

Fairer Scotland Duty Summary Template

Title of policy, strategy or programme	Post-school education, research and skills: Purpose and Principles
Summary of aims and expected outcomes of strategy, proposal, programme or policy	The Purpose and Principles set out the framework for decision making for post-school education, skills and research to ensure the system is fit for the future, delivering the best outcomes for learners, employers and the public investment we make.
Summary of evidence	<p>Evidence</p> <p>As is set out in the guidance, socio-economic disadvantage is a complex, multidimensional problem, closely related to poverty but including low wealth, area deprivation, socio-economic background and material deprivation. We recognise the importance of understanding the impact that the Purpose and Principles will have on socio-economic disadvantage and inequality of outcomes but are limited to an extent by the data available. A lot of administrative data is available for institutions such as colleges and universities and pathways such as apprenticeships, but income is not held as part of these data sets. There is also no accessible data on socio-economic background with limited evidence around wealth. Free school meal data is held on schools' administrative databases but there is currently no data linkage between school and post-school data. Where income data is available, we have used it, but in most cases the proxy used is residence in the most deprived quintile (SIMD20) which we recognise is an incomplete measure of socio-economic disadvantage.¹ There is also a range of data on protected characteristics and</p>

¹ [Paterson SA 2019 ScottishIndexMultipleDeprivationWideningAccessHE.pdf](#)

care experience where we know there are many intersectionalities with socio-economic disadvantage. In addition to data there are various research reports and evaluations which can provide some evidence including reports published by the sector. Finally, there are a range of qualitative views and experiences from our engagement which provide useful insights on barriers and opportunities. In 2019-22 21% of Scotland's population were living in relative poverty but poverty show that some groups have a higher risk of poverty than others. Data for smaller population groups is based on data from 2017-22. Non-white minority ethnic groups (49% for 'Asian or Asian British' and 48% for 'Mixed Black or Black British and Other', Muslim adults (63%) single women with children (38%), large families (34%) and disabled people (29% when disability benefits are removed from household income) had higher prevalence of poverty ^{2 3 4}.

Attainment Gaps

We know that there is a strong relationship between level of qualification and socio-economic advantage, however defined. Adults with no or lower qualifications are more likely to have low net household income with 30% of people with no qualifications having an income below £15,000 per year compared to 10% of people with post-school qualifications.⁵ After leaving compulsory education, young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to end up in "positive destinations" overall (92.8% compared to 97.6% for least deprived quintile) and less likely to end up in higher education (29.2% compared to

² [The-Poverty-related-Attainment-Gap-A-Review-of-the-Evidence-11Feb2021.pdf](#) (povertyalliance.org)

³ [Poverty and income inequality statistics - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

⁴ [Tackling child poverty priority families overview - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

⁵ [Scottish household survey 2019: annual report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

	<p>65.1% for least deprived), but more likely to be in employment and training (28.5% compared to 25.7%) or further education and adult learning (34.8 compared to 18.6%)⁶.</p> <p>Recent evidence from Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) suggests that better economic outcomes are achieved with a degree, although, even then earnings for people who are disabled, from a minority ethnic community background or from the most deprived areas were significantly lower. Reports published in December 2022 suggested that significant change in income level relates to qualifications at SCVQ level 5/6 or above.⁷ Only 44% of school leavers in the most deprived areas of Scotland are qualified to a Higher level (6) or above, compared with 81% of Scottish school leavers in the most affluent areas. School exclusion rates were also higher for Gypsy/Travellers, disabled pupils, those with additional support needs and pupils living in the most deprived areas.⁸ Data shows that long-term, the attainment gap has been closing, although attainment levels in more deprived areas remain lower than in less deprived areas and post pandemic data has shown some trends that the gap in attainment is widening.⁹ Low prior attainment levels are a barrier to school leavers and young people accessing further and higher education within the system. There is also a legacy of older people who left school with low attainment levels who will be impacted by barriers when trying to access the post-school education,</p>
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⁶ [Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations, No. 5: 2023 Edition - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

⁷ [Supporting documents - Education and Skills Impact Framework \(ESIF\) - university provision: contextual summary report 2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

⁸ [Chapter 4: School Leaver Attainment - Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations, No. 2: 2020 Edition - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

⁹ [Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations, No. 3: 2021 Edition - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

research and skills system to improve their socio-economic situation.

