

## Thematic Report on Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) Reports 2013-16: Widening Access

### Overview

In this report we highlight good practice and areas for development as featured in the ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports 2013-16. The key findings emerging from Outcome Reports in relation to **widening access** were:

### Activity to promote good practice

- Abertay University's deliberate and sustainable strategy for providing effective support to students entering the University from its partner colleges.
- The University of Dundee's effective approach to recruiting and supporting the entry of students from non-traditional backgrounds, including the Dundee University Access to Learning Summer School.
- The University of Glasgow's successful track record in recruiting and supporting widening participation with its 'Top Up Programme' and MD40 group development.
- The positive and successful approach to promoting widening participation at Glasgow Caledonian University, including its College Connect Strategy and Caledonian Club initiatives.
- The proactive and multifaceted approach to widening access at the University of the Highlands and Islands, including extensive and effective use of the recognition of prior learning, active networks with schools and colleges, and post-admission support through Personal Academic Tutors and programme leaders.
- Robert Gordon University's strong commitment and effective approach to widening participation, as demonstrated by proactive outreach strategies and collaborative initiatives, which are specifically designed to support non-traditional students in accessing the University.
- The University of Strathclyde's strong commitment to widening participation, as demonstrated by its proactive outreach strategies and collaborative initiatives, which are specifically designed to support non-traditional students in accessing the University.
- The wide range of initiatives and activities aimed at raising aspirations and promoting widening access to higher education at the University of St Andrews.
- The University of the West of Scotland's well-established relationships with schools and colleges that facilitate successful transitions to the University for students from non-traditional backgrounds, including activities aimed at widening participation such as the 'Routes for All' programme.

### Areas for development

- Progressing a range of intended actions at the University of Aberdeen, including those relating to internationalisation and broadening its analysis of progression rates to include part-time and postgraduate students, and consider the access for part-time students to student support services, such as the Student Learning Service, out of core hours.
- Continuing to reflect on the extent to which all students can engage with the student experience at the University of St Andrews, in the context of a more diverse student body, including those who live some distance from the University.

## Introduction

As part of the ELIR 3 method, QAA Scotland produces regular Thematic Reports to support learning from the outcomes of individual ELIR reports. The purpose of the Thematic Reports is to inform future development work in the sector and, in particular, to inform future QAA activity including work carried out in collaboration with the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC).

## Scope and structure of this report

This report identifies material relating to widening access contained within the ELIR reports for all 18 Scottish higher education institutions reviewed in the ELIR 3 cycle (2013-16). The institutions included in this report are: the University of Aberdeen; Abertay University; the University of Dundee; the University of Edinburgh; Edinburgh Napier University; Glasgow School of Art; Glasgow Caledonian University; the University of Glasgow; Heriot-Watt University; the University of the Highlands and Islands; Queen Margaret University; Robert Gordon University; the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; Scotland's Rural College (SRUC); the University of St Andrews; the University of Stirling; the University of Strathclyde and the University of the West of Scotland.

This report summarises examples of positive practice and areas for development as highlighted in the ELIR Outcome Reports (see page 1), and the more detailed findings included within the ELIR Technical Reports (see below). It is possible that additional practice takes place in these 18 institutions, but only those elements of practice included within the ELIR reports is included here. The report then outlines briefly the next steps in the ELIR process following the publication of the reports.

The annex includes references to widening access within the ELIR Technical Reports. The paragraph numbers used in the annex are taken directly from the original reports.

## Areas highlighted in the ELIR Technical Reports

In ELIR 3, each Outcome Report sets out the ELIR team's views of positive practice and areas for development at the institution. These key findings in relation to widening access are summarised on page 1 of this report. This section identifies current interesting practice at the 18 institutions as identified in the longer ELIR Technical Reports.

### Activity to promote good practice

#### Equality and diversity

Equality and diversity is a core element within ELIR 3 cycle Technical Reports. Different aspects of equality and diversity are covered in the reports and all institutions refer to activity with regard to widening access. The ELIR 3 reports highlight different projects, schemes and resources, which are detailed in following sections of this report.

