

Learning for All

The Report of the SFEFC/SHEFC Widening Participation Review Group

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Introduction

The Funding Councils, further education colleges and higher education institutions have been devoting a great deal of effort to widening participation for many years. We established this review because it was time to have a long, hard look at what progress we have made and, in the light of that, what we should be doing in the future. The widening participation review group has spent the last year doing this. This report contains its analysis and recommendations on the way forward. I would like to thank Jim McGoldrick, the Chair of the review group, its members and the many reference groups it met (listed in annex A) for their work.

We always knew that progress in an area as complex as patterns of participation would not come overnight. We did not expect to have achieved ideal levels of participation across the whole population in the relatively short time it has been a high priority. Neither did we expect it to be easy to link the many actions we and others have taken with particular impacts: someone's decision to participate may have been affected by many different actions or by none. With these caveats, this review shows that, while some progress has been made, there is still a long way to go.

This report is timely. It is published just as the new Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council replaces the separate Scottish Higher and Further Education Funding Councils and will help guide the actions of the new Council.

Personally, I hope the report begins to turn the debate away from 'widening' participation and towards a new concept of 'optimum' participation. Widening participation has served its purpose as a general aim; but surely the time has come to focus our efforts with a more specific and purposeful aim. 'Optimum participation' would need to be defined on the basis of a comprehensive cost/benefit analysis which took account not only of the benefits of learning to individuals and society but also the costs both of additional participation and current non-participation. The real economic and social costs of the latter are not usually brought to account when the additional costs of increasing participation are considered. I am confident that, if they were, we would see a clear business case for expansion of participation in further and higher education. This in turn would lead to faster progress in social inclusion and the extension of our civil society.

I hope others too will join the debate because – as the report makes clear – raising participation in learning beyond school goes well beyond further and higher education. Many stakeholders have a role to play. I, therefore, welcome the report's call for a concerted national campaign to make real progress in raising the skills and aspirations and thereby the life-chances of the most disadvantaged in our society. The report recommends a programme of action which builds on the good work by people in all educational sectors – schools, colleges, community learning and development, and higher education institutions. It is a long-term, strategic review that sets out priorities for the next five years and beyond. It is a framework within which we hope all of the stakeholders can work together to build and implement an action plan. That plan should be bold and ambitious: nothing less than significant improvement within the next decade should do.

Roger McClure
Chief Executive

Foreword

In Scotland today, educational participation and achievement is highly skewed, particularly by socio-economic background, geography and gender. People from lower socio-economic groups are less likely than the average to stay on in school and achieve, or to participate in higher education. These patterns are so stark that they cannot be explained by differences in innate ability. If we want a more just and effective society with people well equipped to work and contribute to their communities, then we have to tackle the causes of these patterns.

We also need to do so for economic reasons. The Scottish Executive's economic aspirations require a high-quality, widely accessible education system if they are to succeed: not one that benefits only some. And we need to do so because learning transforms people's lives, improving well being, confidence, health and lifetime earnings.

The further and higher education sectors have done much to tackle the problem, and there is evidence that many of these initiatives are beginning to bear fruit. However, progress in changing some of the patterns of participation has been slow.

Patterns of uneven educational participation and achievement are established early on in people's lives. The environment in which people are brought up – families, communities and their culture, peers, schools, the local economy and employers – creates positive or negative contexts for their learning, leading them to "well-trodden pathways". Success breeds success.

Since we fund further and higher education, this report focusses on patterns of participation and achievement in these types of learning. However, to understand these patterns and to address them, we need to consider lifelong learning as a whole – including school. People do not develop their aspirations for further and higher education independent of their attitudes to other forms of learning.

If education is to promote social justice and economic inclusion, people working in education – nurseries, schools, colleges, universities and community learning and development – have to continually strive to help learners achieve the most they can, and contribute to building communities that support and sustain success. Because of the power of the reinforcing cycles at work here, this is a slow process that needs sustained, consistent effort, and for the efforts of many agencies to be aligned. We also need to be realistic about what the education system – particularly further and higher education, but also schools – can achieve, because wider society will always have powerful effects.

Confidence, aspiration, a sense of the value of learning, the drive to learn and determination to work at it, an awareness of what the options are – these are all essential prerequisites for learning. Their absence is the most significant barrier to learning for disadvantaged groups or communities. Compared to these, all the other barriers – learner support arrangements, the coherence of Scotland's qualification systems, recruitment and selection practices, institutional funding arrangements and even school attainment – are secondary. Where groups are under-represented in further and higher education, this is largely because they are much less likely than average to apply.

Learners have to be at the centre of our thinking. They are the main stakeholders for education and it has to meet their needs. Learners have to take responsibility for their learning, they have to work if they are to learn and they have to make their own choices. But learners often do not know what they want, what they need to do to achieve their goals, or what their options are, and what help is available to them. The economically poor are also more likely to be the information poor.

People have different talents and abilities. They develop different goals and interests. People take different paths through their lives. They will want different types of learning. What they want will change over time. Sometimes they will want formal learning. More often they will learn informally through their work and social life. We need to empower people to get the learning that's right for them – the best next step for them at whatever stage in their life – and to achieve. And to help create an education system that can respond to this.

Colleges and universities need to be seen by learners as welcoming and attractive places for them to learn. Educators need to provide high quality, learner-centred services. We think that excellence in education means adding maximum value for learners – recognising potential and guiding learners to courses that are right for them, helping learners to achieve as much as they can, recognising that learners start from different places and learn in different ways, and providing support which is as tailored to individuals as it possibly can be. We should expect to see a diverse range of institutions delivering different programmes to different segments of the market, this means that colleges and universities will contribute in different ways.

We should also expect that as institutions respond to this agenda they will need to change their outreach to communities, the image they portray, their recruitment and selection practices, their teaching and learning approaches, their student support arrangements, and their information and guidance services. These changes need to evolve together, otherwise institutions risk recruiting students who are then unsuccessful because they are faced with teaching and learning approaches to which they are unable to adapt. The last thing that we want is to widen access to failure. But neither do we want standards of qualifications to be devalued.

Stepping back from the roles of individual FE colleges and higher education institutions (HEIs), the lifelong learning system as a whole – institutions, community learning and development, schools, careers and guidance agencies, qualifications authorities, funding councils, quality agencies, the student awards agencies, etc – needs to develop to meet more coherently the needs of learners. By working together to raise aspirations and help learners and their influencers to take better informed decisions. By providing more joined-up qualifications and programmes making smoother transitions for learners and responding to the diverse range of needs. By providing effective learner support to reduce the barriers for the poor and to enable learners to achieve. And by ensuring that the business case for colleges and HEIs to play their part in this agenda is right.

Tackling uneven educational participation and achievement is a crucial national effort. We need to tackle it both to create a more just society and for economic effectiveness – we simply cannot afford not to make best use of Scotland's human capital. Because these patterns are set early in life, the most important actions to make progress have to be taken by Scotland as a whole through schools, communities and careers guidance agencies as well as HE and FE.

We believe achieving further progress will require a new national effort – a national campaign – harnessing the efforts of all educational sectors. This should be a campaign to make real our vision that all have a genuine equal opportunity to participate in the learning that matches their hopes, talents, efforts and needs. And, importantly, a campaign to ensure that people take this opportunity. For some this will mean going to university, for some college, for others it will be training. Almost all should benefit from at least one of these at some point.

I would like to thank the members of the review group for the time, effort and thought that they all put into this review; the several hundred people we met in the course of the review, and who contributed greatly to our thinking; and the members of the Funding Councils' Executive – particularly Tom Ward, John Kemp and Laurence Howells – who supported us in our work.

Jim McGoldrick
Chair of the SHEFC/SFEFC Widening Participation Review Group

Executive summary

This report is based on a review of the actions taken by the Funding Councils in the past and the evidence for the underlying patterns of participation and recent changes. We also looked at the academic research on widening access and consulted some of those who have researched the area and many practitioners.

Our view is that the further and higher education sectors have done much to widen access supported by the Funding Councils' policies, funding methods and initiatives. There is evidence that most of these initiatives are beginning to bear fruit, though some have been less effective than others and we suggest some refinements that could beneficially be made. More people from all parts of society are accessing further and higher education and participation at HE level by people from the most deprived areas has grown. But progress is slow and people from the most deprived areas are particularly unlikely to attend HEIs. The big imbalances by level of deprivation are not present in colleges – in fact the most deprived are represented in colleges to a greater extent than in the population. But in FE there are other issues – in particular uneven participation by geographic area. For both sectors there is a major issue in under-participation by men.

We are a long way from realising the **vision** we set out in this report – that all have an equal opportunity to participate in the learning that matches their hopes, talents, efforts and needs.

Achieving further progress will require a new national effort – a national campaign – harnessing the efforts of all sectors. This should be a campaign to make real our vision, to prioritise the areas requiring action, and, importantly, to work to ensure that people take the opportunity offered by education. For some this will be going to university, for some college, for others it will be training. Almost all should benefit from at least one of these at some point in their lives.

Getting 'first chances' right is important... We believe that the most effective action has to tackle root causes rather than symptoms. In the long term it is better to get the 'first chances' right, rather than rely on remedial policies. We need to raise aspirations so that more people from under-represented groups make the most of the opportunities that exist, are motivated to achieve at school and later.

...but for the foreseeable future, 'second chances' will remain crucial. It would be unrealistic to pretend that progress can be instant on better 'first chances'. Deprivation, school attainment, aspirations and expectations are the major underlying factors leading to and reinforcing the current patterns of participation. Strategies to change or to counterbalance these will take time. Articulation routes to HEIs from colleges, the national qualification framework and access courses help, and are disproportionately used by those who have most need of a second chance in education. There has been considerable progress in these areas. We need to further develop this area and ensure that institutions are properly funded to run access courses and to support all students. We also need to continue to promote these 'second chances'.

We have to keep an eye on what is changing. As we say above, changing the pattern of participation in education is a long-term project. But we need to constantly check how we are doing and take note of changes. Imbalances related to deprivation are likely to remain an issue in participation in HE. But the focus on some other groups may change over time. In the past our continuing focus on other groups has meant that we did not take sufficient notice of the rapidly-changing gender balance in participation. The gap in the Age Participation Index (API – a measure of the percentage of young Scots entering full time HE in a particular year) between men and women has grown from nothing to over 10 per cent in only 10 years. Retention and achievement rates for men are lower than for women. This gap is a significant issue and one that we recommend is given more attention.

Regional collaboration matters. Many of the ways forward we suggest in the report rely on the wider access regional forums working effectively because some of the under-participation is concentrated in particular geographic areas and because many issues are best tackled by the HEIs, colleges and schools working together locally on aspiration raising, on transitions, on access courses. We need to broaden the forums' missions to include all post-compulsory education, to put them on a firmer footing and to enable them to contribute to the national campaign we advocate in this report. We note that not all of the widening access forums have been equally successful to date – we need to work to make sure they are in the future and that the best practice is spread widely. We should also use regional collaboration to help us target resources better, building demand alongside any expansion of provision.

Both disability and ethnicity remain significant participation issues – but they are different from many others. They are more complex issues than those associated with deprivation, geography or gender and we need to address them appropriately. People with disabilities participate broadly in proportion to their numbers in the general population, but access and outcomes for people with disabilities vary enormously depending on the nature of their disability. Overall, people from ethnic minorities are more likely to participate than the general population – but there are variations between ethnic groups and in subject choice.

We need to constantly review the resources for education. In the long term, success in the campaign we discuss above may well cost more. It will increase staying-on rates at school and it will increase participation rates in both HE and FE – sometimes among students who need more support. We do not believe it would be sensible to attempt to quantify that cost now. We do not have a set figure for participation in FE colleges or HEIs that we are aiming to meet. We cannot predict when and how well we will succeed. We do not know how much demographic change – the reducing numbers of young people – will reduce the net cost. We need to factor in the evidence of longer-term savings elsewhere in better economic performance, reduced crime and better health, and we need to consider how we optimise the contribution of learning to the economy and society. However, as our campaign succeeds we will need to quantify the costs to the further and higher education sectors and advise the Scottish Executive, probably over many spending reviews.

We recommend a **programme of action** to make further progress by prioritising the problems faced by the most deprived areas, the widening educational gap faced by men, and further work to improve retention and achievement. We believe this will require work on:

- developing a common vision and common agenda;
- building the demand for learning among disadvantaged groups;
- providing high quality, learner-centred services;
- strengthening the business case for institutions to contribute; and
- monitoring, evaluating and learning.

Finally, we set out a **basket of measures** against which we can judge progress.

Learning matters

It is worth reminding ourselves why participation in learning is important. Lifelong learning enhances learners' life opportunities by improving their skills, knowledge, and confidence. It can lead to:

- enhanced chances of employment and earnings¹; and
- increased ability to participate in, contribute to and influence wider society.

Participation in lifelong learning can also bring pleasure and personal fulfilment, and is related to better physical and mental well-being².

In general, the more people learn, and the higher their level of qualifications, the more it enhances their life chances (in terms of future earnings). However, the extent to which lifelong learning enhances individuals' earning potential varies considerably between types and levels of lifelong learning, institutions and courses. The returns (in earnings) to a degree will on average be slightly greater if you study at a Russell Group university than another university – around six per cent for men and 2.5 per cent for women³. In addition, financial and employment returns differ depending on the route by which people access courses⁴, and when in their life they access them⁵.