Widening Access to the post-school education and skills system

Colleges and Universities

There has been a reduction in the gap between those living in the most deprived and least deprived areas in the proportion of young people participating in education, employment or training (from 11.6 percentage points in 2017 to 9.9 percentage points in 2020).¹⁰

In 2021-22, 16.5% of all Scottish-domiciled entrants to full-time first-degree courses were from the 20% most deprived areas¹¹. This is a decrease from 16.7% in 2020-21 but still represents an additional 80 students. In 2020-21, 40.9% of Scottish-domiciled full-time first-degree entrants from the 20% most deprived areas progressed from a college course.¹²

A greater proportion of school leavers from the most deprived areas were reported to be in Higher or Further education in 2021-22 (62.0%) compared to 2013/14 (58.9%).

When combining all full- and part-time undergraduate higher education at Scotland's universities and colleges, 19.7% of entrants were from the 20% most deprived areas, compared to 17.2% in 2013/14. When focussing on full-time entrants only, that figure is 21.1%. This indicates that, at tertiary sector level, equality of access based on SIMD area is being achieved but with variance in level of representation at institution and sector level and, as discussed above, some caveats around the ability of the

¹⁰ [Closing the poverty-related attainment gap: A report on progress 2016-2021 \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

¹¹ [Figure 6 - UK domiciled full-time HE undergraduate student enrolments by participation characteristics 2017/18 to 2021/22 | HESA](#)

¹² [Report on Widening Access 2020-21 \(sfc.ac.uk\)](http://sfc.ac.uk)

SIMD metric to capture households in poverty. There has been an increase in the total number of undergraduate higher education entrants from the most deprived areas of Scotland between 2013/14 and 2020/21, from 14,730 to 17,735 entrants.

Colleges Scotland have said that in 2022, 34% of college students were from the 20% most deprived postcodes in Scotland¹³. The college cohort is on average more likely to be from deprived areas than for the Scotland population as a whole, and more likely to be studying for lower levels of qualification¹⁴. However, Scotland's colleges made a substantive contribution to widening access with 25.3% of their Scottish-domiciled entrants to higher education courses being from the 20% most deprived areas.

The distribution of apprenticeships have tended to be higher in SIMD20 most deprived areas than less deprived areas. Over time this trend has flattened but people from the most deprived 2 quintiles remain the most prevalent. This holds true for Modern Apprenticeships (MA) and Further Apprenticeships (FA) but people starting Graduate Apprenticeships (GA) tend to be more likely to come from less deprived areas and across all apprenticeships people from more deprived areas tend to be concentrated in apprenticeships with lower associated qualifications.¹⁵

¹³ [Key Facts 2022 \(collegesscotland.ac.uk\)](https://collegesscotland.ac.uk)

¹⁴ [CDN-Pathways-from-Poverty-Report-1.pdf](#)

¹⁵ [Microsoft Word - Graduate Apprenticeship Annual Report 2022 FINAL.docx \(skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk\); fa-progress-report-july-2021.pdf \(skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk\);](#)
MA bespoke data from SDS

Student Support

Since 2020-21, there has been a 4% reduction in the number of full-time SAAS supported students from SIMD20 to 22,870 students in 2021-22. Students from the most deprived SIMD20 areas received more support than those from the least deprived areas (£6,890 2021-22 compared to £5,820 2020-21). Students from the most deprived SIMD20 areas were also more likely to receive a bursary and/or grant (64.7% compared to 20.7% in least deprived).¹⁶

Undergraduate and Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) students from low-income households may be entitled to additional income assessed loan amounts. There were 41,135 income assessed loans authorised, with a total value of £253.5 million and an average of £6,160 per student.