#### Institutional strategy

Widening access appears as a strategic focus in all 18 institutions. The role of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Outcome Agreement was highlighted by six institutions: Abertay University, the University of Dundee, the University of Edinburgh, the University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University and Queen Margaret University. An interesting aspect referred to by five institutions (the University of Aberdeen, Glasgow Caledonian University, the University of Edinburgh, the University of the Highlands and Islands, and the University of the West of Scotland) is on mainstreaming and the extent to which equality and diversity activities are

designed into daily activities. For example, the University of the Highlands and Islands' active networks with schools and colleges and the effective use of recognition of prior learning supports its mainstreaming of widening access activity. The University of Edinburgh now includes questions on equality and diversity in its course and programme proposal forms.

### **Performance monitoring**

Widening participation students are at a higher risk of withdrawing, therefore monitoring progress and engagement has increased importance. The SFC Outcome Agreement identifies specific targets for widening access, and institutions have mechanisms in place within their institutions to monitor admissions and retention. Eight institutions make specific reference to groups that monitor and respond to widening access data: the University of Aberdeen, the University of Dundee, the University of Glasgow, the University of the Highlands and Islands, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, the University of Stirling and the University of Strathclyde. Effective data use, to support student progress, allows early intervention for students who might be struggling. For example, the University of Glasgow's 'MyCampus' student information system has enabled detailed analysis of student data in relation to widening participation students. An Adviser Early Warning System is also in place at the University to identify students at risk of withdrawing by monitoring their attendance at classes and engagement with information technology. All institutions refer to the use of data and monitoring performance.

### **Contextualised admissions**

Six institutions operate a contextualised admissions process: Abertay University, the University of Edinburgh, the University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, the University of the Highlands and Islands, and Robert Gordon University. The approach used by the University of Glasgow was highlighted by the SFC in 2011 as a model for the higher education sector.

### **Widening access frameworks**

Three institutions make reference to frameworks that support widening access work. The University of Aberdeen has been developing a framework to promote widening participation from pre-application to post-graduation. The Wider Access Framework 2015 at the University of the Highlands and Islands is 'mainstreamed', which means that work to support widening access is managed through normal business practices rather than being monitored in a specific area. At Queen Margaret University a framework for Widening Participation and Student Retention (WISeR) has been developed, with more regular reporting on retention and withdrawal patterns among students from diversity groups.

### **Pre-enrolment**

There is considerable involvement with the secondary education sector in widening access, with the following institutions identifying school-focused activities in the ELIR 3 cycle reports (where reported through ELIR, the names of specific activities are provided):

- University of Aberdeen
- University of Dundee - 'Discovering Degrees'
- University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh Napier University and Queen Margaret University - 'Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools'
- University of Glasgow - 'Top Up programme'
- Glasgow Caledonian University - 'Advanced Higher Hub'
- University of the Highlands and Islands

- University of Strathclyde - Children's University (this provides a learning accreditation framework for learning outside of school hours for children aged 7-14)
- University of St Andrews
- University of the West of Scotland - 'Routes for All'.

There is widespread activity with further education colleges through articulation and advanced entry activity. This type of activity was reported for 13 institutions: the University of Aberdeen, Abertay University, the University of Dundee, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, the University of the Highlands and Islands, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, Scotland's Rural College, the University of Stirling, the University of Strathclyde, the University of St Andrews, and the University of the West of Scotland.

Six institutions offer summer schools. Dundee University Access to Learning Summer School, targeted at MD40 entrants, helps to prepare and qualify applicants for entry to a range of undergraduate programmes by providing academic and study skills support. Heriot-Watt's 'Brightest Watts' is a week-long summer school to introduce Scottish students to the subject areas available at the University. The accelerated one-week summer programme at Strathclyde University involves student input. The University of Glasgow, the University of St Andrews and Glasgow School of Art also run summer schools.

Other types of outreach activities target underrepresented groups through community activities. For example, 'Educated Pass', run by the University of Edinburgh, targets boys through local football clubs. Glasgow Caledonian University's Glasgow Club works with local communities in a structured way to address lower than average rates of progression to university. The University of the West of Scotland is developing ideas on how to use its mobile campus (a coach fitted out with IT and other resources) to target potential students in communities with low participation in higher education, for example by taking the mobile campus to community locations that could include schools, community centres and shopping areas to illustrate and promote the range of learning opportunities on offer at the University.