Learning is also important to Scotland's economic development: education can help drive economic success for Scotland. The Scottish Executive's *Smart, Successful Scotland* asks that education at all levels contribute to a culture of enterprise, actively enable people to improve their quality of life and take their part in a prosperous and competitive economy. This ambition cannot be achieved if the full benefits of education are only available to a limited section of the population. Our economy will not prosper if it is not making the best possible use of its people through an education system that promotes aspiration, and seeks out and develops talent. When our economy needs more scientists and engineers and our health service more doctors or nurses we need to make sure we try to attract people to education from all backgrounds. This will be even more important as demographic change – the projected decline and ageing of Scotland's population – impacts. Spreading learning wider can help improve Scotland's productivity.

Neither, argues *Smart, Successful Scotland*, will the economy prosper in the long run if the increasing success of those who do well out of the education systems leads to wider gaps between rich and poor, and between well-off and deprived areas. The areas that get least out of education are those with the highest unemployment and the most concentrated poverty. Fuller participation in education is crucial to narrowing these gaps.

¹ Gasteen, Houston, and Davidson, *Investigation of the Private Employment and Earnings Returns to Further Education in Scotland*, Scotecon, 2002, p15. Gasteen, and Houston, *Scottish Educational Qualifications – the Returns to Educational Routes*, Scotecon, 2003. The evidence suggests that the growth in HE participation has not reduced the premium on wages.

² See *Revisiting the Benefits of Higher Education: A Report by the Bedford Group for Lifecourse and Statistical Studies*, Institute of Education, HEFCE, 2003.

³ Arnaud Chevalier and Gavan Conlon, *Does it pay to attend a prestigious university?*, Centre for Economics of Education, 2003.

⁴ The route by which people obtain qualifications seems to matter. See Gasteen, and Houston, *Scottish Educational Qualifications – the Returns to Educational Routes*, Scotecon, 2003.

⁵ *The Wider Benefits of Higher Education*, HEFCE, 2001.

What has been happening?

In this section we examine the patterns of participation and achievement in learning, our actions to widen access and the research and evaluation evidence. The purpose of this section is to see what can be learned from this and identify the priorities for future progress and the most promising lines of development. We therefore supplement the evidence and data with our evaluation and suggestions for the way forward. This feeds directly into our subsequent conclusions and recommendations.

Annex B gives an overview of this chapter in the form of a table that matches particular aspects of the pattern of participation with the actions the Funding Councils have taken that have affected it. This gives a clear indication of which areas our targeted activities have addressed and enables our programme to be looked at as a whole.

We are aware that there are limits to how sure we can be about whether or not our actions have led to change. Linking cause and effect in an area as complex and with so many drivers as participation in education is difficult. Sometimes cause and effect are separated by long periods of time: work to raise aspirations with a primary school pupil will not bear fruit until that pupil is 18 or older. Sometimes it is hard to be sure which intervention of many had an effect on particular groups. In all of our analysis we must be aware that the world changes: as participation has grown over time, the context in which people take decisions on whether or not to participate has changed. We do not pretend we can give absolute answers.

With all these caveats, the evidence shows that...

More people from all parts of society are accessing further and higher education ...

In the past 15 years the number of students graduating from Scottish HEIs each year has increased by two and a half times. In the same period the size of the FE sector, measured in volume of activity has almost doubled⁶. The purpose of this expansion was to support the Government's education, skills and economic policies. The evidence from employers (Futureskills Scotland reports that about 80 per cent of employers recruiting from FE and HE think that recruits are well prepared for work) and evidence from quality reviews shows that the college and university sectors maintained the quality of their provision whilst achieving this expansion.

Both Funding Councils and their predecessor bodies have played a key role in this through their funding policies, which, particularly during the 1990s, were designed to drive expansion. Both Councils also expect institutions to use their general funding to: respond to the learning market, meet the needs of the communities they serve and to deliver high quality, continuously improving provision. The Councils' core funding for teaching therefore provides the key underpinning for widening access, participation and achievement.

...and participation at HE level by people from the most deprived areas has grown, but only very slowly ...

In 2000, SHEFC and SFEFC set a joint target to raise the percentage of undergraduate entrants from postcodes with a participation rate of less than 85 per cent of the average by 10 per cent between 1998-99 and 2003-04. Progress was made, but we have not met that target with an increase of eight per cent having been achieved (see table one).

⁶ Scottish Executive, *Standard tables on higher education and further education in Scotland*.

Table1: Progress against SHEFC/SFEFC target on widening access to HE

	Entrants from areas with SPR of more than 85	Entrants from areas with SPR of less than 85	Total known	Percent with SPR less than 85	% change on base percentage of under-representation 1998-99 = 100%
1998-99	56,290	21,902	78,192	28.0%	100.0%
1999-2000	57,660	23,063	80,723	28.6%	102.0%
2000-01	57,388	23,890	81,278	29.4%	104.9%
2001-02	58,666	25,104	83,770	30.0%	107.0%
2002-03	53,838	23,582	77,420	30.5%	108.7%
2003-04	55,448	24,109	79,557	30.3%	108.2%

(SPR – Student Participation Rate)

Table two shows that in 2003-04 people from the least deprived areas are about twice as likely to be participating in higher education as people from the most deprived areas. It shows that there has been an increase in the proportion of people from the more deprived areas since 1996-97, but this change has been very gradual. If all things were equal, 20 per cent of students would come from each of the groupings by deprivation. We are still a long way from this.

Table 2: Comparison of Scottish domiciled student numbers in HE by Carstairs deprivation group, between 1996-97 and 2003-04

Year	Percentage of students in each deprivation category				
	1: from 20% least deprived	2	3	4	5: from 20% most deprived
1996-97	28.8%	22.3%	19.9%	16.2%	12.8%
2003-04	27.8%	21.7%	19.6%	16.7%	14.2%

Source: Raab & Small, *Widening access to higher education in Scotland; evidence for change from 1996/97 to 2000/01*, 2003 – updated by SFC

...and people from the most deprived areas are particularly unlikely to attend HEIs ...

Table three (overleaf) shows that people from deprived neighbourhoods are much less likely to study in higher education institutions than people from the least deprived. People from the most deprived areas studying HE are more likely to do so at an FE college and, where they do attend an HEI, they tend to concentrate in the newer universities.

Table 3: Scottish-domiciled undergraduate students at UK HEIs and Scottish FE colleges, 2003-04 by Carstairs deprivation group

Institution type ⁷	2003-04 Percentage of those with known deprivation group				
	1: from 20% least deprived	2	3	4	5: from 20% most deprived
Total	27.8%	21.7%	19.6%	16.7%	14.2%
Ancient universities	38.8%	22.3%	16.7%	13.1%	9.0%
Old universities	29.9%	21.8%	20.2%	14.9%	13.1%
New universities	27.0%	20.8%	18.8%	17.5%	15.9%
Other HEIs	19.3%	29.5%	21.2%	18.3%	11.7%
Open University	26.1%	24.4%	21.3%	16.4%	11.7%
HEIs in the rest of the UK	39.5%	25.3%	17.1%	11.2%	6.8%
FE colleges	20.0%	17.9%	21.3%	20.5%	20.3%

Source: Raab, & Small, *Widening access to higher education in Scotland; evidence for change from 1996/97 to 2000/01*, 2003 – updated by SFC.

Note: Deprivation group is not known for 3.3 per cent overall. The proportion is rather higher for FE colleges – 6.3 per cent.

...nevertheless, all types of HEI have increased the proportion of students from the most deprived areas ...

From 1996-97 to 2000-01 only the newer universities and the Open University in Scotland increased the proportion of their students from the areas containing the most deprived 40 per cent of the population⁸. Since 2001-02 all institutional types have increased the proportion of Scottish-domiciled HE students from the most deprived 40 per cent of the population⁹. In ancient universities, the figure has gone from 20.9 per cent in 2001-02 to 22.1 per cent in 2003-04. In old universities, it has gone from 26.4 per cent to 28.0 per cent.

SHEFC targeted additional places (1,685 FTEs since 1999) to contribute to improving access for people from low-participation areas (which in practice coincide with the most deprived areas). These places were targeted at part-time provision. These additional places were focussed on the institutions that did best in recruiting students from low participation areas. SHEFC also supported institutions which attract private sector investment in widening access (SHEFC allocated 200 additional places in 2001-04). Institutions were successful in attracting additional private sector income in the period that the scheme operated.

The effects of these additional places are hard to disentangle from the general patterns of participation, particularly because the numbers are very small compared with total activity.

⁷ The ancient universities are the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews. The old universities are the Universities of Dundee, Stirling, Strathclyde and Heriot- Watt University The new universities are the Universities of Abertay, and Paisley, Glasgow Caledonian University, Napier University and Robert Gordon University. The other HEIs are Bell College, Edinburgh College of Art, Glasgow School of Art, Queen Margaret University College, Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and the UHI Millennium Institute.

⁸ Raab, & Small, *Widening access to higher education in Scotland; evidence for change from 1996/97 to 2000/01*, 2003. provides an analysis of patterns to 2000-01, p16.

⁹ This is based on an SFC update of Raab & Small's analysis to cover the years 2001-02 to 2003-04.

...but students from deprived areas are particularly unlikely to attend some of the most highly sought after courses at HEIs.

Some of these courses (but by no means all), tend to be concentrated in the older universities. For example, HESA data shows that in 2003-04 only 8.8 per cent of Scottish-domiciled medicine and dentistry students in Scottish HEIs are from the lowest 20 per cent of deprivation zones. The institutions and subjects which people from deprived neighbourhoods are least likely to study in are those whose graduates tend to earn the most.

To help address this, SHEFC has supported a major collaborative project from its strategic funds (£225k) – the University of Glasgow-led Widening Access to Medicine and Veterinary Medicine project. This project is seeking ways to identify school children with the potential skills and attributes to succeed in these professions and supporting them in their development. Early results are promising.

Selection to high-demand courses has received disproportionate attention in the debate over widening participation. The evidence is that admissions processes play a relatively small part in the patterns of participation mentioned above – dwarfed by the influence of application rates and prior school attainment. Much of the further and higher education system is open to anyone reaching a threshold level of attainment¹⁰. However, we believe that perceptions that selection methods used for high demand subjects and institutions are not fair can in itself contribute to unwillingness to apply even where people meet the entry requirements.

HEIs tend to rely heavily on prior formal educational attainment in selecting students because there is evidence that it is the best single indicator of potential to achieve in HE¹¹. Prior educational attainment can underestimate the potential of people from some backgrounds (such as those from state schools, and, under some circumstances, schools with poor attainment rates)¹². For subjects preparing people for particular professions, academic attainment may ignore other crucial skills and characteristics necessary to be effective in that profession. School attainment cannot identify potential in people who have only undertaken limited formal education. If we want to identify those most suited to a particular course, those likely to achieve, and those learners most likely to excel in the most popular courses and the careers they lead to, then we need to become more sophisticated in how we select.

The Scottish Executive, and the UK Government, are considering the implementation of a Post Qualification Admissions (PQA) system for admission to higher education institutions. Some have argued that PQA would make admissions processes fairer¹³. However, in some respects PQA could undermine efforts to widen participation. For example, if PQA compressed the period within which institutions make a decision on applications, in comparison with the conditional offer system, it could encourage institutions to place greater emphasis on prior academic attainment. PQA could also make it more difficult for learners to interact with an institution over time before deciding whether to apply. It could also lead to longer periods of uncertainty for learners regarding their learning destinations, in comparison with the conditional offer system, and this may be a particular problem for mature learners.

We need to improve our ability to identify learners' potential in order to guide learners better to provision that is right for them. And, for the most popular courses, to enable institutions to select fairly those most likely to excel. This will have particular importance as schools and colleges develop a wider range of routes and vocational qualifications. We think that the Funding Council and institutions should embed this as part of their quality enhancement activities.

¹⁰ See figures in *Higher Education in Scotland: A Baseline Report*, SHEFC 2004, on this for HEIs. 90% of applicants get in somewhere. We do not have clear evidence on the relationship between applications and places in FE, though some colleges are telling us that increasing numbers of courses are oversubscribed.

¹¹ *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice* p 5.

¹² See *Schooling Effects on Higher Education Achievement*, 2003, p3, HEFCE Circular letter 2003/32.

¹³ For example, see *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice*, p9.

Students from the most deprived neighbourhoods are more likely to study at non-advanced level at FE colleges.

In contrast to participation in HE, people from deprived neighbourhoods are more likely than average to study at non-advanced level in FE colleges, as table four illustrates. This position has remained fairly stable from 1999-2000 to 2003-04.