The number of full-time students receiving a bursary and/or grant in the academic year 2021-22 decreased by 8.7% from a record high the previous year. The total amount awarded decreased by 13.5% to £7.3 million to £91.4 million. An average of £1,715 per student was provided in 2021-22, a decrease from the previous year. Around four fifths (81.5%) of the total amount of bursary and grant support paid was through the three bursaries: Young Students Bursary (£43.2 million); Independent Students Bursary (£17.6 million); Care Experienced Bursary (£13.7 million). See Table FT.3 in the supplementary data tables for full breakdowns.

The discretionary fund provides financial support to students who have difficulty entering higher education for financial reasons, or have financial difficulties while they study. There were 10,675 instances of assistance in 2020- 21

¹⁶ National Statistics Publications (saas.gov.uk)

through the main Discretionary Fund, providing £13.3 million of issued support at an average of £1,250 per instance. A student may have more than one instance of assistance. Discretionary fund support was most typically provided for general living expenses – issued 9,785 times. A separate discretionary childcare fund is available for students at Scottish Higher Education Institutions to apply for help towards registered or formal childcare costs. There were 650 instances of support in 2020-21 through this fund, providing £2.1 million of support at an average of £3,180 per instance ¹⁷.

In 2021 the Poverty Alliance reported that ‘there is a lack of synthesised evidence on evidence-based approaches and interventions that support disadvantaged young people into work and training (including apprenticeships) post-16’ and more research is needed. Disadvantaged pupils in this report are defined as those living in the most disadvantaged areas (bottom quintile of SIMD). Of the evidence that exists, effective interventions to support disadvantaged young people into these routes included providing a trusted, consistent advisor and personalised support. They also found that traineeships and apprenticeships that include a mix of work experience placements, work preparation training and numeracy and literacy support are shown to be effective. The most effective interventions to increase access to higher education were bursaries, scholarships and grants. ¹⁸

¹⁷ [National Statistics Publications \(saas.gov.uk\)](https://www.saas.gov.uk)

¹⁸ [The-Poverty-related-Attainment-Gap-A-Review-of-the-Evidence-11Feb2021.pdf \(povertyalliance.org\)](https://www.povertyalliance.org)

Digital

Digital skills and digital access can be a barrier to accessing the system. Pre-pandemic data showed that people with no or school only qualifications were less confident when using the internet. Only 58% of people with no qualifications were confident at using public services online compared to 91% of people with post-school qualifications. Similarly, only 53% of people with no qualifications were confident at sending and receiving emails compared to 82% of people with post-school qualifications.¹⁹ The pandemic drove fast improvements in the use and provision of public digital services for many. However, learning loss for young people in lower income households and adult learners who were unable to adapt quickly to digital modes of learning will have created additional barriers to accessing the post-school education, skills and research system.

Aspirations

It is often suggested that lack of aspiration is a reason for lower income households having poorer attainment or destinations. However, this is not necessarily true. Parents from lower income households may have different rather than low aspirations for their children. For example Trainor suggests aspirations might be more for entering employment or apprenticeships rather than studying at university. However, whatever their aspirations, there is evidence that additional support is needed for children from lower income households to enable them to achieve positive destinations as low income parents are less likely to know how to best support their children to meet their aspirations.²⁰

¹⁹ Scottish household survey 2019: annual report - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

²⁰ STORRE: Can we put the poverty of aspirations myth to bed now? (stir.ac.uk)