### **Subject-specific activity**

While most widening access activity is generic, some work is aimed at specific subject areas. For example, the University of Dundee highlighted the 'Reach Scotland' and 'ACES' national initiatives that support and enable young people interested in 'high demand' professions such as medicine, dentistry, law, architecture and art. Heriot-Watt University's Go4Set initiative aims to stimulate young people's interest in science, engineering and technology. Similarly, the University of Edinburgh's 'Pathways to Professions' provides advice and guidance to state school pupils interested in studying medicine, law, veterinary medicine and architecture. The University of Strathclyde's Engineering Academy provides articulation between enhanced Higher National Certificate provision and articulation to the level 2 engineering course.

### **Induction activities**

Glasgow University's 'Top Up Programme' and Queen Margaret University's suite of orientation and induction programmes (QMAdvance and QMAssist) provide ongoing support post enrolment.

### **Student involvement**

In the following institutions specific activities were reported through ELIR 3 that have widening participation initiatives involving students and/or student associations.

- Ask an Experienced Student e-mentor - Edinburgh Napier University.
- Caledonian Club student mentor - Glasgow Caledonian University (this initiative links to the University's student association's leadership and employability award).
- Robert Gordon University appointed a student intern to investigate issues of transition from a student perspective, which is an integral component of the University's Enhancement Theme activity.
- 'Strathguides' - offered by the University of Strathclyde involves students offering S5 and S6 pupils university survival workshops. Students are also involved in the S4 and S5 summer programme.
- University of St Andrews students work with S1 and S2 pupils.
- Through the University of the West of Scotland's 'Routes for All' initiative, university students act as mentors to assist in the delivery of the initiative, which aims to provide academic and study skills support for senior year high school pupils.

### **Financial assistance**

Additional financial support is offered by the University of Edinburgh through its Widening Horizons Programme, which provides funding to give widening participation students an immersive study abroad experience in their first year. The University of St Andrews also offers scholarships and bursaries.

### **Care experienced entrants**

Four institutions have initiatives and support aimed specifically at supporting care leavers: Edinburgh Napier University, Robert Gordon University, the University of St Andrews and the University of Strathclyde. The first three have achieved the Buttle UK Quality Mark, which means they are recognised as offering a minimum level of support to care leavers, but also demonstrate a commitment to improving their provision further. The University of Strathclyde hosts the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children, which engages in activities to promote widening access for 'looked after' children at other higher and further education institutions in Scotland.

### **Staff investment**

Within the ELIR 3 cycle, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University and Robert Gordon University have appointed additional specific staff to assist with widening access initiatives.

### **Course curricula**

Three institutions have highlighted features in course curricula that facilitate widening participation. The University of the Highlands and Islands allows students to study a module from a degree programme alongside a Higher National award to assist in the transition to degree programmes. Effective use of the recognition of prior learning is reported by the University as an important activity in widening participation. The University of Stirling, working in partnership with Forth Valley College, has developed four programmes on a fully integrated model where the programmes are jointly designed, developed and delivered by the College, University and industry partners. Students enrol at both the College and the University and are encouraged to make use of learning and student support facilities on both campuses. The University of St Andrews offers an evening degree programme.

Through curricula-based activities, some students at the University of Strathclyde have the opportunity to engage in widening participation. For example, trainee teachers work with students from the most deprived backgrounds in the local area with the dual aim of giving children a positive view of higher education and improving students' teaching skills.

## **Online support**

Both Robert Gordon University and Queen Margaret University have support resources delivered online. For example, Queen Margaret University's QMConnect and MentorNet are face to face and online mentoring schemes. QMConnect activities include peer-to-peer mentoring and are primarily aimed at new undergraduates, which involves direct entry students. MentorNet is a secure student-led online community open to selected students at the pre-entry stage. The range of online support for distance learners at Scotland's Rural College was considered particularly helpful with respect to the College's aspirations to grow distance and blended-learning student numbers.

## **Areas for development**

This section of the paper outlines the areas for development identified relating to widening access in a higher education institution in the ELIR 3 Technical Reports. Across 18 institutions there were four areas identified for development.