Table 4: Comparison of student numbers studying at non-advanced level in Scottish FE colleges by deprivation category between 1999-00 and 2003-04

Year	Percentage of students in each deprivation category						
	Missing	Undefined	1: from 20% least deprived areas	2	3	4	5: from 20% most deprived areas
1999-00	11%	0%	13%	15%	16%	22%	24%
2003-04	0%	8%	14%	15%	15%	22%	25%

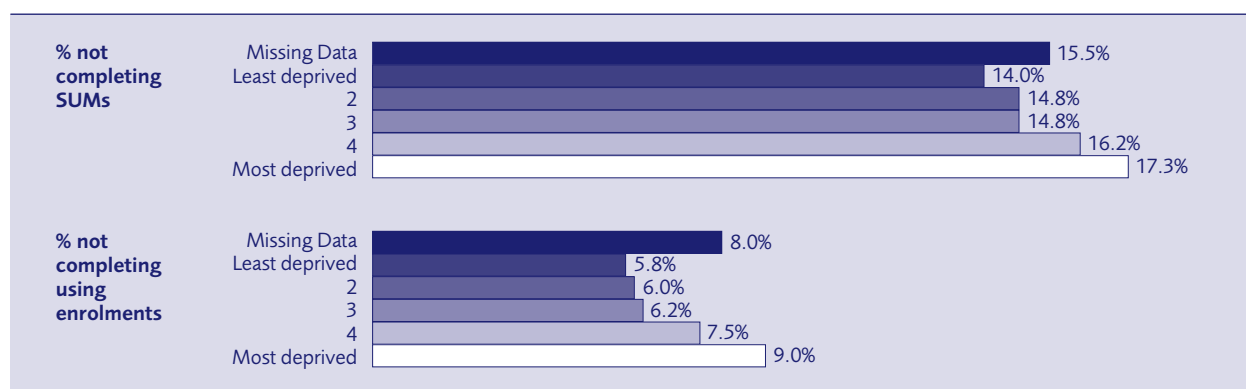
Source: SFC

SFEFC supports colleges in serving the needs of deprived areas by the social inclusion weighting in its funding formula (about £11.7 million in 2004-05). This recognises the additional costs that colleges face – entry costs and support for retention for students from the most deprived areas – and provides an incentive to recruit these students. The strong pattern of participation from deprived groups suggests that this, along with the strong social inclusion mission of colleges, has been effective.

Retention rates are lower for people from the most deprived areas in both HEIs and FE colleges.

Figure one shows that in FE colleges, retention rates are lower than average for people from lower deprivation zones.

Figure 1: Non-completion in FE colleges 2002-03, by deprivation zone ¹⁴



Source: SFC

These figures indicate that the additional funding for students from the most deprived areas has not yet led to equal outcomes for students – though the disparity may have been far worse had that funding not been present.

Table five illustrates that in HEIs young people from low participation neighbourhoods have lower retention rates than people from higher ones. This gap in retention has widened slightly in recent years.

¹⁴ Scottish-domiciled students from the 25% date for funding to the end of the course, SUMs are Student Units of Measurement, a measurement of activity.

Table 5: Non-continuation following year of entry – young full-time first degree entrants to Scottish HEIs, 1996-97 to 2001-02

Year of entry	Low participation areas	Others
	% non-cont	% non-cont
1996-97	12	8
1997-98	11	7
1998-99	12	8
1999-00	14	8
2000-01	13	8
2001-02	15	9
2001-02 (excluding Bell College and UMI)	14	8

Source: HESA Performance Indicators

From 2001-02 SHEFC has supported HEIs in improving the retention and progression of students from low-participation neighbourhoods (that is, those where the HE participation rate is less than two-thirds of the UK average.) through its widening access premium (£5 million in 2004-05). We do not yet have adequate data on the years for which the premium has been paid to say whether retention rates for people from low-participation areas are converging towards the general rate. In 2003 we undertook an initial evaluation of the premium. The evidence was that institutions were using the premium on appropriate projects and generally welcomed it, though a small minority – generally institutions that received least from the premium – would prefer that the money was simply allocated through general core funding. It seemed that the premium was having the effect of concentrating funding and attention on the issue of retention in HEIs. It must also be remembered that, by international standards, retention rates in Scottish HEIs are extremely good.

A recurring concern we heard from stakeholders, for all types of learners, was the need for support to be available at transition points. Evidence suggest that transitions between one type of learning and another or one type of institution and another can be challenging for all learners, but particularly for those from under-represented groups such as people from lower socio-economic groups, and people with disabilities and other additional support needs¹⁵. Examples of support which can help to 'level the playing field' for learners include identifying individual needs and learning styles¹⁶, tutorial support, pastoral support, counselling, and study skills initiatives¹⁷, induction sessions and bridging courses¹⁸. There is plenty of evidence that such support can aid retention and achievement¹⁹.

There remains a potential tension between performance indicators for retention and trying to meet the needs of individual learners and communities best. We therefore caution against the uncontextualised use of such performance indicators and strongly support the approach taken by the Funding Council and its quality agencies in using these as part of a balanced, holistic judgement. It is also important to remember that the causes of 'drop out' are rarely solely a function of the quality of teaching and support provided by institutions – important though this is.

¹⁵ On transitions for people with disabilities, see *Aspiration Raising and Transition of Disabled Students from Further Education to Higher Education*, National Disability Team / Skill, 2004, p24. *Implementing Inclusiveness Realising Potential* (the 'Beattie Report'), Scottish Executive, 1999, stresses the importance of effective transition arrangements into FE for people with additional support needs.

¹⁶ *Implementing Inclusiveness in Further Education*, HMIE aspect report for SFEFC, 2004, p13.

¹⁷ See JM Consulting for HEFCE, *Cost of Widening Participation*, p24-25, 2004. See also Yorke, *Transition into Higher Education : some implications for the 'employability agenda'*, LTSN Generic Centre, 2003, p3.

¹⁸ See *Implementing Inclusiveness in Further Education*, HMIE, 2004, on bridging courses for pupils with additional support needs, in their final year at school, prior to transition into college arrangements into college (p13). See National Audit Office, *Widening Participation in Higher Education in England*, 2002, p27 -28 on activities to assist students to settle into institutions and courses in HEIs.

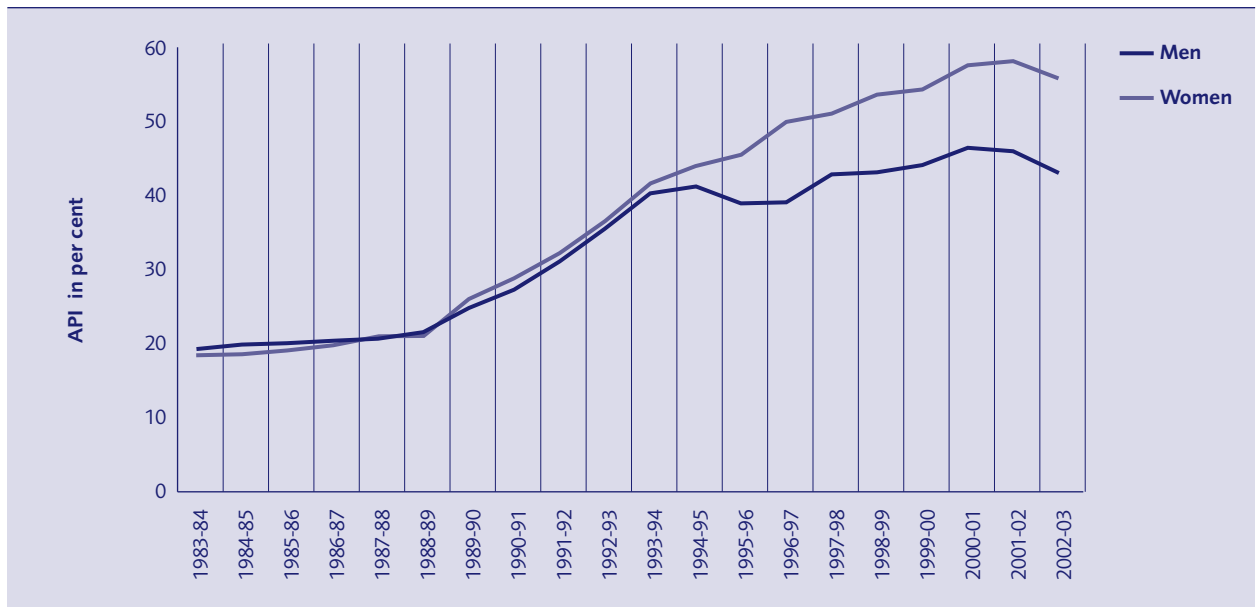
¹⁹ See for example, Yorke, *Transition into Higher Education : some implications for the 'employability agenda'*, LTSN Generic Centre, 2003, p10; *Social Class and Participation*, Universities UK, 2002, p5; *From Elitism to Inclusion*, Universities UK, 1998.

We think that improving our support for learners to improve retention and achievement rates will be a continued focus for both sectors and needs to be given high priority as we take this agenda forward. Particular attention needs to be given to support needs at transition points.

Men are falling behind women in both FE and HE, with the starkest gender gap in HEIs...

Boys' school attainment is, on average, lower than girls'²⁰. Over the last 10 years women have become much more likely than men to participate in higher education. Figure two shows that since 1989-90 the Age Participation Index (the number of Scots aged under 21 who enter full-time HE for the first time in a given year as a percentage of the population of 17-year-olds in the same year) has been higher for women than men and that the gap is widening.

Figure 2: Age Participation Index (API) for Scotland by Gender 1983-84 to 2002-03



Source: Scottish Executive

The gender gap is starkest in higher education institutions. In 2003-04 about 60 per cent of students in Scottish HEIs were women, and women are more likely than men to participate in higher education institutions at almost all ages²¹.

There is also a gender gap at both HE and FE level in FE colleges (see Table six), though it is not as stark as in HEIs. Overall, women are much more likely to participate in FE colleges both at advanced and non-advanced level. However, students aged between 18 and 20 are more likely to be men than women.

²⁰ SQA Attainment and School Leaver Qualifications in Scotland 2002-03, Scottish Executive, table 2.

²¹ SFC.

Table 6: Enrolments of Scottish-domiciled candidates in Scottish FE colleges 2003-04 by gender, level and age

Age of student (in August)	Gender	Higher Education		Further Education	
		Students	Per cent	Students	Per cent
under 18	Men	2,391	49.5%	47,347	50.0%
	Women	2,436	50.4%	47,324	50.0%
	Total	4,827		94,671	
18-20	Men	7,814	54.4%	19,008	55.0%
	Women	6,558	45.6%	15,578	45.0%
	Total	14,372		34,586	
21-24	Men	3,917	49.9%	11,999	42.3%
	Women	3,937	50.1%	16,390	57.7%
	Total	7,854		28,389	
25 & over	Men	10,693	40.0%	88,238	35.5%
	Women	16,036	60.0%	160,445	64.5%
	Total	26,729		248,683	
Overall	Men	24,815	46.0%	166,592	41.0%
	Women	28,967	54.0%	239,737	59.0%
Total		53,782		406,329	

Source: SFC

Retention and achievement rates are lower for men than for women.

Men also have lower retention and achievement rates. In Scottish FE colleges in 2003-04, 17 per cent of courses undertaken by men (measured in Student Units of Measurement) were not completed, compared to 15 per cent for women²². In Scottish HEIs in 2001-02, for UK-domiciled full-time entrants to undergraduate courses, about 16 per cent of men did not continue following their year of entry, compared to 12 per cent of women²³.

It is noticeable that there has been little national activity focused on the issue of gender. Given the emerging trends in this area, we think there might be scope to reconsider priorities across the full range of learners' needs – we hope that the proposed Scottish Equalities Unit could contribute to this. It should also be a focus of our other activities.

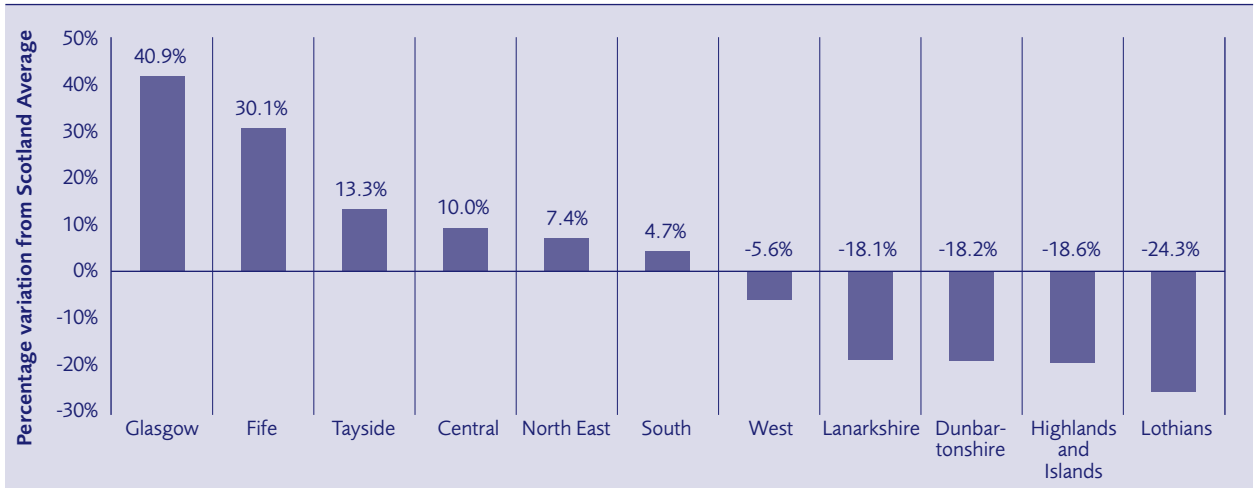
There are wide geographical variations in participation rates ...

