their groups, with some students having been there since first year and others joining in later years on articulation pathways. It was noted that these tutors were often aware of what materials the student had access to and what they may require: *"Associate Student status did enable us to access papers, etc. but there is still catch up and you don't know how far in-depth it goes."*

Positive aspects from the students in relation to subject alignment and curriculum mapping centred on the support from college lecturers and their knowledge and advice as to which degrees were linked to the HNs, as well as the students' own ability to manage the change from college to university study: *"The issue is not entering in year two or three; it is important to take it at your own pace – take it steady. Finish your HND, it's not as scary as you may think."* There was credit given to the practical aspects included in HNs, and the additional knowledge this gave articulating students when they moved onto their degree. It was also mentioned that options for articulation were improving every year, and it was suggested this could be as a result of the student satisfaction surveys.

Based on the student focus groups, most students who used an articulation pathway felt it was well-matched in terms of curriculum and they felt able to cope at their chosen level of entry. However, there is still work to be done, particularly in subject areas with little or no articulation opportunities or in ensuring curriculums remain well-mapped and current, with all students having the opportunity to access additional support in areas such as study skills if they require.

Matching the Curriculums

There is a broad understanding between colleges and universities that the offer of articulation revolves around the matching of curricula and whether the receiving universities are using their available student places for articulation, as Scottish universities operate on a capped places system. This means that each year there is a set number of Scottish Government funded student places available for all entrants.

We already know the reasons why articulation opportunities should exist. These include: no loss of time or money for the student; economic validity to the public purse when qualification levels are not repeated; giving appropriate value and credence to previous study at SCQF Levels 7 and 8; and providing all learners with as much choice as possible for their learning and employability pathway. With articulation rates in some subjects being higher than others, however, and for certain subjects higher in some universities than others, the National Articulation Forum was keen to develop understanding of the reasons for this.

Reasons for Articulation Rates

In January 2020, discussions took place with the majority of HEIs to enable them to feedback on their own experiences of subject alignment and why, in their own institutions, some subjects had higher or lower rates of articulation than others. It should be noted that discussions were based on the information that is currently available through the National Articulation Database, which only provides data up to AY2017-18, and so is not fully reflective of the most current work that institutions are doing on articulation.

Broadly, there were three main reasons for higher and lower rates of articulation into degree subjects:

- In some cases, where there is a cognate HN course, there was no pathway into a university for articulating students.
- There was no HN course that was sufficiently close in content to allow articulation.
- There was limited demand for articulation into those subject areas.

Absence of a Pathway where a Cognate HN Programme Exists

In some universities, there are few or no opportunities for articulation with full credit, even where there are HN courses that are cognate to some degree programmes. Fundamentally, this is because it has not been considered feasible to match curricula between HN and degree programmes. Often the reason for this is that the curriculum the university wishes to teach, for academic reasons, is not compatible with articulation from an HN course. However, we heard evidence that barriers related to history or academic culture – often at subject level – are also significant in some cases. We feel strongly that there are many cases where articulation routes could be created without fundamental changes in academic philosophy.

Lack of Corresponding HN Courses

Where there was no corresponding or related HN course in the degree, creation of an articulation pathway through subject alignment was not possible. This was particularly identified for areas such as English and Physics, subjects where students would usually enter as school leavers. The SQA HN Review provides an opportunity for colleges to highlight where there is a lack of corresponding or related HN courses. In recognition of the current lack of appropriate HNs, the University of St Andrews, North East Scotland College and the University of Aberdeen have all begun to look at ways to align those degree subjects through other HNs such as Social Sciences and Applied Sciences. Whilst some of these considerations are in the early stages, it is encouraging to note they are taking place.

Limited Demand

Whilst the other two points relate to an absence of pathways, this particular point relates to the number of students using existing partnerships and articulation pathways (between colleges and universities) into certain degree courses. Many universities noted they develop and build articulation pathways through discussion with their college partners, who identify the degree route as suitable ongoing study for their students. In some cases, insufficient demand is evident once the programme has been created. In some cases, demand might be improved by ensuring students who may wish to articulate onto degree programmes – where pathways may or may not exist – can access full IAG on the expectations and entry requirements set down by the receiving institutions. They also need clear IAG on what pathways do exist, all of which points clearly to the need for a national and centralised map of articulation opportunities.

Additional Points for Consideration

The institutional discussions also highlighted other more specific elements that impacted on articulation that may affect the rates for certain subjects, such as the need to accumulate a certain number of placement hours before articulating to a university course. This is specifically an issue for Nursing degrees, where students must complete a certain number of hours before being able to progress to the next level of study. Where an HN student has been unable to accrue the required placement hours, they sometimes have an opportunity to undertake them over the summer months (which isn't always possible for those with work/family commitments) or are unable to make them up at all.

It was noted that some subjects still require specific SQA qualifications, such as Primary Education Teaching (Higher English and Maths at National 5 or equivalent level) therefore even when an HEI has developed an articulation route from an HN course onto Primary Education, the students must still meet the minimum entry requirements set down by the General Teaching Councils for Scotland (GTCS). These subjects may be available to study in college; however IAG on additional requirements must be available from an early stage so that students are aware. The **University of Aberdeen** has developed online courses that bridge this specific gap, which are available to all students, not only those wishing to study at the university.

A further point was made that students articulating to a university, especially one in a different region from their home town, may be trying to hold down a job or have caring responsibilities, which could result in retention issues. Whilst many students work and have other commitments, it was raised during the discussions as concerns around poor retention was often given as a reason for not taking HN students onto second or third year, noting that additional commitments could complicate the transition process.

As noted above, all Scottish universities have a cap on the number of funded places they can take for Scottish-domiciled and, currently, EU students. This reason was given by some HEIs for not expanding their rates of articulation. This is not something that can be altered by the National Articulation Forum but does emphasise the role of funding and regulation in supporting articulation in a capped system.

Below is a case study from the **University of St Andrews** that provides detail on how curriculum mapping has been managed between themselves and **Dundee and Angus College**.

The University of St Andrews – Review of Articulation

The University of St Andrews identified the Faculty of Arts as a priority area for articulation. The Faculty already had a number of entrants from college, but this had not previously been via articulation agreements. The Faculty was keen to learn from the experience that colleagues in the Schools of Biology and Chemistry had in aligning subjects between HN and degree. A working group was established, overseen by the Vice Principal (Education), which also drew on the expertise from Admissions and the Global Office. Four degree subjects were thought to be the best match for the HNC Social Sciences, delivered by Dundee and Angus College, to give students the option to enter into year two of the degree programme. To help align the learning between the HN and Medieval History, Scottish History, Social Anthropology and English degrees, students will take a module from the Master of Arts (MA) Combined Studies General degree programme. Students will also be supported by an Education Liaison Officer in Admissions and a student mentor. St Andrews faces a challenge in relation to the potential number of students entering through this route as competition for a fixed number of places is already high. In spite of this challenge, the University is discussing a similar agreement with Fife College and exploring options for routes into other subjects.

Universities seeking to develop articulation pathways, and in particular to break away from the idea of first-year entry as the norm, might find the National Articulation Database useful as a resource that shows the range of articulation routes that exist across Scotland.

Recognising and Building Pathways

Whilst we know many universities and colleges already work together to support articulation through the development of new routes and the distribution of clear and concise IAG, it is recognised that articulation may not be immediately obvious or practical for all degrees. In some cases, degrees in professional subjects might not have a corresponding college course, suggesting that articulation will not be possible. However, the section below on professionally accredited degrees demonstrates where situations have been overcome and articulation pathways are being brokered. This is encouraging in that universities are looking at their institutional choice to facilitate articulation and how it could meet the needs of the full student cohort.

The National Articulation Forum believes:

- The SQA's HN Review has great potential to facilitate improved subject alignment between college and university, therefore improving the volume of articulation and reducing the discontinuity of learning style that is often experienced by articulating students. This work should be taken forward as a matter of priority, with meaningful involvement from both the college and university sectors.

Particularly from a college perspective, there may be perceived concerns around a potential lack of university places being available in second and third year of the degree for articulating students wishing to enter at those levels. This situation is only likely to occur when an institution has not planned for articulation as a route on to the degree; this planning can be managed through the use of college applications and interest expressed by HN entrants who have to enter first year due to a lack of articulation pathways.

The Forum suggests that colleges and universities should make use of available evidence to develop new articulation routes, including:

- Evidence of student demand for articulation. This should be evident within the National Articulation Database and should be used to inform planning for further articulation opportunities. Universities are also encouraged to look at advanced progression figures for their own institutions as evidence of demand for development of further pathways.
- Evidence on skills gaps in the Scottish economy should be used as supplementary information when building new and reviewing existing articulation pathways.
- Existing data and intelligence on articulation pathways and activity across the sector should be used for planning of new articulation pathways.

Where a college is a UCAS centre, the UCAS Advisor Portal also offers data on courses selected (students can make up to five choices) which can allow for popular routes to be identified. These data can all be used in anonymised form as the basis of conversations between college and university partners on identifying gaps and areas of high volume in pathways; this could in turn influence changes and planning to overall articulation pathways and agreements.