### **Impact of strategic change**

At the University of the West of Scotland, the ELIR team recognised that the reduction in articulating students and franchised programmes would free resources for international expansion. There would be value in the University considering the potential impact of this change on its widening participation policy, particularly given the institution's success in providing education to many traditionally difficult-to-reach student groups.

### **Monitoring performance**

At the University of Aberdeen, the University was advised to continue to explore the reasons for low conversion of SIMD40 applicants to enrolments and also pursue its plans to monitor continuation rates for all student groups. The University of the Highlands and Islands was encouraged to build on the existing positive activity it was undertaking to develop an institution-wide strategic approach to address the challenges of non-continuation. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland was encouraged to progress the implementation of the Key Performance Indicators to enable the institution to measure progress and impact against its Strategic Plan and the strategic ambitions arising from the Curriculum Reform project. Scotland's Rural College was advised to ensure that systematic consideration is given to success and retention data to enable managers to identify relative success by different student characteristics, including disability and mode of study at every level.

### **Availability and consistency of support**

The University of Aberdeen was advised of the benefit of reflecting on the availability of student support services for students studying on-campus outside of core hours, in the context of increasing the numbers of part time and widening participation students. The University of St Andrews was encouraged to continue to reflect on the extent to which all students can engage with the student experience at the University, in the context of a more diverse student body, including those who live some distance from the University. The ELIR team considered that if international student numbers are increased as intended Scotland's Rural College will need to ensure it has systematic arrangements for identifying additional specialist support to meet the particular needs of international students at all campuses.

### **Assessment approach and Higher National transition**

At Scotland's Rural College the ELIR team heard from staff and students that the Higher National awards, notably the approach to assessment, were not always a good preparation

for degree-level work. The College, as part of its curriculum development and delivery work, was advised to continue seeking an appropriate solution to aid student transition and achievement, negotiating the position as appropriate with the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

### **What happens next?**

QAA Scotland follows up the ELIR outcomes with institutions individually through annual discussion visits, and each institution is required to produce a Follow-up Report indicating how it has addressed its own ELIR outcomes. QAA Scotland also promotes collaborative working between institutions to share good practice and to find collective solutions to common areas for development. Each institution is invited to participate in a follow-up event to engage with the ways other institutions that were reviewed at around the same point of the ELIR cycle have addressed their review outcomes.

## Index of references to Widening Access in the ELIR 3 Technical Reports

The paragraph numbers below refer to those in the original ELIR 3 Technical Reports for each institution.

Institution	Para	Topic
<a href="#">University of Aberdeen</a>	19	Widening participation recruitment
	20	Widening participation working group
	21	Strategic Plan, targets for widening participation, articulation activity
	46	Effectiveness of approach, areas for development
	94	Collaborative programmes, learning experiences
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity in the student population
<a href="#">Abertay University</a>	33	Strategic aims, targets for widening participation
	34	Contextualised admissions, Tayside and Fife Articulation Hub, retention performance
	137	Specific widening participation activities including with further education and local businesses
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">University of Dundee</a>	18	Learning and Teaching Strategy, SFC Outcome Agreement
	23	Admissions policy and associated practices, governance
	25	Outreach initiatives, 'Discovering Degrees', 'Reach Scotland', 'ACES', articulation routes, Dundee University Access to Learning Summer School
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">University of Edinburgh</a>	3	Strategic goals
	24	Widening participation activities; outreach, contextualised admissions, bursary provision, flexible entry and exit routes, SFC Outcome Agreement



	26	Contextualised admissions, retention approach and performance
	25	Widening participation, Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS), Pathways to Professions, Educated Pass
	52	Scholarships, Go Abroad Fund, Widening Horizons Programme
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">Edinburgh Napier University</a>	1	University values
	57	Approaches to supporting diversity, Students Association
	32	Supporting care leavers, Buttle UK Quality Mark, MD20 two-week pre-entry scheme, 'Ask an Experienced Student' e-mentor, contextual admissions
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">University of Glasgow</a>	15	Widening participation, SFC Outcome Agreement
	18	Contextual admissions, Top Up programme
	19	Impact of initiatives on continuation rates, strategic approach
	20	MyCampus student information system, use of data, targeted intervention
	25	Use of data, Adviser Early Warning System, monitoring engagement and participation
	36	Effectiveness of approach
	67	Use of management information
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">Glasgow Caledonian University</a>	15	Strategy, planning, student success
	19	Data trends analysis, Outreach and Community Engagement department, Advanced Higher Hub, Caledonian Club
	28	Caledonian Club student mentor, University's Student Leadership Programme (SLP), leadership, communication, teamwork skills