Figure three shows that participation rates at non-advanced FE level vary considerably by geographical area, with Glasgow and Fife having the highest participation rates in 2002-03, and Lothians, Lanarkshire, Dunbartonshire and Highlands and Islands having participation rates considerably below the national average.

²² SFC, FES 2003-04

²³ HESA *Performance Indicators in Higher Education in The UK 2002/03*.

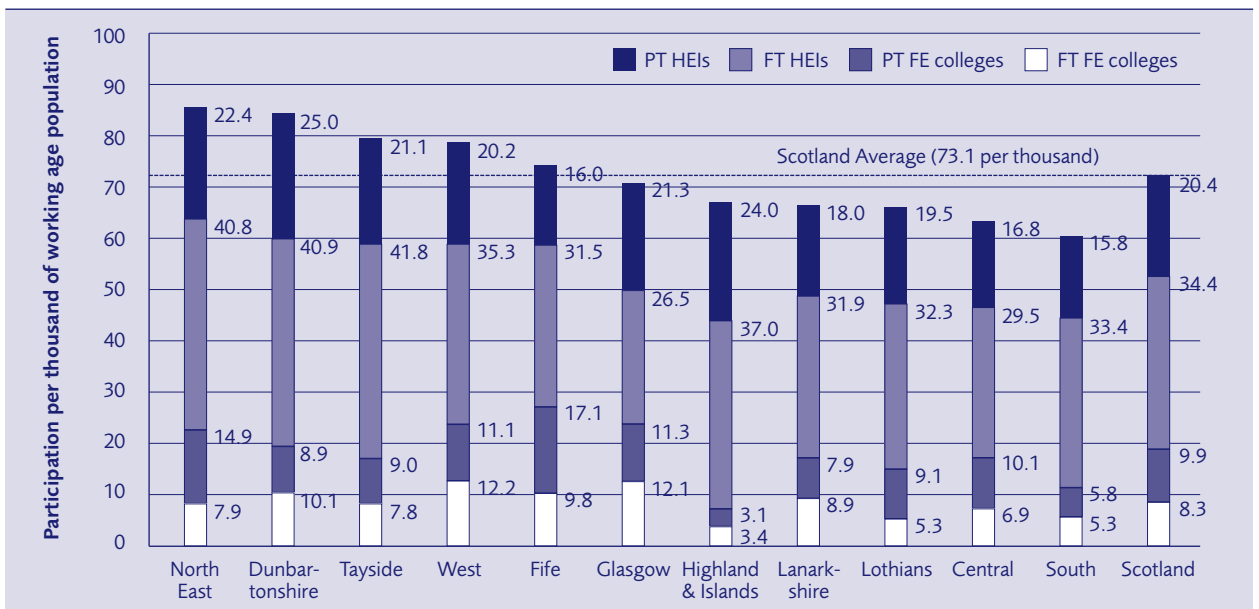
Figure 3. Non-advanced participation rates by region, 2002-03: variation from Scottish benchmark



Source: Supply and Demand of Further Education in Scotland, DTZ Pleda, 2005

There are also considerable variations in participation rates at HE level, as figure four indicates, with the North East and Dunbartonshire having particularly high participation rates, and South and Central Scotland having particularly low participation rates.

Figure 4: Participation at HE Level (at both FE colleges and HEIs), 2002/03



Source: Supply and Demand of Further Education in Scotland, DTZ Pleda, 2005.

For some areas, participation rates are below average for both FE and HE (Lothians, Lanarkshire, Highlands and Islands).

These patterns might suggest that people from some areas are less likely to participate in FE or HE because of where they live rather than their potential to benefit from learning. Understanding the supply and demand factors relating to these differences in participation is a complex exercise.

...but there has been measurable progress in rural areas where additional resources have been targeted.

Whilst there are particular barriers created by distance and sparsity, the data does not show a simple link between rurality and participation rates.

However, the development of Crichton campus in Dumfries in 1998 (supported by £2.3 million of SHEFC strategic funding and 150 additional funded places) has contributed to an increase in HE participation in the south of Scotland²⁴. Similarly, the development of the UHI Millennium Institute has contributed to increased participation in HE in North and North East Scotland based on its new model of HE provision for dispersed rural communities, linking FE colleges together as providers of HE²⁵.

Geographically targeted allocations appear to have contributed to widening access. The evidence is clearest where they have been targeted on rural areas or outwith the main urban centres. The evidence is less clear for the allocations made to urban centres (see above for SHEFC's allocation of funded numbers to low-participation areas). But the additional numbers allocated have been small, perhaps properly reflecting a caution about the extent to which effective learner demand really existed in the target areas and the risk of skewing the system inappropriately. These targeted allocations have been primarily made to HEIs. We think that this may create a risk of not properly considering the full range of lifelong learning opportunities needed by communities and creating inappropriate competition between the sectors. This suggests that area-based allocations should be considered across the two sectors by the merged Funding Council using the emerging common evidence base. In targeting any available growth, the Council should prioritise the level (non-advanced, HN or degree) which would best support widening participation in the particular area.

We recommend targeting any additional numbers sparingly, focusing on the most severe problems and where constraints on student places appear to be a key barrier to participation and meeting needs. We should continue to rely on institutions to respond to the majority of the variations in participation that will always occur. However, it might be more effective in the future to make targeted allocations of numbers as one part of a package to address the needs of an area alongside collaborative multi-agency activities to stimulate demand, and action to improve the accessibility, quality, image and attractiveness of provision serving these areas.

...and it is striking the impact that high quality facilities can have on participation.

The impact that new attractive well-designed buildings can have on motivating learners, employers and the community is well illustrated by the James Watt Campus at Kilwinning and the new West Lothian College at Livingston (which were supported by allocations of strategic growth). As institutions' estates are modernised we can expect to see further impacts on recruitment. This has particular significance for the FE sector, where a major programme of capital renewal is underway and, because of the position of most colleges, is likely to have a major impact on regenerating and stimulating new interest in learning in some of the most deprived areas.

²⁴ Raab & Small, *Widening access to higher education in Scotland; evidence for change from 1996/97 to 2000/01*, 2003, p30.

²⁵ Raab & Small, *Widening access to higher education in Scotland; evidence for change from 1996/97 to 2000/01*, 2003, p30.

There has been an expansion in part-time provision at HEIs benefiting students from more deprived areas.

Part-time provision in HEIs has substantially increased – by 50 per cent between 1995-96 and 2002-03 compared to 20 per cent for full-time students– though it has recently plateaued. Much of this growth has been at postgraduate level – very valuable for continuing professional development and retraining. SHEFC has supported this through its part-time incentive grant (which started in 1994-95 and distributed £7.5 million in 2004-05). It has also given grants to support the development of part-time undergraduate programmes which are tailored to meet the needs of people who are unemployed or on low incomes (a total of £950,000 between 1998-99 and 2000-01).

Part of this expansion has benefited students from more deprived areas or students with disabilities – there has been a four-fold increase in the number of students supported by SHEFC's part-time fee waiver scheme since it was introduced in 1998-99 (£2.4 million in 2004-05). The scheme reduces the costs of studying for part-time learners on low incomes or receiving non-means tested disabled students allowance. The number of mature women from deprived areas studying part-time also increased considerably between 1996-97 and 2000-01²⁶. However, while this is welcome, the expansion in part-time has also benefited students who are not deprived in broadly equal measure. The proportion of part-time students from the most deprived 40 per cent of areas in 2003-04 (27 per cent) was broadly what it was in 1999-00. This means that if we see part-time provision as a way to widen access we need to be aware that simply providing additional part-time places will not necessarily target additional resources on 'access' students. Other responses – such as fee waivers or changes to student support – may be more effective in doing this. Before we target additional measures at part-time places for improving access we need to research the level of demand.

There are a large number of articulation and other routes giving access to HEIs for people from a wider range of backgrounds.

There are currently about 2,000 articulation routes between FE colleges and HEIs, and about 3,700 students (about 10 per cent of entrants) used one to enter year two or three of a degree at a Scottish HEI in 2002-03, an increase of about 350 on 2001-02. SHEFC has supported the development of more effective articulation routes between FE colleges and HEIs through its FE/HE Articulation Grant (£2.7 million over 2003-04 and 2004-05). And through our funding for national activities such as the Mapping, Tracking and Bridging project being undertaken by the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access. It is also one of the areas we have funded wider access regional forums to work on.

Articulation into year two or three of a degree course partly depends on institutions having places for learners and there is some evidence that as institutions improve their retention rates in the early years of courses, they may become more reluctant to offer advanced standing. This will require further monitoring.

The national qualification framework, the development of articulation routes and access courses have the potential to shorten routes to degree-level study ...

The SCOTCAT programme (about £550,000 over 1998-99 and 1999-2000) helped lay the foundations for the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), and all HEIs have now credit rated most of their programmes. The SCQF has the potential to make a real difference to learners, but this is a long-term project which will take time to have its full influence. Its impact will become clearer when the evaluation commissioned by the Scottish Executive from the Centre for Research into Lifelong Learning is published.

²⁶ Raab & Small, *Widening access to higher education in Scotland; evidence for change from 1996/97 to 2000/01*, 2003, p18.

...and these routes are important to widening access and providing second chances.

Articulation routes and the people using these routes are highly concentrated in the post-1992 universities and the Open University. We are, however, not yet able to measure whether these routes lead to good retention and achievement rates.

We do not believe that an HN qualification should automatically entitle a learner to advanced standing on a particular degree level course – the overriding consideration should be the learner's ability to succeed. There are sometimes good reasons why one course will not 'fit' with another. The Scottish system of higher education does not automatically entitle learners with particular qualifications to enter a course, as some continental systems, with their associated high drop out rates, do²⁷. It is hard to see how an entitlement model for HN level students could function without a similar entitlement for school level qualifications and within our system of controlling public spending through limiting funded places and capping of overall numbers. However, there is still a question for universities who do not extensively use articulation with advanced standing to consider whether they are admitting the learners best able to benefit from their courses.

We think that we need to do more to 'join up' qualifications by adapting the content of qualifications and courses (or provide bridging courses) so that it is easier for learners to articulate from one level to another, and to minimise the time it takes learners to achieve their goals. Joining up the learning system should be done systematically, but along the routes learners are most likely to take. This needs to be a universal consideration of programme designers in the schools, college and university sectors as part of the natural cycle of reviewing courses. We think that there are particular opportunities for this at the moment with the HN Review currently being undertaken.

Second chance routes into lifelong learning – basic skills courses, providing 'taster' experiences, developing confidence, and academic skills and knowledge and supporting progression – are of great importance to people from disadvantaged groups²⁸. Many people have told us in the course of this review that some access courses are unnecessarily restrictive in terms of their content and are therefore potentially limiting learners' next steps. Whilst FE colleges can use SFEFC funding for such courses, in HEIs these courses lead to non-accredited sub-HE level learning, which is not eligible for SHEFC funding. As a consequence these activities often operate on extremely limited and uncertain funding. We think that each part of the country should have sufficient sustainable second chance provision. We also heard in the course of our review of innovative ideas for collaboration between FE colleges and HEIs to support learners making the transition to degree level study, with colleges offering support for learners during the early part of their study in an HEI. These ideas should be encouraged, supported and disseminated.

We think that the Council should ask the wider access regional forums to look collectively at and disseminate good practice in the design of these types of courses, consider the scope for innovative FE/HE collaborations to support transitions, and coordinate such provision in their areas in order to meet learners' needs. The Council should then consider making such non credit-bearing provision in HEIs eligible for funding where it contributes to the regional agenda and demonstrably contributes to widening participation and success for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

²⁷ See *Education at a Glance*, OECD.

²⁸ For example, see Murphy, Morgan-Klein Gallacher and Osborne, *Widening Participation in Higher Education, Report to the Scottish Executive*, 2002, on access courses.

People with disabilities participate broadly in proportion to their numbers in the general population ...

Most disabilities do not affect potential to benefit from lifelong learning²⁹. We would therefore expect disabled people to be about as likely to participate in lifelong learning as the rest of the population. However, people with disabilities have lower than average attainment at school³⁰.

In HEIs, for those students for which we have data in relation to disability, in 2002-03 about five per cent of those aged 30 or under reported that they have a disability. In colleges, for those students for which we have data in relation to disability, in 2003-04 about six per cent of students aged under 30 reported that they have a disability. There is no definitive data on the proportion of people in Scotland with a disability, however, data from the Scottish census suggests that an estimate of the number of people aged under 30 with a disability would be between six per cent and nine per cent.

The proportion of people reporting disabilities and the proportion receiving Disabled Students Allowance in Scottish FE colleges and HEIs has substantially increased in recent years.

SHEFC has supported institutions in this through its disabled students premium (from 2001-02) to assist with the costs of providing additional materials and services for disabled students (£1.4 million in 2004-05).

SHEFC also funded a range of projects including:

- a National Coordinator for Disability since 1995, and since 2001-02, funding the Scottish Disability Team (£180,000 in 2004-05);
- funding to HEIs to appoint institutional disability co-ordinators. Most of these co-ordinator posts have been made permanent following the end of our top sliced initiative suggesting that this pump priming funding worked; and
- the Teachability project to produce resources to assist staff to ensure their teaching and learning is accessible to learners with disabilities. These materials are being used and are internationally respected.