The current SFC 10-year strategy for articulation seeks a global target that 75% of all HN students who move to a degree programme should be able to do so with advanced standing (full credit) if they choose. This target refers to students who articulate into broadly the same subject group at university. When students do not receive full credit for their HN, they may be offered entry to their chosen degree at a lower entry level or elect to move into a different subject area where no credit transfer may be available.

Success of Articulation

Based on the breadth of agreements and range of subjects covered, there presently exists a successful model of college to university transition in Scotland. However, there is still far more to be done if articulation is to truly be an equal route into degree programmes, and to meet the Commissioner for Fair Access' push in the 2019 annual report, *Building on Progress Towards Fair Access*⁹, for all Scottish institutions, on "improving articulation rates between HNs and degrees", which states that now is the

⁹ Commissioner for Fair Access (2019) [Annual Report 2019: Building on Progress Towards Fair Access](#)

time “to embed these initiatives and to be able to measure progress against targets.” **Abertay University** provides a case study on offering guaranteed progression:

Abertay University – Guaranteed Progression for Partner Colleges

Every year, over a third of Abertay’s new undergraduate students join in year two or three of a degree programme. This recruitment pattern comes from its decision to move to a model of automatic progression for students on articulating programmes at our local partner colleges. This partnership has been developed between the University and three local partner colleges, Dundee and Angus, Fife, and Al-Maktoum. All partner institutions have invested the time and energy into aligning the curriculum and programme between HN and degree from the outset, which means that if the college students successfully complete their HN programme, the University has the confidence to know that they can progress directly into year two or three of the relevant degree programme with no loss of time or additional entry requirements or conditions. This approach has enabled all institutions to grow the number of opportunities for full credit articulation.

It is possible to offer automatic progression because of the close partnerships at academic and professional level between university and college. There are regular meetings between senior staff. On the academic side, colleagues work together to discuss portfolio developments and put a range of subject-specific support mechanisms in place to assist students before the transition. This can be anything from making the University’s facilities for civil engineering available to students whilst doing their HN, to offering C++ online to computing HN students who will move into the University’s computing division. The University’s CyberSecurity division sends all new students a ‘hack pack’ with key information to help students prepare.

This partnership extends into a joint approach to communication and recruitment with students. They host an annual clearing advice fair on campus with the shared objective that every prospective student leaves the event with a route to an Abertay degree either directly or through a partner

2017-18 Articulation

As noted earlier, the first publication using figures from the National Articulation Database, *Articulation from Scottish Colleges to Scottish Universities 2017-18 (Experimental Statistics)* was published in 2019.¹⁰ Whilst the intention is not to replicate those data in this report, it may be useful to highlight some key statistics.

It should also be noted that whilst these are the most up-to-date figures that are currently published, they do show historic data and may not reflect actual articulation activity for 2019-20. More recent figures are expected to be published by the SFC in 2020.

The National Articulation Database and the articulation pathways that are reported on are based on students who articulate within three years of completion of their college course. This is in order to give a consistent measurement of articulation into degree subjects that were broadly linked to the previous HN study. The key focus is on **Advanced Standing**, where a student gets full academic credit for their prior learning.

¹⁰ Scottish Funding Council (2019) [Articulation from Scottish Colleges to Scottish Universities 2017-18](#)

Table 1 shows articulation (Advanced Standing) figures between 2014-15 and 2017-18, as well as those for Advanced Progression (partial credit, usually HND into second year of a degree) and Progression¹¹ (no credit, usually HNC and HND into first year of a degree). It should be noted that these figures do not include articulation activity within UHI or SRUC.

Table 1: Articulation figures between 2014-15 and 2017-18

	Advanced Standing (AS)	Advanced Progression (AP)	Progression (P)	Total
2014-15	3,539	847	3,233	7,619
2015-16	3,869	846	2,867	7,582
2016-17	3,722	690	3,035	7,447
2017-18	4,021	791	3,014	7,826

Source: Articulation from Scottish Colleges to Scottish Universities, SFC, April 2019.

In 2017-18, we can see the number of students who received advanced standing amounted to just over 4,000 students – approximately 51% of students who entered university degree programmes with HN qualifications in that year.

The Commissioner for Fair Access recognises the SFC’s ambition for 75% of HN students receiving full credit for articulating in broadly the same subject area by 2030, but noted that clearly more needs to be done. It is likely that it will be achieved by looking at the 10% of students who received partial credit and entered with advanced progression, and the approximately 38% of HN students who entered with no credit. It is recognised that these figures are a combination of several aspects, including: a lack of subject match between the HN and the degree; students choosing not to take up an offer of advanced standing; the lack of existing articulation route onto the degree, as well as universities not having an articulation pathway that recognises the previous HE study in the same subject area.

Meeting Articulation Ambitions

Table 2 shows the figures for Advanced Standing, Advanced Progression and Progression as a total for all available years, as well as for HNC and HND individually.

The figures in Table 2 include those moving from college to university using their HNC/HND course as an entry qualification in a new subject area. Those students will be starting in the first year of their degree programme, so are repeating a year of study (Progression). All of these figures can be broken down further to show articulation activity by institution.

It can be seen from the figures in Table 4 for 2017-18 that the majority of universities have active articulation pathways, and that college students are utilising them to gain Advanced Standing and finish their degree with no loss of time. There is, nevertheless, a wide range of practice, with some universities taking many students with Advanced Standing and Advanced Progression, and some taking either no students or very few with Advanced Standing. These tables also demonstrate the large numbers of students entering university through articulation routes on Progression only, which is receiving no credit from prior study at SCQF level 7 and above. This includes students who elect to go into a lower entry year of their degree than they may have been offered by the university, therefore do not accept the credit awarded for their previous study at SCQF level 7 and above.

¹¹ Terminology used in this report is defined in the Glossary, which can be found in Appendix A.

Table 2: Articulation figures by qualification on entry between 2014-15 and 2017-18

All HNs	Advanced Standing (AS)	Advanced Progression (AP)	Progression (P)	Total
2014/15	3,674	878	4,330	8,882
2015/16	4,061	887	4,047	8,995
2016/17	3,895	723	4,445	9,063
2017/18	4,233	832	4,698	9,763
HNC				
2014/15	971	-	2,936	3,907
2015/16	1,140	-	2,961	4,101
2016/17	1,109	-	3,032	4,141
2017/18	1,255	-	3,248	4,503
HND				
2014/15	2,703	878	1,394	4,975
2015/16	2,921	887	1,086	4,894
2016/17	2,786	723	1,413	4,922
2017/18	2,978	832	1,450	5,260

Source: Articulation from Scottish Colleges to Scottish Universities, SFC, April 2019 (includes student movement at UHI or SRUC).

A dash (-) in a cell indicates that this number is less than five. This is the approach used by the National Articulation Database for reasons of anonymity.

For colleges noted as being part of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) and SRUC in table 4, these figures will not show the full extent of student movement between HNs and degree programmes within that tertiary body as this is not included in the current definition of articulation. This is also, broadly, the same issue for numbers associated with SRUC and their partner colleges in terms of counting articulating student numbers in the national figures.

Table 3: Articulation from College, as shown by institution 2017-18 (Overall)

College	Advanced Standing (AS)	Advanced Progression (AP)	Progression (P)	Total
Argyll College (UHI)	-	0	5	5
Ayrshire College	374	-	384	758
Borders College	19	-	38	57
City of Glasgow College	831	197	712	1,740
Dumfries and Galloway College	50	-	78	128
Dundee and Angus College	287	65	357	709
Edinburgh College	446	111	477	1,034
Fife College	155	40	231	426
Forth Valley College	89	34	156	279
Glasgow Clyde College	392	96	398	886
Glasgow Kelvin College	205	51	231	487
Inverness College (UHI)	24	0	52	76
Lewis Castle College (UHI)	-	0	7	7
Moray College (UHI)	26	0	60	86
New College Lanarkshire	243	44	366	653
Newbattle Abbey College	-	0	17	17
North East Scotland College	540	110	314	964
North Highland College (UHI)	-	0	15	15
Orkney College (UHI)	-	0	-	0
Perth College (UHI)	24	0	106	130
Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)	20	-	50	70
Shetland College (UHI)	-	0	10	10
South Lanarkshire College	104	11	98	213
West College Scotland	287	59	348	694
West Highland College (UHI)	-	0	-	0
West Lothian College	103	-	175	278
UHI college (unknown)	-	0	7	7
Grand Total	4,233	832	4,698	9,763

Source: Articulation from Scottish Colleges to Scottish Universities, SFC, April 2019.

A dash (-) in a cell indicates that this number is less than five. This is the approach used by the National Articulation Database for reasons of anonymity.