Student Income and Expenditure

Recent impacts of limited access to accommodation and rising rents along with the rising cost of living and related poverty are likely to significantly impact on students and especially those from poor background or who are estranged or care experienced. For example, the Thriving Learners Survey reported that students who had suffered any form of food insecurity had higher levels of depressive symptoms, perceived stigma and serious psychological issues²¹. A recently commissioned survey of income and expenditure of students will provide good quantitative evidence next year. In the meantime, there is a range of qualitative evidence of the severe impacts of poverty with the college sector identifying food poverty as increasingly a barrier to learning, affecting the learner's ability to maintain wellbeing and sustain their studies.²² A recent survey by NUS showed that 52% of students have skipped a meal because of lack of money and 37% have considered dropping out for financial reasons.²³

Widening Access Policy

In recognition of various barriers for socio-economically disadvantaged people in access to higher education, a Commission for Widening Access²⁴ was established in 2015 to lead and challenge a widening access policy and programme to both enhance participation and maximise student retention. This policy was based on people who had come from the most disadvantaged areas in Scotland. Significant improvements to access have been made with the interim widening access

²¹ [MHF_Thriving_Learners_Report.pdf \(mentalhealth.org.uk\)](#)

²² [Pathways-from-Poverty-Leading-with-Empath-and-Vision-An-Insight-into-West-Lothian-College.pdf \(cdn.ac.uk\)](#)

²³ [NUS_Cost_of_living_Crisis_presentation_reduced.pdf \(nationbuilder.com\)](#)

²⁴ [Commission on Widening Access \(sfc.ac.uk\)](#)

	<p>targets met early and 16.5% of all Scottish domiciled entrants to full-time first-degree courses at university being from the 20% most deprived areas²⁵, compared to 13.7% in 2013-14. But, the full set of targets as set out below are increasingly challenging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 2021, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 16% of full-time first-degree entrants to Scottish universities as a whole. • By 2021, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 10% of full-time first-degree entrants to every individual Scottish university. • By 2026, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 18% of full-time first degree entrants to Scottish universities as a whole.²⁶ <p>There is some questioning on the context of the targets including whether SIMD20 is the best or should be the only basis for targets²⁷; whether there should be more recognised efforts to widen access to all higher education not just universities; and whether further discussions are needed around metrics such as retention and long-term outcomes as well as access to higher education²⁸²⁹. NUS when thinking about widening access consider a broad range of groups who are under-represented or for whom additional barriers exist including low</p>
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²⁵ HESA Student Data - Figure 6 - UK domiciled full-time HE undergraduate student enrolments by participation characteristics 2017/18 to 2021/22 | HESA

²⁶ [The Final Report of the Commission on Widening Access - March 2016 \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/the-final-report-of-the-commission-on-widening-access/march-2016/pages/10_to_12.aspx)

²⁷ There is some evidence that a scheme with eligibility based on SIMD tended to benefit better-off families in the most deprived areas rather than increasing access from families experiencing poverty. There is also some criticism of its relevance in rural and island areas.

[Paterson, SA 2019 Scottish Index Multiple Deprivation Widening Access HE.pdf](#); [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020: introduction - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

²⁸ [Commissioner for Fair Access \(Scotland\)](#)

²⁹ [Beyond-Access-to-HE-FINAL_2.pdf \(aqmen.ac.uk\)](#)

	<p>income, care leavers³⁰, estranged students, parents or carers, disabled and mature students.³¹</p> <p>Professor John McKendrick was appointed by the Scottish Government in 2023 as the Widening Access Commissioner and has committed to continue this work. Continued efforts to widen access and improve outcomes for those who are socio-economically disadvantaged is an underpinning element of the Purpose and Principles.</p> <p>Engagement Comments</p> <p>Here are a range of qualitative views and experiences from our engagement which provide useful insights on barriers and opportunities.</p> <p>Principle 1 - High Quality Opportunities Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to be engaged in adult learning. Social class is a key predictor of engagement in learning. • Digital poverty and digital literacy can be a barrier to accessing learning. <p>Stakeholders we engaged with discussed possible solutions to these barriers including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to understand available opportunities (including Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG)) to support decision making. The Adult Learning Strategy recognises the need to strengthen partnerships to ensure that adult learners have access to
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³⁰ In 2020-21, 1.5% of Scottish-domiciled full-time first-degree entrants were care experienced. That represents 485 entrants, up 105 from the 2019-20 figure. Source SFC widening access report. [Report on Widening Access 2020-21 \(sfc.ac.uk\)](#)