The FE sector plays a particular role in supporting people with disabilities, many of whom face major difficulties accessing learning. This is supported by SFEFC's extended learning support weighting for students with additional support needs to cover additional expenditure incurred by colleges in order to meet student needs which arise from specific disability categories (about £28.8 million in 2004-05).

SFEFC set up the BRITE Initiative (Beattie Resources for Inclusiveness in Technology and Education – £221,000 in 2004-05) to provide colleges with training and advice on the use of assistive technologies and the assessment of learners' support requirements. A recent HMIE review found that the initiative had contributed significantly to FE colleges' ability to meet the needs of learners and recommended that this work continue, since further improvements could still be made.

²⁹ An exception is severe learning difficulties.

³⁰ For example, in Scottish publicly funded schools, school leavers who have Record of Needs/Individualised Educational Programme status have considerably lower qualifications than the average, though having a Record of Needs is not a perfect proxy for disability. See *SQA attainment and school leaver qualifications in Scotland: 2002/03*, Scottish Executive, Table 25.

SFEFC and SHEFC have provided substantial funding to FE colleges (£54.2 million since 2002-03) and HEIs (£10 million in 2004-05) to modernise their estates and teaching equipment, in part to enable them to be more accessible to people with disabilities. We know that a significant proportion of the estates and teaching equipment funding was spent on disability-related developments; however, further evidence of the extent to which colleges and universities are meeting need is required and an evaluation is currently being undertaken in partnership with the sectors.

The barriers to access for people with disabilities vary enormously depending on the nature of their disability. It is therefore dangerous to generalise about such groups. However, there appear to be considerable differences between different types of disability in terms of retention and achievement rates.

We think the focus on people with disabilities has been useful and should continue. There are clearly continuing support and development needs to meet the letter and spirit of recent disabilities legislation and good practice.

Overall, people from ethnic minorities are more likely to participate than the general population.

Whilst some ethnic minorities are relatively unlikely to have formal educational qualifications, overall, ethnic minorities participate in further or higher education at a higher level than the average, though participation varies quite a lot between different groups³¹. However, there are problems in the reporting of data on ethnicity, and intrinsic difficulties in analysing small populations.

Both Councils have encouraged and supported colleges and universities to develop their policies on race equality (required under the Race Relations Amendment Act (RRAA)) and have worked with the Commission for Racial Equality to provide feedback on institutions' policies. The Councils also supported good practice work in relation to race both through UK-wide initiatives and through agencies such as SFEU. All institutions have made good progress in responding to the RRAA; however, we are aware that policies and plans only go so far – it is too early to see evidence of impact on practice and operations.

We think the Councils should continue to support this agenda particularly through the development of the Scottish Equalities Unit.

Student support and fee waivers have helped an increasing number of students from poorer backgrounds to participate in further education³².

SFEFC funds colleges to provide student support for non-advanced students: bursaries, hardship funds, childcare and education maintenance allowances (about £68 million in 2004-05). This funding is targeted on disadvantaged groups, and contributes to widening access by reducing financial barriers to study and to completion. The number of students assisted by bursaries has increased by about 15 per cent from 2000-01 to 2003-04, from about 31,500 to 36,300. We cannot yet evaluate any impact on retention and achievement rates, but improvements in data collection mean that in the future we will be able to do this. Over several years, SFEFC has adjusted the pattern of allocation of these funds to bring them closer into alignment with needs.

³¹ See SFEFC and SHEFC's annual race monitoring reports, www.sfefc.ac.uk/about_us/race_equality/Race_Equality_Monitoring_SFEFC.html

³² Student support for Scottish-domiciled HE students is provided by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland. Although SHEFC's part-time fee waiver is part of this agenda.

The SFEFC fee waiver grant enables colleges to waive tuition fees of students on the basis of eligibility and need (likely to be about £40.6 million in 2004-05). There was a substantial increase in students benefiting from the fee waiver between the year it was introduced 2000-01 (about 83,000 students) and 2001-02 (about 100,000 students), but since then the number of students benefiting has remained static.

Financial disadvantage is one key barrier amongst a range of cultural, institutional and dispositional factors that affect individuals' decisions to participate in post-compulsory education. These funds are therefore an essential part of supporting the widening access agenda. The continuing efforts that SFEFC has made to target such resources more effectively and to keep improving the guidance on their use, in partnership with the colleges and learners, have been effective.

Some people are deterred from learning (or particular types of learning) by cost (and perceived cost)³³. Particular issues include the relationship between benefit systems and learner support arrangements³⁴, loss of earnings³⁵, childcare³⁶, attitudes to debt³⁷, and barriers to particular types of learning (including part-time³⁸, access courses and summer schools³⁹) which can be significant for non-traditional learners. We think that it is particularly important to address the issues regarding part-time study and benefits.

We believe we should continue to research where cost or perceived cost to learners is creating an unreasonable barrier and make the case for necessary changes to learner support arrangements. The new Council needs to continue to refine its approaches building on this evidence and the findings of the Scottish Executive's Funding for Learners review.

³³ The Scottish Executive's *Review of Funding of Learners*, notes that "... entering post-compulsory education can be perceived as a risky investment decision, especially for low income students" (p4). Una Bartley, *More School? Universities Scotland*, 2004 suggests that for those pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds who were thinking of university, most of their parents expressed concerns about finance. Concern about debt is a factor for potential students from lower socio-economic groups, Andy Furlong and Alasdair Forsyth, *Socio economic disadvantage and experience in higher education*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2003.

³⁴ *Review of Funding for Learners Final Report*, Scottish Executive, 2004, p5.

³⁵ Elias and Davies, *Dropping out: a study of early leavers from higher education*, 2002.

³⁶ Some stakeholders told us that childcare costs can be an important factor affecting participation. However, the *Review of Funding for Learners Final Report*, Scottish Executive, 2004, suggests that cost is not one of the main issues relating to childcare.

³⁷ *Attitudes to Debt: School Leavers and Further Education Students' Attitudes to Debt and their Impact on Participation in Higher Education*, Universities UK, 2003, indicates that prospective students with more tolerant attitudes towards debt were more likely to go to university than those with negative attitudes to debt, all other things being equal. Groups with the most negative attitudes to debt include those from the lowest social classes, lone parents, Muslims, and black and minority ethnic groups. However, it is not clear how such attitudes translate into behaviour.

³⁸ See *Funding for Learners Review Report*, Scottish Executive, 2004 p21 for an account of the student support arrangements for part-time students. There is some evidence that cost factors may be suppressing demand for part-time study for some groups, though the evidence base for this is incomplete.

³⁹ Learners are not entitled to student support for access courses or summer schools, and some stakeholders have suggested to us that this can pose a barrier to participation on these courses.

Institutions and the sectors increasingly see contributing to widening access as a key part of their mission ...

HEIs have significantly developed and expanded their widening access activities in recent years⁴⁰. SHEFC's programme of high-level visits to institutions has shown that HEIs take access seriously and recognise and respond to the challenges they face. All the HEIs came together in 2001 to publish a statement of core principles that they all signed up to (the Social Inclusion Pledge). SHEFC helped and gave impetus to this through its support for HEIs to develop and implement wider access strategies (£3.2 million over 1998-99 to 2004-05).

The further education colleges have long been committed to these ideas, and we have seen the further embedding of this social inclusion role as a core part of their mission alongside colleges' other roles in providing vocational education to meet local and national needs. SHEFC provided colleges with about £5 million over 2001-02 to 2004-05 to help them develop and implement inclusiveness strategies to take forward the recommendations of the Beattie Report *Implementing Inclusiveness, Realising Potential*. In 2003-04 we commissioned HMIE to evaluate the impact of this funding. This report showed that colleges had generally undertaken significant developments to promote inclusiveness, and all had used the additional funding effectively.

We think that all colleges and HEIs should be contributing to the widening participation agenda, and that the Council should continue to encourage and support them to do so. But institutions each have their own culture and mission. Institutions have to behave rationally within their mission, their market and finances. These determine the extent to which institutions have a 'business case' to contribute to widening participation. We should therefore expect to see a diverse range of institutions delivering different programmes to different segments of the market, and that institutions will contribute to the widening participation agenda in different ways. We should also be realistic about how quickly they can change in order to better respond to this agenda, and which of our measures will be most effective in encouraging and supporting them to contribute to this agenda.

In the wider community there appears to remain two areas of concern about widening participation. These are typically labelled "social engineering" and "dumbing down". Both these concerns appear from time to time in the media and in public debate. These perhaps reflect a need for the Council to clarify the perceived tension between "widening access" and "excellence", and reaffirm that widening access must not be achieved at the expense of the standards of qualifications.

Vision and values are important since they underlie and influence everything that all the players do – learners, institutions, agencies, the Government and commentators. We think the new Funding Council could do more by continuing to speak out clearly, articulating and promoting the values of fairness and equity towards a more just society. At the same time it should stress the absolute need to maintain the standards of qualifications. The Council should also promote the idea of excellence in education as adding maximum value for learners – the idea that the education system should be taking all learners as far as they can possibly go, no matter where they start from.

The various premia and weightings in funding formulae described above have also contributed to this, by supporting the 'business case' for institutions to widen access. Many of the stakeholders we spoke to in the course of this review, reported that these aspects of the funding formulae have leveraged change. We note also the importance of demand-side measures (for example, the evidence from part-time fee waivers) – we are sceptical about the effectiveness of supply-side interventions alone without stimulation of effective learner demand and student support.

⁴⁰ *Greater Expectations: Wider Access and Raising Aspirations*, Universities Scotland, 2005, p1, identifies new wider access initiatives established by Scottish HEIs since 2001.

We do not think that the Council's recurrent funding should be used as an incentive for institutions to recruit people from particular groups or backgrounds. We do not believe in social engineering outcomes in this way, and incentives can have unintended negative consequences: competition for learners rather than partnership working to widen participation; cherry picking outstanding students from disadvantaged groups or areas, rather than engaging more widely with such groups or areas; and encouraging institutions to take students on courses that are not right for them. We think that there are particular reasons to review the values, measures and conditions of the widening access premium for HEIs. Whilst it is extremely difficult to determine the additional costs to institutions of widening participation activities, there is some evidence that these premiums may not currently be high enough to fully recognise additional costs⁴¹. Some stakeholders have expressed concern that the measures for allocating these premiums and weightings are not optimal, and that there is not sufficient accountability regarding their use⁴².

We think the Council's goal should be to avoid financial disincentives for institutions to recruit students with potential from disadvantaged groups, by recognising the additional costs of widening participation activities. The Council should refine its premiums – values, measures and conditions – to support this approach.

...national activities have supported this ...

SHEFC and SFEFC have funded two national posts to support the widening access agenda: a national co-ordinator for widening access (since 2000), and a social inclusion policy and research officer for Universities Scotland (since 2002). These posts have proved useful in: influencing institutions' approaches, raising awareness of policies and issues, developing and sharing good practice and undertaking some important research projects.

...as have regional collaborations ...

SHEFC established the Scottish wider access regional forums in 1998 as a network of regionally-based forums to assist institutions to develop complementary and collaborative widening participation strategies for higher education. With SFEFC funding they were expanded to include FE colleges in 2000. Since 2004 the forums have been funded at a higher level (about £2.5 million in 2004-05) so that they can take on a more strategic role and fund projects – including some projects previously funded directly by SHEFC. One example of a project is the Greater Opportunity of Access and Learning with Schools (GOALS) project which is managed by the West of Scotland Regional Forum. The project aims to raise awareness of and aspirations for higher education, through collaboration between about 300 schools and HEIs. There is evidence that GOALS is beginning to work⁴³.

⁴¹ SHEFC's widening access premium is set at approximately 5 per cent of the average gross unit of resource. In contrast, *The Costs of Widening Participation in Higher Education*, JM Consulting for HEFCE, 2004, estimates the additional costs of widening access activities for English HEIs to be on average 31 per cent. We have some concerns about the applicability of this study to our situation – in particular the difficulty in such work in estimating the necessary additional costs as opposed to simply measuring additional actual expenditure.

⁴² *The Funding for Learners Review*, Scottish Executive, 2004, (p58) suggests that the criteria for the Disabled Students Premium should be based on the number of students with additional needs rather than the number of students in receipt of DSA. Stakeholders have also suggested that the methodology for allocating the Widening Access Premium should be reviewed.

⁴³ The 2003 evaluation of SHEFC's widening access development grant projects identified early indicators that GOALS was having an impact on the aspirations of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The West of Scotland Wider Access Regional Forum (which funds GOALS) has also reported to us that the numbers of school leavers going from GOALS schools to full-time higher education has increased since 1999-2000 (West of Scotland Wider Access Forum annual report, 2004).

However, the wider access regional forums have not been universally successful.

The forums have operated in different ways. They have not been universally successful. In the past some have been better at providing a focus for useful region-wide or collaborative activity than others. They have also varied in the extent to which they engaged senior staff in their institutions.