Table 4: Articulation into University 2017-18, as shown by institution (Overall)

University	Advanced Standing (AS)	Advanced Progression (AP)	Progression [including Flexible OU Progression] (P)	Total
Aberdeen, The University of	33	62	157	252
Abertay University	304	82	145	531
Dundee, The University of	70	61	326	457
Edinburgh Napier University	538	76	215	829
Edinburgh, The University of	20	32	72	124
Glasgow Caledonian University	990	49	707	1,746
Glasgow School of Art	22	21	31	74
Glasgow, The University of	13	0	224	237
Heriot-Watt University	117	55	162	334
Open University in Scotland, The ¹²	0	0	518	518
Queen Margaret University Edinburgh	122	24	136	282
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	0	0	21	21
Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)	35	0	9	44
St Andrew's, The University of	-	0	14	14
Stirling, The University of	37	21	418	476
Strathclyde, The University of	27	44	420	491
The Robert Gordon University	561	72	265	898
University of the Highlands and Islands	67	18	75	160
West of Scotland, The University of the	1,275	215	783	2,273
Non-Scottish University	-	0	0	0
Grand Total	4,233	832	4,698	9,763

Source: Articulation from Scottish Colleges to Scottish Universities, SFC, April 2019.

A dash (-) in a cell indicates that this number is less than five. This is the approach used by the National Articulation Database for reasons of anonymity.

Freedom of Choice Not to Claim Full Academic Credit

The value of choice is crucial for all learners, and sometimes students exercise this choice by choosing not to accept an offer of articulation. This was highlighted in the student focus groups where one learner noted that it was their love of learning that made them go into first year of university. Other reasons that students choose not to articulate include:

- The student's desire to undertake a four year programme of university study, after completing their HN studies.
- The student's lack of confidence (i.e. in academic ability, in social aspects, in knowledge of university campus and procedures).

¹² Students can apply for credit transfer at any time during their Open University (OU) degree; therefore data for the OUIs does not match other institutions. SFC is working with the OU to improve representation of their students on the National Articulation Database.

- The student’s wish to move with peers from the same college course to first year of a university course (however, other students highlight that articulating with peers is an equally good experience).

The National Articulation Forum would like to see colleges and universities using information available through the National Articulation Database to look at and compare degree outcomes and success rates of students who enter university in first year with direct entrants who enter university in second and third year with full credit. The information in the Database also has the potential to be used by institutions to inform regular pathway development.

Subject Pathways

The National Articulation Database publication provided detail of subject pathways by both college source subjects and the university destination subjects. Information on subjects with the greatest numbers of Advanced Standing was drawn from and combined data in articulation years 2014-15 to 2017-18) and is shown in the table below:

Table 5: Top College Source Subjects for Advanced Standing (Combining all Articulation Years from 2014-15 to 2017-18)¹³

College HE Subject	Total	AS	AP	P	%AS	%AP	%P
Accountancy/Accounting	1,606	1,189	145	272	74.0%	9.0%	16.9%
Sports and Hobbies	1,875	988	299	588	52.7%	15.9%	31.4%
Business Studies	1,340	910	139	291	67.9%	10.4%	21.7%
Applied Social Science/Studies	2,564	854	256	1,454	33.3%	10.0%	56.7%
Computer Studies	1,042	581	173	288	55.8%	16.6%	27.6%
Management	735	565	36	134	76.9%	4.9%	18.2%
Mechanical Engineering	802	511	62	229	63.7%	7.7%	28.6%
Music	718	471	81	166	65.6%	11.3%	23.1%
Computer Science	643	424	112	107	65.9%	17.4%	16.6%
Administrative Management	674	415	70	189	61.6%	10.4%	28.0%

Source: SFC, February 2020.

There are some interesting subjects to note, for instance the inclusion of Accounting on the list. Accounting is a professionally accredited degree, which is generally considered a more difficult degree for articulation pathways due to specific learning outcomes required by their professional bodies. Based on information from the National Articulation Database, however, over 1,115 students gained Advanced Standing onto an Accounting degree with this particular college HE subject between 2014-15 and 2017-18), with a further 122 gaining Advanced Progression. Other degree subjects that had articulation pathways for HN Accounting students include Finance, Combined Studies, Business Studies and Management Studies. This would suggest that there is no actual reason for articulation

¹³ Table 5 contains raw figures (combined for all years) and is not limited to Scottish-domiciled. It also covers entrants from all pathways and is not limited to three years from qualifying.

not to take place in any degree subject; it is within the gift of all universities to explore their curriculums for matching with HNs.

Subjects that are found to have lower numbers of articulating students often have high numbers of applications for a limited number of places (e.g. English Studies), professional body requirements (e.g. Law) or admission requirements such as portfolios (Fine Art). On the issue of placement hours in Nursing, most of these are delivered by colleges through the HNC Care and Administrative Practice (CAP) course or on the first two years of the degree course, meaning students on a potential HND route may not have access to those placements. SFC is working with Scottish Government and NHS Education for Scotland (NES) on monitoring these articulation routes and seeking improvements where possible.

The [webpages](#) for the **College Connect Transition Programme**, which is supported by **Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)**, note that the programme has been working with colleges, employers, College Development Network (CDN) and SQA to develop HND Care and Administrative Practice in parallel with GCU's Bachelor of Nursing Degree. GCU is now the first Scottish university offering advanced standing pathways into specialist nursing fields, including Adult, Mental Health, Learning Disability and Child. This follows on from GCU's existing successful HNC Care and Administrative Practice pathways into several Allied Health Profession degrees.

Professionally Accredited Degrees

University degrees that have accreditation¹⁴ from the relevant professional institute or body attached to them are often in high demand with applicants. In some professional subjects, such as Accounting and Engineering, articulation is widespread. In other subjects, such as Education and Law, the requirements of professional bodies sometimes limit opportunities for articulation. This is generally because the degree content has already been approved by the professional body (e.g. the Law Society of Scotland or the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS)) and some universities do not recognise the content of Higher National Qualifications as being able deliver the outcomes required on the first one or two years of those specific degrees.

Law

The Law Society of Scotland has procedures in place for universities to apply for the aligning of SCQF Level 7 and 8 credits with accredited law degrees that lead to the solicitor route – specifically the LLB; this is called a Scottish Exempting Degree.

The Law Society of Scotland is also in talks with **Edinburgh Napier University** and **Edinburgh College** regarding mapping of curricula to facilitate articulation. As a first step, both institutions have agreed to undertake a mapping exercise based on the Law Society of Scotland's Foundation learning outcomes and Edinburgh Napier University's core LLB modules. After this has been completed, it will be reviewed by all parties to determine the next course of action required.

¹⁴ Professional subjects such as Accountancy, Dentistry, Divinity, Law (LLB), Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Education/Teaching, and Engineering.

Teaching

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) has an entry memorandum¹⁵ in place which states: “As long as an applicant meets the minimum entry requirements, it is for the universities to decide whether to accept or reject an applicant in line with their general admissions policy.” The minimum entry requirements relate to English at SCQF Level 6/Higher or accepted alternative, and Mathematics at SCQF Level 5/National 5 or accepted alternative. Therefore articulation is not impossible, but at present the most direct route for articulating students into teaching would be via a Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), application to which is open to all students who graduate with a degree.

In order to give increased opportunities for articulation in a system with capped student numbers, the National Articulation Forum proposes:

- Universities should consider ring-fencing some places on undergraduate and Graduate Apprenticeship degrees to give articulating students more certainty about their prospects for advanced entry into university from partner colleges and from the range of work-based learning programmes. This might be in the form of a guaranteed place to an applicant who is articulating from a partner college. It is recognised that this is challenging for universities when set in a wider context of high retention rates and a capped number of places. The Scottish Government and SFC should carefully consider how this is supported, linking to recommendation 6 (below).

Creating Articulation Opportunities

Subject alignment is about looking at where the gaps exist and creating articulation opportunities for potential students. Whilst articulation can aid widening access to degrees and meeting targets, it should not only be focused on supporting those learners, but be about building positive and robust links across sectors that serve all learners, institutions and the economy.

As noted above, articulation can be used not only to meet student aspirations but also to address workforce planning and meeting skills needs in areas such as Nursing, Teaching and Engineering. The **University of Aberdeen** has developed an articulation route into Engineering, a degree subject that is recognised as having higher levels of Mathematics required from all students, and where there is a gap between the level of Mathematics of the corresponding HN course and the level required for university study. The University provides several routes for articulating students into engineering as a subject, including a two-week transitional summer school to support students with Mathematics content. More details can be found in their [online brochure](#).

It is recognised that subject mapping and curriculum alignment are resource intensive processes that require time, effort and money, and that commitment is necessary from all institutions involved. Added to this is the need to ensure that all students are supported before, during and after transition in order to be successful in their studies.

Due to this and the desire to see the creation and improvement of sustained articulation pathways the National Articulation Forum suggests:

- The Scottish Government should consider how it might support the recommendations made by the National Articulation Forum in the way it provides financial support to the universities and colleges.

¹⁵ General Teaching Council for Scotland (2013) [Memorandum on Entry Requirements to Programmes of Initial Teacher Education in Scotland](#)



Transition Support

Learner Focus

“College could do more – for example, in referencing for those who want to go onto uni; I think referencing is a massive thing at uni so if you join a degree in third year, you need to be more prepared.”