	60	Employability attributes, academic development tutors, Caledonian Club, part-time job opportunities
	63	Approach to promoting widening participation and performance, College Connect Strategy
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">Glasgow School of Art</a>	22	Widening participation student population, embedding activity, progression manager appointment
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">Heriot-Watt University</a>	26	Lothian's Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS), Go4Set, Brightest Watts, contextualised admissions
	40	Induction arrangements, new posts to support widening participation activity
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">University of the Highlands and Islands</a>	21	Approaches to programme structure, role of the Personal Academic Tutors
	22	Wider Access Framework, widening participation activities, use of recognition of prior learning
	23	Regional Schools Group activity, delivery models
	24	Contextualised admissions
	53	Personal Academic Tutor role
	83	Contextualised admissions, use of recognition of prior learning, networks with schools and colleges, non-continuation challenges
	146	Collaborative partnerships and widening access
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">Queen Margaret University</a>	15	Widening access student population, SFC Outcome Agreement
	17	Lothian Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS), East Lothian Hospitality and Tourism Academy
	18	Pre-entry and induction programmes; QMAdvance, QMAssist, QMConnect and

		MentorNet, face-to-face mentoring, online mentoring, QMConnect, MentorNet
	19	Student Retention Project Board, retention, framework for Widening Participation and Student Retention (WISeR)
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">Robert Gordon University</a>	24	Articulation arrangements
	28	Coordination of widening access activity, ACCESS RGU, use of contextualised admissions, development of specialist support groups, one-to-one support, small group support, generic skills workshops, online self-study resources, link with Enhancement Theme
	31	Induction programmes, use of the virtual learning environment for campus-based and distance learners
	52	Use of data
	70	Enhancement Theme links, student intern, lecturer in student transitions, Theme partnership with Students' Union
	106	Use of data, performance, good practice, areas for development
	121	Information management, data analytics
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">Royal Conservatoire of Scotland</a>	6	Strategic Plan, KPIs
	15	Student population
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">Scotland's Rural College</a>	22	Arrangements for supporting equality and diversity, formal monitoring and review arrangements, data management
	23	Approach to equality and diversity, governance
	24	Student population features, support arrangements for advanced entrants, approach to assessment
	25, 26	Consistency of support provided across campuses to specific student groups, data management

	27	Support resources for part time and distance learners
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">University of Stirling</a>	27	Student population, retention
	131	Articulation arrangements and partnerships, integrated delivery model
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">University of Strathclyde</a>	20	Strategy, Widening Access team
	21	Widening participation student population
	22	Strategy, targets, outreach and widening participation initiatives, Engineering Academy
	23	School-based mentoring, Children's University, learning accreditation framework, Routes to Learning Unit, summer programme for S4 and S5 pupils, inter-generational learning programme, 'Strathguides', Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland
	24	Curriculum-based initiative
	25	Contextual admission
	26	Effectiveness of approach
	103	Future plans
	112	Effectiveness and future plans
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity in the student population
<a href="#">University of St Andrews</a>	22	Identification of widening participation students
	26	Financial aid
	34	Widening participation philosophy, approach and impact, access-aware Advisor of Studies, care or caring experienced, Buttle Quality Mark
	63	One-stop Advice and Support Centre, Academic Alert system, Inclusive Curriculum Toolkit
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity
<a href="#">University of the West of Scotland</a>	21	Widening student population profile, strategy, articulation, international student recruitment

	30	Learner pathways, associate students
	52	Effectiveness of approach, relationships with schools and colleges
	101	Future plans, recruitment strategy, impact on widening participation
	2.2	Supporting equality and diversity

QAA1871 - May 17

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2017  
 18 Bothwell Street, Glasgow G2 6NU  
 Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01415 723420  
 Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)