In 2003, the Councils, after an internal evaluation, decided to extend the funding for the forums, to change their role in order to make them more strategic and to give clearer direction of the areas in which we expected them to work – something that the forums said during the evaluation they needed. The three areas that we asked them to address were: work with schools, work on FE/HE articulation and work with communities in areas of low participation.

All of the forums have now produced strategies which address these areas and three of the four are a year into implementing them. It is too early to say whether these new arrangements are producing real benefits across Scotland. The forums are at different stages of development as some are building on stronger legacies from the past than others. However, the early signs are generally positive and we believe that regional collaboration is important to widening access – co-ordination is needed to avoid gaps, minimise ineffective competition between institutions and overload on schools having to deal with many institutions on the same issue. The regional forums could also help facilitate delivery of the Executive's initiative on school-college links. We suggest above that the forums should also be asked to continue to look at 'second-chance' routes to HEIs. We also think it is important to widen the remit of the forums beyond access to higher education. While this remains the area which has the biggest imbalance in access, we do not believe it can, or should, be tackled in isolation from other post-compulsory education.

Since 2004 the work of the national co-ordinator has been more focussed on ensuring that good practice is spread across practitioners and the four regional forums. This has included supporting the forums in performing the role that was previously undertaken by the Scottish Network for Access and Participation. The early signs are that this is building better awareness and links between the forums. It has been useful to have an 'arms-length' resource for communication between the forums, other bodies and the Councils.

We think that the uncertain start for some of the regional forums has been unfortunate, also it might have been better had the FE sector been involved from the start. However, we think they now need to be given the chance to deliver the strategies they have developed. In particular we think that regional co-ordination to look at needs, raise aspirations and work with partners (particularly schools) is important and the forums – with their remit widened beyond higher education – look like the best vehicle to continue to take this forward. It is also important that the forums monitor and evaluate the progress they are making.

There has been some very effective work to improve practices.

SHEFC provided about £1.35 million per annum – from 2000-2004, chiefly to HEIs – for projects to widen access to higher education, many of which were undertaken on a collaborative basis. Following evaluation, the projects that offered most value in meeting continuing needs, or most development potential, have been taken over by the Widening Access Regional Forums. The external evaluation of this scheme found that it had allowed experiments to take place in ways to widen access, had an impact on a significant number of people, and had supported early embedding of approaches to widening access in HEIs.

Both SHEFC and SFEFC have also supported specific improvements in teaching and learning practice of importance to the widening access agenda through the generic activities of sector support bodies such as the SFEU, and the Higher Education Academy. A particular focus was given to this agenda by the HE sector through its Quality Enhancement theme *Responding to student needs* which produced a range of good practice material, models with a proven track record and toolkits for use within institutions. Flowing from this is further development work on how the first year of study towards a degree needs to be adapted and developed to better meet the needs of a wide range of students.

More recently, through our *Learning to Work* strategy and associated work we have promoted the importance of employability, something that is of clear relevance to the concept of excellence as adding the maximum value for learners that this report advocates.

In the FE sector, SFEFC funded many projects supporting this agenda. One example was the Focus on Learning project, a collaboration across four colleges and 14 different courses (SFEFC funding £335,000), which was designed to help staff adapt teaching strategies to meet the needs of learners, particularly returners to learning and those from areas of deprivation. Overall, the outcomes have stimulated improvement in the quality of provision and assisted the spread of good practice. SFEFC is also currently funding the Stevenson College-led project on Quality and Equality of Learning and Teaching Materials (£400,000). The FE sector has also recently identified Retention and Achievement as a key quality enhancement theme that they intend to work on over the next period. This will have particular relevance for the widening access agenda.

As part of institutions reaching out to disadvantaged groups, they need to engage with learners and employers and think imaginatively about courses from the perspective of potential learners. One illustration of this is the Canal Project (Anniesland College) which ran from January 2003 to April 2004. It aimed to motivate and engender the commitment to learning of disaffected and unemployed young people from communities close to the Forth & Clyde Canal in North Glasgow, who would have been unlikely to have been attracted to learning solely by the prospect of qualifications, through learning activities designed around the construction and operating of marine vessels. The project also aimed to give communities a visible stake in the canal, stretches of which were derelict, primarily through lack of use. The project was successful. Five new vessels were constructed, nine trainees secured full-time employment, five took up full time training, five passed Boatmaster Licence Grade 2, all trainees achieved SQA qualifications and the project won several awards, including a Scottish Training Award⁴⁴.

The quality, standards and relevance of provision are crucial for all aspects of education, but particularly for achieving effective widening access. Both SHEFC and SFEFC have increasingly emphasised meeting the needs of a wider range of stakeholders through our quality processes. Evidence from HMIE, SQA and QAA processes is encouraging, demonstrating that, overall, institutions provide high quality and standards. Where there are weaknesses, these are addressed, and both sectors are committed to quality improvement.

⁴⁴ This project was supported with European Social Fund Funding.

We think that focussing on enhancement through learning from practice, through projects and from others has been effective and will be an essential underpinning for effective widening access and we strongly encourage the new Council to continue with these approaches. We think that the current priorities within quality systems being given to meeting individuals' needs, promoting employability and promoting retention and achievement are the right ones.

We will need to continue monitoring demographic and other trends ...

Evidence from institutions' general success in recruiting students, from application rates for popular courses and from the DTZ *Supply and Demand of Further Education in Scotland*, 2005 study shows strong recent demand for further and higher education. However, trends will need continued monitoring as the following factors interact:

- progress in widening access to currently under-represented groups, which might put pressure on existing places;
- demographic shifts with fewer young people in the population;
- evidence that the higher education participation rate for young people in Scotland may have plateaued in recent years⁴⁵;
- the impact of fees in England which may make Scottish higher education look more attractive;
- progress on attracting more students from Europe and the rest of the world, an important area to which Scotland is giving increasing impetus; and
- economic development which may shift the balance for people between work and full-time study and/or may create new and higher skills demands.

We should therefore continue to examine the evidence, with the Scottish Executive, and consider whether there is a case for additional growth to widen access, taking into account the interaction between demand for learning, demographics and the economy.

School attainment, aspirations and expectation – often a reflection of deprivation – are the major underlying factors leading to the current patterns of participation...

The main reason that participation in HE is higher for higher social classes is people from those groups are more likely to apply. Table seven below shows this clearly. It compares the percentage of applicants from each social class with the percentage from that class in the Scottish population⁴⁶. (We have also shown the figures for the age bands of those most likely to be parents of applicants to HE, as the classification of applicants is based on parental occupation.) It shows that the higher social classes are over-represented in applications, the lower ones under-represented.

⁴⁵ *Higher Education in Scotland: first update*, SHEFC 2005.

⁴⁶ The classifications used here are the new National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) which has been used since the 2001 census rather than the more familiar social class categories.

Table 7: Scottish-domiciled UCAS applicants to HEIs compared to the socio-economic composition of Scottish population.

	Percent of applicants	Percent in Scottish population			Ratio of per cent of applicants to per cent in population
		All	Age	Age	
			35-54	55-64	
1. Higher managerial and professional	16.7%	6.8%	9.3%	5.7%	2.45
2. Lower managerial and professional	23.6%	17.3%	23.8%	15.2%	1.36
3. Intermediate	11.7%	9.4%	10.6%	7.7%	1.24
4. Small employers and own account workers	6.4%	5.7%	8.1%	8.3%	1.12
5. Lower supervisory and technical	4.5%	7.4%	9.0%	7.0%	0.60
6. Semi-routine	11.0%	12.6%	14.1%	12.9%	0.87
7. Routine	4.6%	10.4%	11.3%	12.3%	0.44
8. Never worked and long-term unemployed	n/a	4.2%	3.7%	3.5%	
Not Classified/UCAS unknown	21.5%	26.2%	10.1%	27.3%	

Applications from higher socio-economic groups are slightly more likely to be successful than those from lower socio-economic groups. But the difference in success rates between people from different social classes is relatively slight and explains far less of the disparity in participation rates than school attainment does.

Table 8: Applicants and acceptances via UCAS by socio-economic class, 2003⁴⁷

	All applicants	Accepts/applicants	Clearing/applicants	Total			
1. Higher managerial and professional	6,152	5,071	82.4%	313	5.1%	5,384	87.5%
2. Lower managerial and professional	8,723	6,772	77.6%	587	6.7%	7,359	84.4%
3. Intermediate	4,335	3,285	75.8%	331	7.6%	3,616	83.4%
4. Small employers and own account workers	2,362	1,744	73.8%	162	6.9%	1,906	80.7%
5. Lower supervisory and technical	1,656	1,262	76.2%	98	5.9%	1,360	82.1%
6. Semi-routine	4,050	2,956	73.0%	293	7.2%	3,249	80.2%
7. Routine	1,709	1,178	68.9%	114	6.7%	1,292	75.6%

Table nine below shows that applicants from higher social groups tend to be over-represented among applicants with the highest pre-entry qualifications.

Table 9: Scottish-domiciled UCAS applicants by tariff band and socio-economic class, 2003⁴⁸

Tariff band	Per cent of applicants from each socio-economic group						
	120-179	180-239	240-299	300-359	360-419	420-479	
Percentage of all applicants in each band	8.8%	10.0%	13.0%	13.8%	10.9%	7.7%	
1. Higher managerial and professional	11.2%	14.7%	16.4%	21.1%	24.8%	28.1%	16.7%
2. Lower managerial and professional	21.5%	24.6%	26.9%	27.6%	30.8%	29.6%	23.6%
3. Intermediate	14.0%	13.0%	13.1%	12.4%	11.8%	12.0%	11.7%
4. Small employers	7.7%	7.3%	7.1%	7.7%	6.6%	6.5%	6.4%
5. Lower supervisory and technical	5.3%	5.5%	5.8%	5.3%	4.8%	5.3%	4.5%
6. Semi-routine	13.4%	12.5%	11.7%	9.6%	8.5%	7.4%	11.0%
7. Routine	5.9%	6.0%	5.7%	4.7%	2.9%	2.4%	4.6%

⁴⁷ Table excludes unknowns.

⁴⁸ Table excludes unknowns.

People from disadvantaged groups (including people from lower socio-economic groups, boys, and geographic areas with low participation) are more likely than average to have low attainment at school or to have high rates of disengagement from school. These patterns go on to influence their later learning – either by limiting access, where qualifications are an entry requirement, or by lowering aspirations and expectations.

These factors largely explain the patterns – for example, of participation for people from deprived areas, or of men – we see in participation in higher education⁴⁹. The majority of people who meet the entry requirements for HE go on to participate in it. People who have not obtained the required prior educational attainment are much less likely to do so, even though 'second chance' routes (such as access courses) are available for people who have the potential but not the required qualifications, and access to the Open University does not rely on prior attainment.

Where people have low aspirations for lifelong learning, where they do not view lifelong learning (or certain types of learning or institutions) as 'for them', and where they do not have a sense of the value of learning, they are less likely to apply to study, even where they have the potential to succeed and the required entry qualifications to do so. Low aspirations are a reason for the lower levels of participation in further and higher education by men⁵⁰, and people from lower socio-economic groups⁵¹. The influences of family, community and peers are often very important in forming aspirations. Since people's aspirations and expectations regarding lifelong learning are often formed when they are relatively young, the influence of schooling (and school subject teachers in particular) can be especially important⁵².

...and they reinforce patterns of success and failure for communities.

Aspirations and expectations, school attainment and informed decisions are strongly influenced by people's environment – families, communities and their culture, peers, schools, the local economy and employers – in which people are brought up, which tends to drive people down well-trodden pathways. These patterns begin to be established early on in people's lives⁵³.

We can understand the relationship between aspirations and expectations, informed choices and achievement, in terms of reinforcing cycles. Achievement feeds people's confidence and aspirations, and this supports people's future learning and success. Where people have low aspirations they are less likely to seek out the qualifications they need. The environment, culture and expectations in which people live, are brought up and learn also affects their achievement. Those who have already achieved are better equipped and more likely to be able to access environments which better support learning. Achievement, aspirations, confidence and people's environment are all interlinked in reinforcing cycles. Of course these cycles work both ways, magnifying early differences and setting patterns of greater or lesser success for the future. Individuals can and frequently do break out of these cycles but the model of success breeding success is very powerful affecting both individuals, communities and other groups in society.

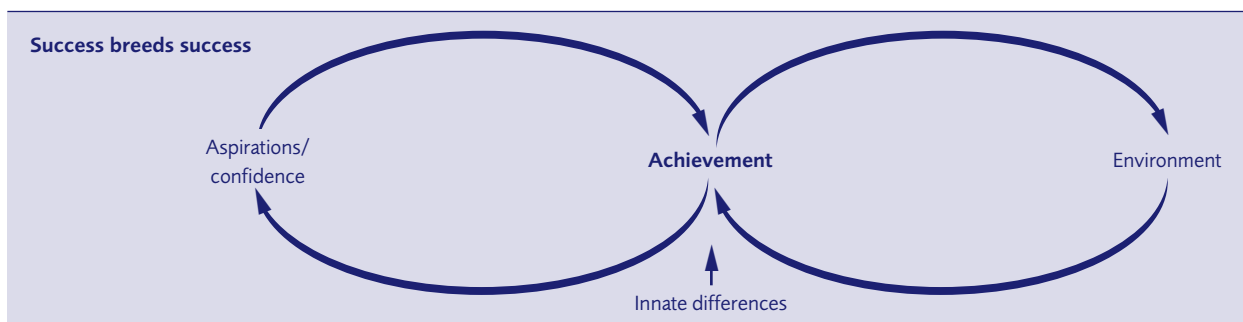
⁴⁹ This is clear, for example, in relation to socio-economic background and geography. Teresa Tinklin and David Raffae, *Scottish School Leavers Entering Higher Education*, Scottish Executive, 1999, argue that school qualifications were the most important determinant of entry to higher education, and that a large part of the differential in applications and participation in HE by socio-economic background can be explained by differing levels of school attainment (p7). There is also a clear positive correlation between geographical areas with high school attainment, and the proportion of school leavers entering full-time higher education. See DTZ Pleda Consulting, *National Report of Demand and Supply of Further Education in Scotland* (2002), commissioned by SFEFC, and DTZ Pleda Consulting, *Supply and Demand of Further Education in Scotland* (2005). It is possible that the key underlying relationship here is however with social class not geography.