Student, Edinburgh Napier University

The main topic of discussion in all the student focus groups was around transition between college and university, including what had worked and where students felt they would have benefitted from more support. The learner focus sections under the previous chapters are all relevant to this and should be considered alongside the points made below. One point that was repeatedly made by students was the issue of their work/family/caring commitments, which were usually the reasons they wished to articulate locally. For them it also meant that knowing what transition support was in place beforehand was also important in that decision-making process.

Transition support for articulating students covers a wide range of areas including pre- and post-entry to degree support such as campus visits, additional study support and shared tutorials between college and university lecturers. It also covers all aspects of IAG provided by both sectors. Some students mentioned they were Associate Students (as outlined in Recognition of Diverse Articulation Routes) and suggested that this had been on the whole positive for them in terms of having a wider understanding of the articulation process and the available support.

For students who had moved from college, a few suggested that college staff should help to prepare students who were moving onto a degree programme, by encouraging more self-directed study behaviours, or providing more university-focused work such as academic writing. Most students who had articulated mentioned the need for referencing to be more prominent in college courses: *“I think referencing is a massive thing at uni, so if you join a degree in third year, you need to be more prepared.”* This point was also raised in discussions around subject alignment, highlighting the need to ensure appropriate study skills are included at all stages of the articulation process.

Most students praised the support of college and university staff, specifically Guidance Tutors, Heads of Years and Student Advice Centres. The *‘Countdown to Zero’* programme offered at Edinburgh Napier University was highly regarded by the students who had utilised it. Whilst there was some mention of difficulty in the transition process of fitting in with existing year groups: *“Nobody was actively friendly or actively horrible,”* some students did not experience difficulty, particularly if they moved with fellow college students. To make the experience more equal for students going to university by different routes, it may be worth considering integration of students on articulation routes; one student suggested universities could establish articulation student networks to create a ready-made peer and mentor group.

Transition Support

Once students studying a Higher National (HN) qualification at college have made the decision to move onto a degree programme, it is important they can access as much support as possible from both their college and the receiving university. Much of this support will be provided under the existing communication channels as outlined in Chapter 1 – Information, Advice and Guidance; however, the process of transitioning between two sectors and two institutions needs to be fully supported. This can be seen in the model operated by the **University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)**. This is a

model of global support, as the student moves from HN to degree provision seamlessly due to both qualifications being offered on the same college campus or via distance learning.

Supporting Students in Articulation

All Scottish colleges and universities operate dedicated student support teams; these teams cover several aspects of student life including entry of learners of all stages and ages to the institutions, such as entrants from school and mature learners. Additionally, the student support teams in universities will also provide support for those learners who are transitioning from college on multiple pathways including articulation.

As each individual learner journey will be different, there can be no expectation of a uniform approach; however, there can be a baseline expectation for a level of support. This baseline would include advice on financial matters (especially if a student has previously studied an HN and is looking to return to college on an articulation pathway with a different HN), anticipated degree options for their chosen degree and advice on whether additional study support or entry requirements will be needed for that degree. This baseline expectation can be enhanced with additional elements but should not be reduced.

Additional elements would cover most areas already covered by the Associate Student Scheme that some college and university partners operate: campus visits, college students taking part in university lectures, access to university library, union and other facilities.

Dumfries and Galloway College

Dumfries and Galloway College works closely with the University of Glasgow, University of the West of Scotland (UWS) and the Open University in Scotland (OUiS), which all offer degree-level study on the Crichton Campus in Dumfries.

Both the University of Glasgow and UWS offer related articulation routes from college in the areas of Business, Childhood Studies and Social Work. Students who have successfully completed an HNC in these three areas or HND in Business can apply to progress. The OUiS has a formal articulation and progression agreement in place with the college which allows students who have successfully completed any HNC or HND to progress to part-time, flexible, degree-level study. These arrangements provide the opportunity for students to progress with full credit transfer to the BA/BSc Open degree programme, or for students from identified curricula to progress with credit to a related named OUiS undergraduate programme.

As a result of the articulation opportunities being actively promoted, students are encouraged and supported to develop their qualifications and career opportunities in a positive way. An example of this is demonstrated through Claire Proudfoot's story. Prior to attending college, Claire worked as an Administration Assistant and it was during this time that she began to look at other career options that were available to her. As Claire didn't have any Highers, she couldn't go straight to university, so she chose to study HNC Early Education at Dumfries and Galloway College.

Claire says: "I would not have been able to go further afield as I am a single parent and had limited childcare options at that time. I hoped that having a degree would increase my chances of being employed in a better position to provide a better life for my son. This has been possible as I have continued my education and completed my BA Childhood Studies at UWS on the Crichton Campus. I completed a further course at UWS which would allow me to reappear as a Nurse Manager, which

was a Graduate Diploma in Childhood Practice. I have since completed a teaching qualification through Dundee University and I am now employed in my dream job as a college lecturer. My time at college was really the beginning of a bigger journey for me as I progressed onto university, which would definitely not have been possible for me otherwise."

West College Scotland

Kike arrived from Poland three years ago to pursue her dream to become an Interior designer. After securing a place at West College Scotland on the NC Interior Design course, Kike has gone on to successfully complete an HNC, HND, and has just become the first student from West College Scotland to be accepted into second year of the BA in Interior Design at Glasgow School of Art.

As a single mother with a young child, it was extremely difficult for Kike to juggle being a parent and a full-time student; however, it did not stop her from having a perfect attendance record and perfect achievement record. Liked by staff and students, she was always around and eager to help her peers and get involved in all extra-curricular activities.

Whilst having no family to support her in a new country, she faced many personal and financial challenges which on occasion put the prospect of course attendance and course completion at risk. However, through the support of teaching and service staff at the college, coupled with Kike's own inner grit and determination, she was able to overcome these obstacles to pursue her dream of progression on to university.

Accessing the support of the subject specialist lecturing staff, her guidance tutor and the finance team at the college enabled her to continue with her studies in the face of much adversity. Their advice and guidance became invaluable in ensuring Kike could make informed choices about which articulation path to take, which HEIs would suit her best and frame what was to be expected as regards both creative ingenuity and academic rigour. However, while studying at our Paisley campus, Kike's personal relationship deteriorated into an abusive one, with Kike facing mental and physical abuse. Her priority was to protect her son from this man, who was immersed in a drugs culture, resorting to legal action to do so. The college supported Kike and her son by guiding her through re-homing and childcare entitlements. Kike is a wonderful example of personal achievement.

Kike's journey at West College Scotland ended with her winning the West College Scotland Student of the Year Prize 2019.

Above are case studies from **Dumfries and Galloway College** and **West College Scotland** on supporting students in their decision-making and transition to degree process. The Dumfries and Galloway College study highlights how college and university staff work together on the provision of guidance and support, and includes a student-centred example of how this shared approach has worked in practice. The West College Scotland case study focuses on a personal story of a student and how the college subject and support staff provided advice and guidance on how the student could continue and progress their journey from college to university.

Queen Margaret University Edinburgh (QMU) regularly conducts and compiles their own case studies on student experience of articulation practice, including elements that the individual students found helpful. These can all be found on the [QMU website](#).

Below are examples from **Edinburgh Napier University** and the **University of Strathclyde** on supporting students through the articulation transition stage.

Edinburgh Napier University

Edinburgh Napier University has had significant success in using articulation as an access route to Honours level study for students with experience of care. The data show that a significantly higher number of care-experienced school leavers go to college as an initial positive destination, rather than directly into university. This being the case, articulation with direct entry to university lends itself as a means to support wider access. Over the last decade 88% of the University's care-experienced college-entrants were awarded full credit for their Higher National (HN) qualifications and joined the University with Advanced Standing. This is significantly higher than national average figures for Advanced Standing amongst articulating students of all characteristics. Napier has also had success with this across all six schools, irrespective of discipline.

The success largely comes down to the dedicated attention of an Articulation Adviser post created within the University, the integration of widening access with admissions and using data, built up over five years, to guide practice. The Articulation Adviser post was specifically created to be a dedicated contact for the student, before the application stage via UCAS, and to play an additional mediator role for them with the University's admission team. The personal relationship between student and Adviser builds with at least three touch points with the applicant throughout their admissions journey into University. The Adviser spends time on applications, working through rejections to ensure that key contextual data have not been overlooked within the application to help admissions teams to see the application with the right perspective.

The University of Strathclyde – Articulation into Social Sciences

Strathclyde University has developed advanced entry routes into degree programmes based on two different qualifications. As well as a formal articulation agreement based on the Higher National, Strathclyde also offer advanced entry routes from a Diploma. For example, students on the Diploma in Higher Education at City of Glasgow College can go directly into year three of the Education and Social Sciences degree at Strathclyde.

Students are involved with the University from the beginning of their college year, with access to the University library and union. University staff take part in the College's induction sessions so the partnership approach is clear from the outset. College students have both a City of Glasgow and Strathclyde student record. With a view to transition, students at the College take a module in academic literacy and have teaching sessions in the University's library so that they are supported in making the change between learning and writing styles between the College and University and develop the skills for referencing.

An optional Transition Day runs in May so that students know about all of the support services available to them. The widening access, finance and disability services teams are all involved in that. As the degree in Education and Social Sciences involves a work placement in a social service setting,

the University runs a session on workplace practice to give students an understanding of what is involved.

“Looking back I feel that the lecturers helped us prepare for the transition by building our skills for independent learning.” Third year Business Student, 2019

“In my case, the transition from college to university was such a positive experience, due to the support provided by both City of Glasgow college staff and the staff at the University of Strathclyde. I found it to be really easy to settle in to the University as everyone is so welcoming and the university staff are always on hand and happy to help as you learn some of the ways things differ in university to at college.” Fourth year Business Student, 2019

Moving to a Different Region

Whilst it is recognised that most articulation takes place between local colleges and universities some students may wish to articulate from one region to another, and these routes should also be acknowledged when looking at the support needs of students moving from college to university to ensure a smooth transition for them.

The **University of Aberdeen** and **Robert Gordon University (RGU)** both operate in a region with geographically remote areas, and those institutions have, separately, created packages of student support for learners from SIMD 20 backgrounds, who are applying from outwith Aberdeen, regardless of their year of entry, in order to alleviate and address some of those challenges. These packages cover the first year of study to support students' transition to university and include free or discounted accommodation in selected areas, telephone support and an enrolment pack containing grocery vouchers, relevant book/study vouchers, and travel support for the first semester.

The BSc (Hons) Fashion Technology degree programme at the Galashiels campus of **Heriot-Watt University** in the Scottish Borders sees a significant number of students coming from different regions. The degree offers full articulation with relevant HNCs and HNDs, in second and third year respectively, and is available through a successful partnership route at **Glasgow Clyde College**. Students have also entered from **Fife College** and **Edinburgh College**. The degree operates a transition week for all direct entrants, and the university works with partner colleges on ensuring students are prepared for university study, such as improving portfolio guidance and presentation skills. A recent graduate of the School has been appointed to the new Student Success Officer role, responsible for supporting all entrants and providing an advice point for students.

Retention of Articulating Students

It is important that we understand more about the degree outcomes for students who transition from college to university on articulation pathways and how they compare with those who entered in first year. Data on degree outcomes was not available, so it is not possible to evidence.

The Forum believes:

- SFC should use data from the National Articulation Database and other available sources to publish data on the retention and outcomes of articulating students, which has not previously been available.

Some university and college partners support university applicants who do not quite achieve the required entry grades by referring the applicant to appropriate college HN routes that provide articulation with the degree programme. In some cases, the student will still complete their degree in the same time as if they had started the university course straight from school, providing an interesting example of the benefit of an articulation route for students who had not initially considered attending a college.

Based on the comments gathered from students in the focus groups highlighted throughout this report and the further evidence found in looking at different practices currently operating, the Forum suggests that:

- All Scottish colleges and universities should ensure that appropriate support is in place for all stages of the articulation pathway (pre-transition from college to university, and post-transition) including provision of study skills, academic writing practice, and research skills. This should also include robust retention support arrangements.

Another case study illustrates the work of **Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)** and their ‘long-thin’ approach to supporting articulating students on their transition from college to university. Developed via the university’s College Connect Strategy, a process of early, sustained and continued support from pre-application onto offer and through post-entry has shown students entering GCU on articulation pathways without a negative impact on their outcomes.

Glasgow Caledonian University

Glasgow Caledonian and its partner colleges have invested such time and energy into its transition arrangements for articulation that the articulating entrants, who start in year two or three, have the same or better rates of progress into the next year as continuing students.

Glasgow Caledonian offers articulation routes into all three of its Schools. Some features of the transition process are common to all Schools, including good information, advice and guidance through the College Connect service and the availability of study skill sessions over a twelve week period. Each of the Schools also tailors the support available as needed, particularly on curriculum alignment, depending on the range of degree programmes they offer. Summer schools or shorter ‘boot camps’ are available to support students as they move between college and university and each School develops these to ensure they are bespoke to join up the relevant HN and degree. There is a customised psychological pre-entry programme for psychology entrants and the nursing degree uses a staged model for transitional support, which starts at pre-entry but runs right through years two and three of study at Glasgow Caledonian. Every student who articulates into a degree with a lot of mathematical content in the School of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment, takes a maths diagnostic test so that Programme Leaders can support students in their weaker areas or provide them with new specialist skills such as measurement techniques for those doing a degree in Quantity Surveying.

The University describes this approach as “long and thin support” which starts way before the students join the University but continues throughout their studies into a complete wraparound service for articulating students that has resulted in an impressive record on progression and retention.



Information, Advice and Guidance

Learner Focus

Every learner in Scotland should have access to relevant and accurate information, advice and guidance (IAG) in order to allow them to explore effectively the educational opportunities available to them. However, we learnt from the articulation student focus groups that whilst there may be ample sources of IAG available, knowing where to find it and who to speak to was not always easy. In many cases, students had to be proactive and look at many different sources for the IAG they required, and even then it was not necessarily definitive, with different pathways to different universities and some pathways not existing for similar degrees. Some students noted that they found out about the possibility of articulation in school from their regional Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP)¹⁶. This highlights the need for more emphasis to be given to articulation as a route in discussions on future pathways with school pupils.

A lack of support available in colleges when applying to university via UCAS as a direct entrant was highlighted by many students. Whereas at school pupils receive significant support in the completion of forms and writing of personal statements, those taking part in the focus groups said this support was not available at college: *“Even a voluntary group or an hour group that people could go along and get help on UCAS forms.”*

A lack of clear IAG in relation to funding and how it would operate between their Higher National (HN) qualifications and moving onto a degree programme was also highlighted by students, as was a lack of clarity around how funding would impact on any welfare benefits they receive.

There was feedback around the support offered by college tutors and lecturers, who were praised for their encouragement to students in considering articulation, with some learners stating they would not have gone onto a degree programme without that support. For those who had already articulated to university, some students noted that whilst it was a more independent model of study, and quite a big change in study expectations, there was always someone to help and lecturers could be approached: *“It’s important to know that the support is there – even if it isn’t really obvious, but it’s there.”* Equally, some students felt the transition had not been too difficult for them, and the shift in academic focus or style of teaching had been relatively smooth.

From the focus groups it was clear that some regional articulation agreements (i.e. agreements between colleges and universities in the same region) resulted in some learners feeling they were limited to or steered towards local universities, when they would have preferred to explore articulation options in other regions. A small number of students also noted a lack of articulation opportunities for their specific subject; however they knew in advance this was the case and were prepared to repeat a year of HE study. It was also raised that some schools only focus on the university route and that college options and opportunities should receive the same emphasis in terms of IAG available for pupils, parents and carers.

Based on the findings from speaking to students, colleges and universities do a significant amount of work in providing learners with IAG, and individuals within the institutions support those learners well. However, still more needs to be done to ensure all students who wish to articulate can easily find the relevant IAG and are aware of all routes open to them; students particularly noted the value of hearing

¹⁶ [Schools for Higher Education Programme \(SHEP\)](#) is an SFC-funded school engagement programme focused on raising aspiration and awareness of HE in schools.

from other learners who had used an articulation route returning to the college to share information and experiences.

Expectations of Information, Advice and Guidance

IAG on articulation and the possible pathways available to a learner should be readily accessible at all stages on their journey – from school, at college and once they are at university.

“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

More comprehensive IAG and the promotion of articulation should be available to learners at both local and national levels. This could be delivered through existing routes such as institutional and national school engagement programmes, through the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP), via Skills Development Scotland’s (SDS) engagement and information programmes, including My World of Work and online resources, through the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) Partnerships work with schools and colleges, and other nationally available platforms.

This IAG would include details on what articulation is available for each subject, from each college and into each university. The IAG should be tailored to take account of the questions that may need answered at each point of the learner journey, and should be accessible to learners, parents, carers, schools, employers and all educational influencers.

The Forum recommends:

- All sources of information, advice and guidance (IAG) for students who are considering study at Scottish colleges or universities should highlight articulation as a pathway. This should include existing resources such as Skills Development Scotland’s (SDS) My World of Work, college and university prospectuses, and the Scottish Government’s Learner Journey work, and this should be shared as widely as possible. These pathways should detail the following **up-to-date** information: the available routes onto degree programmes; the entry requirements for those routes (including specifics such as placement hours, additional qualifications); and contact details for both institutions.

Terminology and Understanding

During the evidence gathering work for this report, it became apparent that there is currently no consistent use of the term ‘articulation’ when describing the movement of students with full credit from colleges to universities.