⁵⁰ See Tinklin, Croxford Ducklin and Frame, *Gender and Pupil Performance*, Scottish Executive 2001, on the influence of aspirations and expectations on gender differences in school attainment – which will affect participation in further and higher education. See also Careers Scotland, *Career Goals and Educational Attainment: What is the Link?*, 2004, p38, which indicates that female school pupils have stronger educational ambition and expectations than male pupils.

⁵¹ For example, see Archer, Hutchings, and Ross, *Higher Education and Social Class* (2004), and Connor, Dewson, Tyers, Eccles, Regan, and Aston, *Social Class and Higher Education: Issues Affecting Decisions on Participation by Lower Social Class Groups*, 2001, Department for Education and Employment.

⁵² See for example, Connor, Burton, Pearson, Pollard, and Regan, *Making the Right Choice: How Students Choose Universities and Colleges*, 1999, Canning & Mannion, *Patterns of Progression and Participation in Post-16 Education*, University of Stirling, 2001, p158; Bartley, *More School?* 2004, p5.

⁵³ James Heckman and Dmitri Masterov, *Skills Policies for Scotland*, Allander Series, 2004, argue that skills formation is a lifelong process that begins in the womb and continues in the workplace, that educational policy is only one aspect of skills formation and not necessarily the most important one. Families are more important.



Since the root causes of low participation and achievement in lifelong learning are so deep in society, the most important actions to address these patterns have to be taken by Scotland as a whole through schools, communities and careers guidance agencies, as well as employers and trade unions. Because of the power of the reinforcing cycles at work, this is a slow process and needs sustained consistent effort, and for the efforts of many agencies to be aligned.

Since these patterns are formed early on, and there are links between achievement, confidence and aspiration, the single most important long-term action to widen participation (particularly to higher education, but also to other forms of lifelong learning) is raising attainment and staying-on rates in schools for under-performing groups. Without doing this, all other actions will to a certain extent be remedial. The Scottish Executive and schools are already making this a priority, and it is important that they are successful.

Learners need more help and information to make their choices.

In order to get learning that is right for them, people need more than aspirations. They also need to be clear about what they want, and how they can get it. They need help to develop career planning skills, and the ability to access and evaluate information and advice.

We have heard a great deal of concern about learners' decision making, and about the infrastructure for helping them. For example:

- boys are less likely than girls to develop clear goals – particularly important given that having clear goals has a positive influence on educational attainment⁵⁴;
- people with disabilities express a high level of dissatisfaction with the information, advice and guidance services currently available to them⁵⁵;
- people from under-represented groups are more likely to view lifelong learning (or some types of lifelong learning) negatively or as 'not for them' and this is partly a consequence of a lack of information, or of information not being available in appropriate ways or through sources which people from these groups are likely to make use of⁵⁶;

⁵⁴ Careers Scotland, *Career Goals and Educational Attainment: What is the Link?*, 2004, p38.

⁵⁵ Whittaker, Gallagher and Crossan, *Learner Perceptions of Information, Advice and Guidance: A Review of Research*, 2004, p33.

⁵⁶ Many young people living in areas of deprivation hold the views that college is 'not for the likes of me' and had a lack of information about the potential role of college (Gallacher et al, *Education for All*, 2000.).

- there is evidence that more could be done to provide potential learners with careers advice and guidance, and that under-represented groups may be particularly adversely affected by the limitations to current sources of careers advice and guidance⁵⁷;
- information about the financial costs and benefits of participation in learning is very important for non-traditional learner groups, and there is evidence that many people from under-represented areas are not well informed about this⁵⁸;
- 'wrong decision' is a very common reason for dropping out⁵⁹; and
- some teachers may not be well enough informed about careers opportunities and lifelong learning⁶⁰. This is compounded by the fact that the lifelong learning system is increasingly complex.

Learners' social contexts affect how they and, crucially, their influencers, access, interpret and use the information and make choices. This means that we need to think very carefully about information from learners' and their communities' points of view – unless we do so, our message will not get across and may even send the opposite signals to those we intend.

Responsibility for choices has to rest with learners. However, people making effective choices is so important that we believe that schools, colleges, universities and the other agencies have to do much more to support this: by embedding career planning skills more effectively in learning programmes at all levels; by continuing to improve advice and guidance programmes; by developing better sources of information; and by reflecting, from learners' and communities' perspectives, on how such services are designed and delivered.

We need to encourage ways for the relevant stakeholders – schools, colleges, HEIs and Careers Scotland – to work together to address some of the problems above and raise aspirations in the areas where it is lowest.

⁵⁷ Canning and Mannion, *Patterns of Progression and Participation*, 2001, identifies issues regarding careers services in schools in Fife. Many of the stakeholders that we have consulted have suggested that Careers Scotland is not wholly meeting the needs of potential learners, and that it is not sufficiently well resourced to do so. Some evidence supports this. For example, Bartley, *More School?*, 2004 indicates that its research identified evidence that whilst the careers service was well regarded by those who used it, many pupils were not aware how to access the service, and raises concern that Careers Scotland's self-referral system requires learners to ask for guidance, and that as a consequence some people miss out. See also Yorke, M, *Transition into Higher Education: some implications for the 'employability agenda'*, LTSN Generic Centre briefing paper, 2003, p2. The *Funding for Learners* review report, Scottish Executive (2004) identifies that a lack of clear information, advice and guidance (IAG) regarding learner support represented a failing of the current system of learner support. It identified issues including fragmented provision of IAG on learner support, gaps in provision, duplicate and inconsistent information, and unstructured interactions between the key stakeholders (p5). Other research also identifies issues regarding IAG.

⁵⁸ See for example Whittaker, Gallagher and Crossan, *Learner Perceptions of Information, Advice and Guidance: A Review of Research*, 2004, p15; Bartley, *More School?*, 2004 p23.

⁵⁹ For instance, see Davies, R and Elias, P, *Dropping Out: A Study of Early Leavers from Higher Education*, 2003, p44.

⁶⁰ Many of the reference groups we met during this review indicated that this was an issue.

Conclusions

Much has been done by the further and higher education sectors to widen access, and there is evidence that these initiatives are beginning to bear fruit. However, progress in relation to some of the patterns of participation remains slow. Participation and achievement of people from the most deprived areas remains low, there is a widening educational gap between men and women, and retention and achievement rates for disadvantaged groups are lower than the rest of the population.

We believe achieving further progress will require a new national effort – a national campaign – harnessing the efforts of all sectors. This should be a campaign to make real our vision that all have an equal opportunity to participate in the learning that matches their hopes, talents, efforts and needs. And, importantly, to work to ensure that people take this opportunity. Genuine equality of opportunity should recognise that people with the same innate ability start from different places and that some have to travel up a steeper and longer hill to achieve. For some participation will mean going to university, for some college, for others it will be training. Almost all should benefit from at least one of these at some point in their lives.

With others we should prioritise the areas requiring action and to quantify the ideal patterns, model their impact on society – on the economy, on health, on crime, on benefits expenditure and on social cohesion – so that we can work to optimize the contribution that learning makes. We also need to constantly review the resources available to education. Achieving our vision may require additional resources – though demography (the reducing numbers of young people in Scotland) may reduce this – and we need to factor in the evidence of longer-term savings elsewhere in better economic performance, reduced crime and better health. We need to achieve the best possible balance between achieving the vision for all citizens, the wider social benefits, the practicalities and affordability.

The first step towards this national campaign should be developing a shared vision of what we are trying to achieve. Here is our proposed vision:

Our proposed vision for debate

Our vision is a Scotland in which all would genuinely have an equal opportunity to participate in lifelong learning that matches their hopes, talents, efforts and needs. And in which excellence in learning would be defined as adding maximum value for the learner.

If Scotland were like this then:

Learners and potential learners would: want to learn and value learning; be clear what they want out of their learning, and be self-directed as learners; understand their options; and have high aspirations and confidence.

All communities would: place high value on learning; demand access to it; and, as part of this, employers would encourage and support their staff to participate in learning.

Society would: place high value on learning, and give parity of esteem to different types of learning (such as vocational and academic education); and get learning that provides a good fit between the needs of learners and the economy.

The lifelong learning system would: deliver flexible, diverse and appropriate provision that meets the varied demands and needs of learners.

Individual colleges and higher education institutions would: focus and respond to the needs and potential of individual learners; and find ways to select the right learners for the right courses on the basis of potential to achieve.

Our full recommendations for action are in the next section.

Our recommended programme of action

Our recommended programme of action for the college and university sectors and others is summarised below. In most of the areas, sustained action will be necessary over the long term, but, to ensure progress, we recommend the key stakeholders develop a detailed action plan covering the next two years.

Common vision: common agenda

Use this report to develop a shared understanding and common vision across all the agencies and stakeholders within Scotland on the contribution of learning to tackling inequality and a commitment to develop our systems founded on this vision.

By this means we will align the programmes and get a greater degree of coherence in how the different players are thinking about and tackling this issue, and be better equipped to optimise the contribution of learning to the economy and society.

SFC, institutions and other relevant sectors and agencies in Scotland

As part of this, initiate a national campaign to tackle these patterns of uneven educational participation and achievement.

Scottish Executive, SFC, institutions and other relevant sectors and agencies in Scotland

Ask institutions to continue to reflect on the part that they will play in meeting this agenda, and how they will continue to develop their culture, environment and practices.

SFC, FE colleges and HEIs

Prioritise in our activities:

- **the problems faced by the most deprived areas;**
- **the widening educational gap faced by men; and**
- **further work to improve retention and achievement.**

SFC, institutions and other relevant sectors and agencies in Scotland

Given that little work has been undertaken by the Councils on the issues facing men, particular urgency should be given to preparing a plan of action on this issue.

Build the demand for learning among disadvantaged groups

Support, develop and put on a long-term footing regional multi-agency co-operative activities to raise aspirations and co-ordinate activities. Through these means we will raise aspirations for all disadvantaged groups to all types of learning. We will avoid prioritising one type of learning over others and will widen the remit of the wider access regional forums beyond higher education. We will minimise duplication and maximise impact through acting together. We will expect the best practices to become common across the whole of Scotland. We will work to involve schools in this more fully.

SFC, wider access regional forums, FE colleges, HEIs

Refresh all our facilities, over the long term, so that prominent, attractive, high quality buildings, well-placed and connected to their communities act as beacons to attract learners and communicate the value of learning.

SFC, FE colleges, HEIs

Learners have to play their part by taking more responsibility for their learning, working hard, seeking to be better informed and clearer about their goals. It is one of the roles of institutions to **help learners become informed and more self-directed** through embedding effective careers/life planning skills in all learning programmes at all levels. We will support this through a national effort to develop better learner- and influencer-centred sources of information and guidance.

Learners, schools, careers advice, guidance and information agencies, FE colleges, HEIs, SFC

High-quality learner-centred services

Continue to expect all institutions to provide high-quality learner-centred services, founded on the idea that excellence = adding maximum value for learners. Continue to adapt and develop institutional and national quality improvement systems and our ability to evaluate our impact on learners. Experimenting with new courses and ways of teaching can connect better with learners from disadvantaged groups.

SFC, FE colleges, HEIs, QAA, HMIE, educators

Continue to develop our capacity to identify and meet the support needs of students particularly at transition points. Imaginative and well adapted support can contribute to levelling the playing field so that all learners have a fair chance of achieving the most they can. We think there could be scope for innovative partnerships amongst FE colleges and HEIs to provide such support. The wider access forums should continue to play a role in supporting these developments.

FE colleges, HEIs, SFC, support agencies

Promote the use of the SCQF as a currency to help recognise and give credit for prior learning and to help learners identify their options more clearly.

FE colleges, HEIs, learners

Work collectively and systematically to join up qualifications and programmes, making the most of opportunities to do this as part of the natural cycle of renewing programmes. Much of this work is best undertaken in cross-sectoral subject communities, and the current HN Review provides particular opportunities. Through this means we should aim to minimise the time it takes learners who wish to progress to achieve their goals and make transitions between learning environments easier.

SFC, HEIs, FE colleges, educators qualification authorities

Improve our ability to identify learners' potential in order to guide learners better to provision that is right for them and, for the most popular courses, to enable institutions to select fairly those most likely to excel. We think that the new Funding Council and institutions should embed this in their quality enhancement activities.