Universities and colleges use different terminology which, though used consistently within their own relationships, makes it difficult for students to achieve a broad understanding of options across the Scottish tertiary-education sector. The selection of phrases (and variants) as shown in Table 6 were all found on college and university websites as part of the IAG relating to articulation options for students:

Table 6: Terms in use by colleges and universities to describe articulation

Terms	Variations
Progress	Progression, Progression Routes, Progressing, Progress to Study, Progression/Transfer Routes.
Guaranteed Advanced Entry Places (where students on an HN course have a guaranteed place on a university degree, with entry requirements such as Graded Units being met)	
Articulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal Articulation Routes (where a college and university have a written articulation agreement in place) • Informal Articulation Routes (where there is no written articulation agreement in place, however students frequently move from HNs to Degrees between the two institutions) • Agreed Articulation Routes (usually indicates a written articulation agreement is in place) • Strong Articulation Agreements (usually indicates a written articulation agreement, and also suggests a number of students use this pathway each year).
Universities Partnership	
Associate Student Degrees	Associate Student Scheme
Pathways to University	Degree Pathways, Clear Pathways
Further Study Possibilities	
Continuing Study.	

Whilst all of the above describe ways of moving to a university after completing an HN qualification, the variations in terminology set out on institutional web pages also have the potential to be very confusing for a student looking for clear and consistent advice. The development of clear IAG on articulation pathways is paramount for students, to support consistency of understanding for students in both sectors.

The Forum recommends:

- Scottish colleges and universities should use the terminology outlined in the glossary in Appendix A of this report when referring to articulation.

The issue of consistent terminology also links to the need to update the definition of articulation to reflect the full range of available qualifications at SCQF levels 7 and 8, highlighted earlier in Recognition of Diverse Articulation Routes.

Where, When and What?

Secondary Schools

Pupils in the second year of Secondary school (S2 - approximately 13–14 years old) will begin to consider their subject choices for Nationals 4 and 5, which will in turn influence their choices for

Foundation Apprenticeships, Highers, Advanced Highers and post-school options. The National Articulation Forum believes a focus on IAG at all levels of the learner journey will improve the wider understanding of articulation; this supports the recommendation in the Scottish Government’s 15-24 Learner Journey Review¹⁷:

15-24 Learner Journey Review

Recommendation 14: We will support colleges and universities to ensure more learners progress from college to all our universities without unnecessary duplication of **SCQF** credit.

By improving the IAG provided to schools, teaching staff, careers advisors, pupils, and their parents/carers, we will support the implementation of Recommendation 14 in the Scottish Government’s 15-24 Learner Journey Review.

Between S3 and S5, secondary school pupils are preparing for and taking examinations and will require more specialised and individual IAG on their post-school choices. Not all pupils will wish to move onto a higher education course, either at college or university, and many may elect to move straight into employment or undertake a Modern Apprenticeship. Therefore, colleges and universities are encouraged to look at how they can work with schools, employers and each other to build positive routes from Modern Apprenticeships to degrees, or any qualifications at SCQF levels 6, possibly using the routes shown in diagram 1:

Diagram 1: Potential Progression Route from a Modern Apprenticeship showing SCQF levels



Careers IAG (CIAG) that is available and offered in schools should be linked to articulation opportunities and routes. Currently, the main source of CIAG in Scottish Secondary schools is provided by Skills Development Scotland (SDS)¹⁸ through Careers Advisors and My World of Work¹⁹, and aligns with the recommendations from the Commission on Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce (DYW)²⁰. Therefore, SDS is well placed to raise awareness of articulation and promote it to pupils across the country.

¹⁷ Scottish Government (2018) [15-24 Learner Journey Review](#)

¹⁸ Skills Development Scotland, [Scotland’s Career Services](#) [webpage]

¹⁹ Skills Development Scotland, [Scotland’s Career Services](#) [webpage]

²⁰ Scottish Government (2014) [Education Working for All: Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce](#)

The Forum recommends:

- The Scottish Government, in partnership with SDS Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) staff, colleges and universities, should coordinate and fund a public-facing Scotland-wide campaign to raise awareness of articulation as an available and desirable route into university and promote this to pupils and students of all backgrounds.

SCQFP School Ambassador Programme

In 2015-16, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP)²¹ launched their School Ambassador Programme²² to raise awareness and understanding of the Framework, as well as promoting its use to school staff and pupils.

Since June 2019, the programme has worked with over 100 secondary schools, one charity, and one skills centre in 26 local authorities. Schools receive training for staff and resources that equip them to deliver their own in-house training on the use and understanding of the Framework. All of this enables pupils to have a positive approach to their post-school options, pathways and opportunities.

The SCQFP School Ambassador Programme is a method of sharing necessary IAG across a wide range of stakeholders; therefore schools are engaged in taking forward conversations around different approaches to the learner journey.

The Forum suggests that:

- Scottish schools, colleges and universities should continue to engage with their school transitions contacts, local authorities and other relevant organisations (such as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership and their related programmes, such as the SCQFP School Ambassador Programme) with practical information, advice and guidance (IAG) on articulation. Colleges and universities, in conjunction with SDS, should also distribute and display information on articulation and student support throughout their local/partnership schools and their institutional campuses.

[SCQFP](#) has also developed online IAG for learners, parents and carers on post-school choices.

Scottish Colleges

Colleges are in an excellent position to reach out to both secondary school pupils in their local area and existing students in their own institution, recognising that IAG needs will differ for each group.

City of Glasgow College's website²³ provides a good example of information that can be shared, combining links to information on the SCQF website, such as the SCQF interactive Framework and '*Qualifications can Cross Boundaries*' leaflet.²⁴ These explain the Framework and comparisons with qualifications from different countries, together with details of the college's provision at different levels – National Qualifications, Higher National Qualifications and degree. The [Find a Course](#) pages are easily filtered to Higher National Qualifications in order to establish which subjects have degree progression and to what institution. Whilst many of the Higher National courses suggest there is a

²¹ [Scottish Credit & Qualification Framework](#) [webpage]

²² [SCQF School Ambassadors Programme](#) [webpage]

²³ City of Glasgow College, [Qualifications Explained](#) [webpage]

²⁴ Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework, [Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries](#) [webpage]

possibility of moving onto a degree course, some specify which university. This is helpful for students who are considering articulation; however, not all progression is to Scottish degree courses.

Many colleges offer tailored guidance on degree provision, either as articulation routes or on-college campus delivery; for example, **Forth Valley College** has a dedicated webpage²⁵ called '*do your degree differently*' that offers IAG on their degrees with **University of Stirling**, **University of Strathclyde** and **Heriot-Watt University**. A separate case study on **Fife College** is highlighted below:

Fife College

Fife College publishes an annual guide, 'Your degree, your Journey', and has a dedicated web page specifically for helping students wishing to progress to university. The guide sets out what articulation is and indicates all the articulation routes available and is supported by the web page which provides further resources and application details. The college shares the guide with all secondary schools in Fife, SDS and organisations promoting widening access. The Fife College prospectus also shows all progression pathways for all courses at each SCQF level and includes articulation.

Fife College has also worked on providing more information on articulation to staff via their online portal so that they can offer enhanced guidance to students. This includes information based on anonymous UCAS data so staff can see where previous students have progressed to.

Scottish Universities

Universities play a key role in developing effective articulation routes and they recognise how vital it is that all information on opportunities is kept up-to-date and shared with as many stakeholders as possible through all viable channels. Information is disseminated through marketing materials such as websites, print prospectuses and information stalls at open days, as well as through close engagement with the local community, by hosting events in conjunction with local authorities, community centres, armed forces bases, charities, employers and many other relevant groups.

Through engaging closely with the local community, universities can ensure that courses, where possible, are tailored to suit the needs of applicants and that support is available throughout the application process.

A lot of this work is already being done, which was also highlighted through the student focus groups where it was reported that outreach and access programmes, as well as open days at the universities, had made students aware of articulation. A case study on the provision of IAG from **University of Stirling** is highlighted below:

The University of Stirling

The University of Stirling has an articulation calculator available online which helps students to find entry routes, requirements and expected year of entry based on the HN currently being studied, or the degree they would like to progress to. The '*calculator*' provides information relevant to over 30 degree programmes and 28 Higher Nationals. The resource is designed to provide initial information for anyone at the early stages of considering direct progression from college into university.

²⁵ Forth Valley College [Degrees](#) [webpage]

Stirling also produces leaflets for prospective articulating students about the routes and support available which feature case studies of previous students who have taken this route.

Later on in a student's articulation journey between college and university, Stirling's online module, '*Stirling Essentials*', offers guidance on life at university to new students before they enrol to help them feel knowledgeable, supported and confident. '*Stirling Essentials*' is aimed at all students but there are specific welcome and induction events for articulating students.

Adult Engagement

Universities should provide IAG for people returning to higher education with a Higher National Qualification after a gap in their education (i.e. not directly moving from college) and therefore not in a position to have access to any form of direct IAG from an institution. Whilst a lot of IAG available will still apply to those potential students, consideration should be given to the different levels of engagement they will require from the institutional student support teams.