SFC, FE colleges, HEIs, quality enhancement agencies

Continue to **research where cost, or perceived cost, to learners is creating an unreasonable barrier** to people getting learning that is right for them, and where necessary make the case for necessary changes to student support arrangements. Continue to refine and operate our bursary and fee waiver schemes in the light of this evidence.

Scottish Executive, SFC

Strengthen the business case for institutions to contribute

Refine our premia – values, measures, conditions – to better enable institutions to meet the additional costs of recruiting and enabling their learners to achieve. Our goal should be to avoid financial disincentives for institutions to recruit students with potential from disadvantaged groups. By this means we would help to level the playing field for learners.

SFC

Put on a sustainable basis summer schools and access courses where these contribute to the local regional agenda set by the regional access forum and demonstrably contribute to improving participation and success for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds by making such non-credit bearing provision in HEIs eligible for SHEFC funding. Support this through regional and national work on planning such provision and sharing good practice to best meet learners' needs.

SFC, wider access regional forums, FE colleges and HEIs

Target additional numbers where the evidence is that volume of funded activity is a key barrier to participation and meeting needs in areas of low participation. Such interventions should be focussed on the most severe problems, should be part of a package of measures and should be considered for both HE and FE sectors together. Through these means we will provide institutions with the capacity and business case to stimulate and respond to growing demand for learning.

SFC

Given that we hope that demand for learning from disadvantaged groups will increase, **continue to examine the evidence and consider whether there is a case for additional growth to widen access**, taking into account the interaction between demand for learning, demographics and the economy.

SFC, Scottish Executive

Monitor, evaluate and learn

Continue to develop both quantitative and qualitative evidence on the patterns of participation and achievement, causes and effects and evaluation of programmes. Use this information to improve our systems and practices.

SFC, FE colleges, HEIs, wider access regional forums and others

Maintain capacity to identify and share good practice in improving participation. As part of the quality enhancement agenda, encourage educators to continue to adapt and adopt the best practices, and continue to review and streamline the structures supporting this.

SFC, wider access regional forums, FE colleges, HEIs, support agencies

How will we know if we have been successful?

We propose a basket of measures, which, if seen alongside a programme of qualitative and evaluative research, and considered against the backdrop of wider social and economic factors, will enable us to monitor, learn from and adjust our programmes. If our programme is working, and Scotland as a whole is taking effective action to address the core causes, then:

Patterns of participation would be more even across different groups in society

We would measure this by looking at:

- school attainment for pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds and by gender;
- the participation rates in HE and FE from the schools which currently have the lowest participation;
- the proportions of students in HE and FE from each quintile of the population by deprivation;
- the proportions of mature students from the most deprived areas in FE and HE;
- the differences in participation in FE and HE by geographical areas; and
- differences in participation in FE and HE by gender, ethnicity and disability.

There would be more even demand for learning across all groups in society

We would measure this by looking at:

- the proportion of young people in the NEET group⁶¹;
- the patterns of applications for places in HEIs by socio-economic background, deprivation zone, gender and disability; and
- the patterns of school-leavers (as monitored in the Scottish School-leavers Survey) who aspire to go to university by socio-economic background and gender.

All learners would achieve and have a good learning experience that enhances their life chances

We would measure this by looking at:

- retention and achievement rates in FE and HE for students from different backgrounds;
- the proportion of students entering HEIs via FE colleges, particularly with advanced standing; and
- through our longitudinal survey of students, the proportion of students from different backgrounds that recognised the value of their learning experience.

⁶¹ NEET = not in education, employment or training.

Annex A

The group and how it worked

Members of the Widening Participation Review Group

Professor Jim McGoldrick (SHEFC member, Chair)

Sue Baldwin (Director of Skills Development, Scottish Enterprise)

Professor Mary Bownes (Vice-Principal, Widening Participation, Recruitment and Community Relations, University of Edinburgh)

Susan Bird (Principal, Stevenson College)

David Caldwell (Director, Universities Scotland)

Ian Graham (Principal, John Wheatley College)

Professor John Macklin (Principal, University of Paisley)

Melanie Ward (President, Nation Union of Students Scotland)

Anne Wilson (Director of Education, Dundee City Council)

Observer

Gill Troup (Scottish Executive)

How we worked

The review group was established by SHEFC and SFEFC to carry out a 'root and branch' review of SFEFC and SHEFC's approach to widening participation. In particular the group was asked to advise SFEFC and SHEFC and other relevant stakeholders on:

- an approach to widening access and participation to lifelong learning for learners or potential learners in Scotland;
- the evidence base regarding widening access and participation to lifelong learning for learners or potential learners in Scotland;
- the effectiveness of current measures for widening access and participation to lifelong learning for learners or potential learners in Scotland; and
- the most effective steps to further enhance widening access and participation to lifelong learning for learners or potential learners in Scotland.

The group met four times in 2004. The work supporting the group included a rigorous review of the actions taken by the Funding Councils in the past and the evidence for the underlying patterns of participation and recent changes. We also looked at the academic research on widening access and consulted some of those who have researched the area and many practitioners.

We agreed that our work should be informed by wide consultation. The SFC executive met with over 30 reference groups of stakeholders. These are listed below. We also held a conference at Lauder College at which over 100 stakeholders discussed our vision for wider participation, the key problem areas and the most effective actions that we could take to make further progress.

Reference groups met by SFC during the review

- Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework Conference
- Communities Scotland
- Scottish Trades Union Congress
- Universities Scotland Social Inclusion Advisory Group
- Scottish Further Education Unit
- The Open University in Scotland
- Disability Advisors National Network
- Skill Scotland
- Equal Opportunities Commission
- Widening Participation in Russell Group Universities group
- Association of Scottish Colleges' Principals' Forum
- Pathways to the Professions (University of Edinburgh)

- Scottish Disability Team
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- Widening Access Regional Forum chairs
- Scottish Enterprise
- SFC Disability Advisory Group
- National Union of Students, Scotland
- Universities' Association for Continuing Education (Scotland)
- Division of Academic Innovation and Continuing Education (University of Stirling)
- Scottish Network for Access and Participation event
- Working in Health Access Programme Team
- Learning & Teaching Scotland
- Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University
- Careers Scotland
- Learndirect Scotland
- Edinburgh College of Art – continuing education department
- Scottish Qualification Agency
- SHEFC/SFEFC Joint Learning and Teaching Committee
- Scottish Executive Education Department
- Scottish Further Education Unit Inclusion, Access and Support forum
- Headteachers' Association of Scotland

In addition, Professor McGoldrick met with the principals of 16 HEIs and we held eight focus groups with learners and potential learners.

This annex shows the evaluation that we make in 'What has been happening?', in the form of a table that matches particular aspects of the pattern of participation with the actions the funding councils have taken that have affected it. This gives clear indication of which areas our targeted activities have addressed.

Mechanisms	Funding policies, weightings and premia	Targeted additional numbers	Student support and fee waivers	National and regional structures	Strategic projects and initiatives	Estates and equipment funding
Patterns	By encouraging expansion, responsiveness and quality, core funding has widened access. (SFEFC core funding and SHEFC teaching funding will be £1,055 million in 2005-06).					
... and participation at HE level by people from the most deprived areas has grown but only very slowly... and people from the most deprived areas are particularly unlikely to attend HEIs... nevertheless, all types of HEI have increased the proportion of students from the most deprived areas ...		SHEFC targeted additional places at institutions that did best in recruiting students from low participation areas. (1,685 FTEs since 1999) New Access Partnerships (200 FTEs, 2001-2004)				
... but students from deprived areas are particularly unlikely to attend some of the most highly sought after courses at HEIs.					SHEFC supported the University of Glasgow-led Widening Access to Medicine and Veterinary Medicine project. (£225,000)	
Students from the most deprived neighbourhoods are more likely to study at non-advanced level at FECs.	Social inclusion weighting in SFEFC funding formula (about £11.7 million in 2004-05).	Additional funded activity on the basis of colleges' share of students from the 20% most deprived postcode areas (42,000 SUMS between 2000-01 and 2001-02).				
Retention rates are lower for people from the most deprived areas in both HEIs and FECs.	SHEFC Widening Access Premium (£5M in 2004-05). SFEFC social inclusion weighting (see above).					
Men are falling behind women in both FE and HE with the steepest gender gap in HEIs Retention rates for men are lower than women.						
There are wide geographical variations in participation rates ... but there has been measurable progress in rural areas where additional resources have been targeted ... and it is striking the impact that high quality facilities can have on participation.		SHEFC allocated 690 FTE funded places to tackle rural participation issues mostly in the South West and the Highlands. SFEFC/Scottish Office allocated additional funded activity for James Watt's new college campus in Kilwinning; Falkirk College's Stirling campus; and West Lothian College's new campus (45,000 SUMS 2000-2002).			SHEFC provided £2.3M of strategic funding to support the Crichton Campus project in Dumfries. SHEFC is funding a programme of major capital renewal. The experiences at the James Watt Campus at Kilwinning and West Lothian College. Illustrate the impact of modernised estates (see across).	
There has been an expansion in part-time provision at HEIs benefiting students from more deprived areas.	SHEFC part-time incentive grant (£2.5 million in 2004-05).		SHEFC part-time fee-waiver scheme (£2.4 million in 2004-05).		SHEFC supported the development of part-time undergraduate programmes tailored to meet the needs of people who are unemployed or on low-incomes (a total of £950,000 between 1998-99 and 2000-01).	
There are a large number of articulation and other routes giving access to HEIs for people from a wider range of backgrounds.	SHEFC FE/HE Articulation Grant (£2.7 million over 2003-04 and 2004-05).				SHEFC funded the Mapping, Tracking and Bridging project. Part of SHEFC's funding for the wider access regional forums, and associated projects (see below), is focused on FE-HE interface.	
The national qualification framework, the development of articulation routes and access courses have the potential to shorten routes to degree level study ...					The SCOTCAT programme (about £50,000 over 1998-99 and 1999-2000) helped lay the foundations for the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).	

Patterns	Mechanisms	Funding policies, weightings and premia	Targeted additional numbers	Student support and fee waivers	National and regional structures	Strategic projects and initiatives	Estates and equipment funding
...and these routes are important to widening access and providing second chances.	...and these routes are important to widening access and providing second chances.	SFEFC funding can be used for 'second chance' routes into lifelong learning. But SFEFC funding cannot be used for non-accredited sub-HE level learning.					
People with disabilities participate broadly in proportion to their numbers in the general population ...	SFEFC disabled students premium from 2001-02 (£1.4 million in 2004-05). SFEFC's Extended Learning Support weighting about £28.8 million in 2004-05).				SFEFC funding for the Scottish Disability Team (£180,000 in 2004-05).	SHEFC funded HEIs to appoint institutional disability coordinators. SHEFC funded the reachability project to produce resources for teaching staff. SFEFC funds BRTE (£221,000 in 2004-05) on the use of assistive technologies.	SFEFC and SHEFC have provided substantial funding to colleges. (£54.2 million since 2002-03) and HEIs (£10 million in 2004-05) to modernise their estates and teaching equipment, in part to enable them to be more accessible to people with disabilities.
Overall, people from ethnic minorities are more likely to participate than the general population.					Both Councils have supported good practice work through UK-wide initiatives and through agencies such as SFEU.	Both Councils have encouraged and supported institutions to develop their policies on race equality.	
Student support and fee waivers have helped an increasing number of students from poorer backgrounds to participate in 'further education'.				SFEFC provides student support for non-advanced students (about £68 million in 2004-05) and a fee waiver grant (about £40.6 million in 2004-05).			
Institutions and the sectors increasingly see contributing to widening access as a key part of their mission ...national activities ...as have regional collaborations. However, the wider access regional forums have not been universally successful.	With SHEFC funding, all the HEIs came together in 2001 to publish the Social Inclusion Pledge.				SHEFC and SFEFC have funded two national posts to support the widening Both Councils fund the Regional Wider Access Forums, and recently SFEFC funded colleges to develop strategies and implement funding packages with all of them.	SHEFC funded HEIs to develop and implement wider access strategies (£3.2 million over 1998-99 to 2004-05). SFEFC funded colleges to develop and implement inclusiveness strategies (about £5 million over 2001-02 to 2004-05).	
And there has been some very effective work to improve practices.					Prior to giving the forums responsibility for commissioning and managing projects in their regions in 2004, SHEFC provided about £1.35 million per annum from 2000 for projects to widen access, many of which were undertaken on a collaborative basis.	Both Councils have promoted improvements in learning and teaching practices to meet the needs of a wider range of learners, including: Focus on Learning a (£335,000 from SFEFC); and the Stevenson College-led project on Quality and Equality of Learning and Teaching Materials (£400,000).	

هذه المطبوعة متوفرة بصيغ ولغات مختلفة. لطلب نسخة منها بالشكل المطلوب الرجاء الاتصال بـ
مجلس التمويل الاسكتلندي **Scottish Funding Councils**

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برائے مہربانی سکاٹس فونڈنگ کونسلز **Scottish Funding Councils** سے رابطہ فرمائیں۔

یہ اشاعت مختلف اقسام کے فارمیٹس اور ڈہانوں میں دستیاب ہے۔
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