Adult returners may have circumstances such as caring responsibilities, part-time jobs or being estranged from their family, which may impact on their ability to commit to full-time or traditional forms and routes of education. Articulation pathways from local colleges into university degrees or onto provision available at the college through franchised and validated degrees could help adult returners balance their lives and study commitments.

SDS also provides CIAG for adults not currently in education through their local offices, My World of Work (MyWOW)²⁶ and other bespoke funded activities. The Scottish Government's Adult Learning Strategic Forum Scotland (ALSFS) was established in April 2019 with a remit to provide strategic advice to Scottish Government on the adult learning policy, particularly around matters of direction, performance and planning. The current focus is on building a Statement of Ambition and to develop a new Adult Learning Strategy Scotland, which was due to launch in spring 2020 (before the coronavirus pandemic). The National Articulation Forum would like the new strategy to consider the inclusion of IAG for adult learners in relation to articulation.

Newbattle Abbey College has a strong tradition of residential and non-residential adult education and has long supported learners with few or no qualifications back into education. The College also run their own annual Adult Achievement Awards event celebrating adult learners and their position in further and higher education. Newbattle operates an Associate Student Scheme for an HNC Social Sciences in partnership with **Queen Margaret University Edinburgh** (QMU), which offers successful completers second year entry to specific QMU courses.

Models of articulation have been developed for those already in the workplace who are seeking to further develop and consolidate their existing qualifications without having to enter into full-time study. This benefits both students and employers as they are able to gain their degree whilst maintaining their place in the work force, utilising their education immediately. An example of this is outlined in the chapter entitled **Recognition of Diverse Articulation Routes**.

²⁶ Skills Development Scotland, [My world of Work](#) [webpage]

Articulation Map

“It has to be about information that is accurate and in the same place; we are too technically advanced to not be able to do that. We have technology that everything should be at our fingertips. All the information should be in one place.”

Student, Robert Gordon University

Within COWA’s *A Blueprint for Fairness*, recommendation 8 seeks “more demanding targets” on articulation²⁷ and also has a sub-recommendation (8a) which states: “For the purposes of more effective IAG, the SFC should develop, or commission, an articulation ‘map’, setting out all of the available pathways across Scotland.”

With the National Articulation Database, SFC now have the means to set out where the operational pathways are and how ‘busy’ or well-used they are, and this can be used to aid the production of a ‘map’. This ‘map’ would be made available to pupils, schools, students, parents, advisors, colleges and universities.

In explaining what is meant by a ‘map’, the expectation is that it should include:

- Clear presentation of information on available and utilised articulation routes.
- User-friendly capabilities to search by subject and institution.

However, these expectations must be tested against what the learners, parents, carers and influencers, as users of the map, will require. The work that has been carried out by **Edinburgh Napier University** and **Edinburgh College** in developing a regional articulation app (outlined in the case study below) could be important in developing a national model for the ‘map’.

The Regional Learner Passport Partnership

The Regional Learner Passport Partnership (RLPP) consists of a number of colleges and universities based in the wider South East area of Scotland. It aims to promote and create efficient and student-orientated routes to higher education in and around Edinburgh and the surrounding South-East Scotland area.

One of the agreed outcomes for the RLPP was the creation of an app to promote all the routes from college to university in the region to students, potential students and their advisers. The [app](#) was launched in July 2020.

The ultimate ambition of the project is to expand to a national application covering all institutions and all routes towards degree level study via a Higher National Qualification (HNQ) and other recognised awards in order to give students full visibility of the options beyond the traditional route from school direct to university. The pilot phase will include all articulation routes to a degree via an HNQ with

²⁷ Commission on Widening Access (2016) *A Blueprint for Fairness*, Recommendation 8 is as follows: *The SFC should seek more demanding articulation targets from those universities that have not traditionally been significant players in articulation. These targets should have a clear focus on the benefits, both to learners and the public purse, of awarding full credit for prior study. In establishing new pathways, colleges and HEIs should build upon best practice models already in place to secure the curricular alignment necessary to ensure that learners are equipped with the necessary prior learning and academic skills to enable them to succeed in degree level study.*

Advanced Standing between those institutions who are currently members of the RLPP. The second phase will be expanded to include more institutions.

Future developments of this application will include continued developments and linking with the National Articulation Database to ensure consistency of pathways and quality assurance of data used. To date, all of the work has been supported primarily by Edinburgh College, Edinburgh Napier University, Fife College and Queen Margaret University Edinburgh.

A similar approach was taken by the **University of Aberdeen** in the development of their Pathways brochure, which the University produces as a paper alternative to the online option, as outlined below:

The University of Aberdeen

The University of Aberdeen put students who had moved through an articulation route at the centre when designing transition support to scale-up the volume of formal articulation. Feedback from students revealed that there was not enough information about articulation pathways at a Scotland level. This was leading to a lack of certainty about pathways resulting in many students entering in first year, rather than directly into later years, as they did not have confidence in the robustness of the routes. Aberdeen realised it had a job to do to raise awareness of the defined pathways that were available into the University from college. After consulting with students who had articulated into the University, it was apparent that a regular university 'open day' didn't appeal to college students as they didn't realise that studying at the University was an option.

A new Articulation Day was created with the purpose of giving Higher National students all the information they need to make an informed decision about their future university study. The University has continued to revise the day, building on feedback from students who attended it. The latest developments are to put more emphasis on the university experience, with the opportunity to join university classes with other students, and take part in talks on university applications and career options. Whilst there is a distinctly Aberdeen flavour to the event, the main driver is to inform and support. Recruitment into the University is a secondary objective.

Aberdeen had developed an app to show the articulation pathways available but students made it clear that they wanted more information over and above the actual pathways. The University and students reverted to a paper brochure and created a new resource that explains what articulation is, how pathways are decided as well as listing the pathways available at Aberdeen. It has been very well received by college students and staff.

"I love the pathways brochure. I love the design, the language used and the layout. It has a lot of relevant info and gets straight to the point without looking like a piece of marketing propaganda." A college lecturer

"The last pages [...] are brilliant and allow students to make informed choices in advance! When I was a student at college I knew I wanted to go as far as I could, but had zero idea of what that meant. If I had this brochure I would have definitely been given a clearer pathway." A student

Given the value of the work within the articulation app and its potential to address policy needs within Working to Widen Access, COWA and the 15-24 Learner Journey, there is a need to support

this development with appropriate centralised resources and funding. It should also link strongly to the National Articulation Database.

Therefore, the National Articulation Forum recommends:

- The Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council should work together on the provision of appropriate resources to support the development of a national articulation map, based on the National Articulation Database, taking account of pilots undertaken to date and on consideration of further pilots, implementing their findings as appropriate.



Sharing Good Practice

Learner Focus

“For me, I like the idea of getting my degree quicker – a big driver for me is that I have three kids, and I want them to go to college and university. I want to be able to help them with things like referencing. Personal circumstances have given a different perspective on what is needed.”

Student, Dundee and Angus College

A continued and concerted commitment to articulation from all colleges and universities is vital to enable more and more learners to benefit from the available pathways.

Focus group participants were asked for their overall views on articulation to highlight the current perceptions of the pathways. Those at college listed the prospect of gaining their degree more quickly and not having to repeat years as being the main advantages for them. The ability to start a pathway at college was regarded as positive and one student said: *“Starting at college has fired my interest in learning and triggered interest in lots of things”*. Other students noted that, before starting their articulation journey, university had not been an option for them, but that with the information, advice, guidance and support from the college, they now felt able to take their next steps. It was also suggested articulation be advertised more directly to adults as an option in returning to education.

Students who had already moved from college to university noted that, as direct entrants, it could be difficult to socialise with their new peers: *“I don’t really have a network at uni.”* Others highlighted that moving to university with fellow college students resulted in an existing support and peer group. However, many students raised the issue of the transition as being about confidence, which they sometimes gained from their college experience and from realising they were able to manage the degree work: *“I found third year of the degree easier than the HND year.”*

Obviously, all students are different and there is no one-size model or approach to articulation, either through IAG, delivery or transition support, that will meet every learner’s needs. Throughout the focus group work, colleges and universities were often praised for the work they did and how the students felt supported, and sometimes it was from other sources that learners drew their inspiration: *“I had a teacher who did applied sciences at colleges, then went to uni, then did the PGDE – he spoke about the different types of teaching and learning.”* - highlighting that articulation is a part of wider learner journey.

Evolving the National Articulation Forum

The National Articulation Forum has played a key role in taking forward the recommendations from the Commission on Widening Access (COWA) and Universities Scotland’s *Working to Widen Access* report. However, there is still more to be done and colleges and universities will require ongoing support to continue to build on the work already achieved in increasing articulation agreements, routes and pathways for learners across Scotland.

Supporting Ongoing Developments and Encouraging Sector Leadership

The Forum recommends:

- That Scotland's Community of Access and Participation Practitioners (SCAPP) should develop a sub-group and network for practitioners involved in articulation work at colleges and universities to share good practice. We hope this will be facilitated and supported by representatives from colleges and universities across Scotland.

The purpose of the Community of Practice will be to provide a network for practitioners involved in developing and supporting articulation in all Scottish colleges and universities. This network will enable practitioners to share practice, challenges and opportunities, as well as create relationships with new partners in order to discuss potential new articulation pathways.

The Community of Practice should also support the development of new models of articulation through a pilot programme. This Community of Practice should work to promote a wider connection with practitioners at other stages in the learner journey for a fully-linked approach to supporting students on their articulation pathways.

Skills Demand and Articulation

Any development centred on new articulation pathways and the reinforcing of existing ones should always seek to ensure they are meeting the skills demands of Scotland, which also has the potential to be compounded when the UK leaves the EU at the end of 2020.

Scottish Government's Future Skills Action Plan²⁸, issued in September 2019, highlighted the need to accelerate the Learner Journey recommendations by making work-based learning an integral part of the skills offer, enhancing pathways from colleges into graduate apprenticeships, strengthening community-based adult learning provision and continuing to support industry-led Developing the Young Workforce Employer Groups.

Whilst it is beyond the remit of this report to respond to these issues in detail, it can be seen that articulation could have a role in addressing them, alongside the SQA Next Generation HN review, and contribute to the Future Skills Action Plan.

²⁸ Scottish Government (2019) [Future Skills Action Plan](#)

Appendix A: Articulation Glossary

To aid learner understanding of articulation across Scotland, it is suggested that this standardised glossary be used by Scottish colleges and universities in their communications with students, to promote and explain articulation pathways. These definitions have been written in line with the current measures; implementation of Recommendation 1 will remove the reference to Higher National Qualifications in the Glossary.

Advanced Progression:	Partial credit recognition of previous HE study, currently resulting in entry into second year of a degree programme (SCQF Level 8) with a Higher National Diploma (SCQF Level 8).
Advanced Standing:	Full credit recognition of previous HE study, currently resulting in entry into second year of a degree programme (SCQF Level 8) with a Higher National Certificate (SCQF Level 7) and/or entry into third year of a degree programme (SCQF Level 9) with a Higher National Diploma (SCQF Level 8).
Articulation:	The journey between Scottish colleges and universities using recognised and available pathways, and awarding full credit for previous HE study.
Associate Student:	Where a student studying a Higher National Certificate or Higher National Diploma at a Scottish college that is mapped to a university degree and the student anticipates articulating, they should be able to access facilities on a partner university campus. This is expected to include but is not limited to, the library, gym, union, provision of information on the intended degree programme requirements, including meetings with lecturers/tutors where possible.
Guaranteed Places:	Where the college and university partners have agreed to admit a set number of students who have successfully completed either a Higher National Certificate or Higher National Diploma onto a degree programme with Advanced Standing.
Progression:	Where there is no credit recognition of previous HE study, usually resulting in entry into first year of a degree programme (SCQF Level 7) with either a Higher National Certificate (SCQF Level 7) or a Higher National Diploma (SCQF Level 8).

Appendix B: National Articulation Forum Terms of Reference



Purpose

To support continuous improvement in articulation practice in Scottish Post-16 education and increased student participation in articulation pathways involving all of Scotland's colleges and higher education institutions.

Remit

1. To provide strategic guidance and to influence and challenge thinking on articulation in Scotland, in relation to policy (including Scottish Funding Council policy), practice, and pedagogy.
2. To serve as an efficient shared resource to analyse, report and advise on the development and potential growth of articulation routes and to address issues and opportunities.
3. To source expert advice and research and development work in support of continuous improvement.
4. To promote the collection, collation and dissemination of data and information about articulation and student success.
5. To develop outputs which promote, disseminate and raise awareness of success and best practice in articulation.

Membership

- Principal of a Scottish college nominated by Colleges Scotland (Co-Convener).
- Principal of a Scottish higher education institution nominated by Universities Scotland (Co-Convener).
- Principal/Vice-Principal or equivalent from a Scottish college nominated by Colleges Scotland.
- Principal/Vice-Principal or equivalent from a Scottish higher education institution nominated by Universities Scotland.
- Two representatives of the National Union of Students (Scotland).
- Two experienced articulation practitioners nominated by Colleges Scotland.
- Two experienced articulation practitioners nominated by Universities Scotland.
- Representative of the Scottish Funding Council.
- Representative of the Scottish Government Advanced Learning and Science Directorate.

In Attendance

- Leaders of 'Task and Finish' Groups established by the Forum who are not members of the Forum.
- Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland officers as required to inform and support the work of the Forum.
- Secretariat to the Forum.
- Additional stakeholder representatives by invitation in relation to specific agendas.

Engagement with Key Stakeholders

The Forum will ensure that all relevant stakeholders in Scottish Post-16 education are appropriately engaged in and informed about its work, including employer organisations, school leaders, individuals with direct experience of following an articulation pathway, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, SCQF Partnership, Skills Development Scotland, Education Scotland and UCAS.

The Forum will be mindful of the HN as a standalone qualification valued by stakeholders in its own right.

Frequency of Meetings

Normally three times per year, irregularly, with the timing of meetings aligned to project initiation and reporting points in the Forum's work programme.

Reporting Requirements

The Forum will report formally to the College Principals' Group and to Universities Scotland Main Committee. It will report informally on an ongoing basis to the Convener of Universities Scotland, the Director of Universities Scotland, the Chair of the College Principals' Group and the Chief Executive of Colleges Scotland. The Forum will also be accountable to the Scottish Government's Access Delivery Group.

Sub-Committees

The Forum will establish expert 'Task and Finish' Groups to enable it to fulfil aspects of its remit, particularly where there is an identified need to engage particular combinations of stakeholder interests and/or particular sources of expertise and advice. The Forum will agree terms of reference, leadership and membership of such groups at the time of their establishment. 'Task and Finish' Groups will operate pragmatically and efficiently and may be informal in structure and day-to-day operation.

The Forum may also commission work or seek advice and reports from established groups and networks across Scottish Post-16 education where it determines such an approach to be the most efficient and effective means of fulfilling aspects of its remit.

NOTES

Potential Initial Work Plan

The National Articulation Forum is being established as a standing body with a continuous improvement agenda in support of articulation routes through Scottish Post-16 education. As such it will have an evolving work plan informed by experience as it becomes established.

The programme and pace of work for the first academic year will be determined by the Forum at its first meeting. The Forum will be able to draw on earlier work and ongoing projects undertaken by Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland in developing its work programme. This will include several of the actions agreed through Universities Scotland's *Working to Widen Access* project, specifically:

1. HEI Reviews of their Capacity to Increase Full-Credit Articulation.

Institution resourced, initially facilitated by Universities Scotland officers.

2. Collation and Sharing of Examples of Practice and Case Studies.

This work includes two distinct tasks:

- An internal sector good practice resource.
- Case studies published for learners and other stakeholders.

It will involve desk-based work resourced by Universities Scotland/Colleges Scotland, building on material already collected for the Universities Scotland Working Group.

3. A Common Language of Articulation.

This will need to take account of related work across the sectors, including the *Working to Widen Access* actions on developing a common language on admissions and bridging programmes and possibly recommendations from the Scottish Government's Learner Journey Review. This could be the focus of a short-life 'Task and Finish' Group established by the Forum or be assigned to the existing Universities Scotland Working Group(s), consulting with the Forum as appropriate.

4. Scotland-level Work on Articulation by Subject.

Building on the work already undertaken by the Universities Scotland Working Group – a short-life 'Task and Finish' Group established by the Forum to undertake analysis and interpretation of the subject-level data and to explore how subject-specific barriers to increased full-credit articulation can be overcome, with an emphasis on the seven priority subject areas identified by the Working Group.

5. Models of Articulation involving Qualifications other than HN

A survey of institutions (colleges and universities) to establish existing practice (may overlap with bridging programme work already undertaken) and views of where the greatest potential lies might help the Forum to specify this piece of work in a focused way which could then be handed to a 'Task and Finish' Group for more detailed, expert exploration.

6. Student Perspective Research

A specification will be worked up by Universities Scotland/Colleges Scotland officers and agreed by the Forum. There are options to commission work from an agency (at cost) or perhaps consider seeking institutional co-operation in incorporating it into their student survey work.

Based on the above overview, the expectation might be that to complete the *Working to Widen Access* actions the Forum will establish three 'Task and Finish' Groups during its first academic year of operation with the pace of work to be determined by the Forum at its first meeting:

- A common language of articulation linked to other work across the sectors, including common language work on admissions and bridging programmes and possibly recommendations from the Learner Journey Review.
- Further analysis and interpretation of subject-level articulation data and subject-specific barriers, with a focus on the seven identified priority subject areas.
- Models of articulation involving qualifications other than HN.

The third of these could run later than the first two. There would be three major pieces of input required in addition:

- Examples of practice and case studies.
- Data reporting and accessibility.
- Student perspective research.

Additionally, the Forum would receive reports and analysis of HEI's institutional reviews of full-credit articulation capacity, requiring support from Universities Scotland officers to collate and analyse the potential impact of those outputs.