³¹ [NUS Cost of living Crisis presentation reduced.pdf \(nationbuilder.com\)](#)

	<p>appropriate guidance throughout their learning journey³².</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time courses rather than full-time courses to enable learners to have the flexibility to continue to work and study. • A positive earlier experience of learning. This means adult learning is more likely to continue. • Some adult returners reflected that having a more relaxed and accessible method of teaching (e.g. through SWAP) compared to their school experience supported better learning. • There is a lack of awareness about the rights and entitlements of community-based adult learners requiring additional support to access and engage in learning activities when compared to the experiences of adult learners in colleges and universities. • Providing assistance with digital and virtual methods. <p>Principle 2 - Support for learners Stakeholders that we engaged with shared the following barriers that people may face:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance can be a barrier. For some people, accessing education can mean a loss of income, and the cost of living crisis has an impact. People on low incomes often lack funds to support their learning and need to work. • There are different barriers that exist for members within the same family. • The proportion of adults with low or no qualifications is highest in the most deprived quintile and decreases as the level of deprivation decreases. • Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with students from lower
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³² [Adult learning strategy 2022 to 2027 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

	<p>socio-economic backgrounds may have less funds offering limited opportunities for research and innovation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impacts of poverty and socio-economic disadvantage begin at a young age, impacting on future attainment. <p>Stakeholders discussed possible solutions to these barriers including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right support needs to be put in place for learners such as free transport. The cost/length of travel/ location of study affects the ability to maintain part-time jobs and all affect a person's ability to engage with learning. • Support for people transitioning through different stages of learning is required such as mentoring support, opportunities to visit institutions with staff to support the transition. • Discretionary funding to support adult learners with buying equipment such as a laptop³³. <p>Principle 3: Globally respected</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No comments have been made to date about specific barriers for international students or in the research sphere. We will continue to engage with stakeholders as further policy decisions are developed. <p>Principle 4: Agile and Responsive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economically inactive people who participate in lifelong learning, are more likely to gain qualifications than those in employment while studying. • There is regional variation in the proportion of the population with low or no qualifications. • Delays for learners at the end of apprenticeships (e.g. skills tests)
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³³ Note that various discretionary funds do currently exist.

	<p>may have an impact on decreasing wages.</p> <p>Stakeholders discussed possible solutions to these barriers including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to think how to address occupational segregation via Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG). • There is a positive impact of education and employment on crime reduction. • Part-time funding policies, particularly in HE, could be a barrier. Students are entitled to pro-rata tuition fees so would not receive support for living costs. <p>Principle 5: Transparent Resilient and Trusted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupational segregation can be more pronounced in less affluent areas worsening inequality. • Stigma can be present regarding attendance at one of the post-92 institutions versus ancient universities. <p>Stakeholders discussed possible solutions to these barriers including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hybrid learning options to support those who cannot easily travel, which is relevant to a range of protected characteristics e.g. gender disparities in caring responsibilities. • 324,700 adults in Scotland aged 16-64 years have 'low or no qualifications'. There is potential positive impact in directing funds to this group³⁴. • Employers offering flexibility to work and study. • Ensuring that timetables of full-time courses offer flexibility to work alongside study.
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³⁴ Scotland's Labour Market: People, Places and Regions –2020/21

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removing some of the inconsistencies in financial support. • More financial support and awareness raising for those who are greatest in need. • More access to funded child care and nurseries. • More carers will benefit when they study through the removal of the education restrictions so full-time students can receive Scottish Carer's Assistance³⁵. • Raising awareness of the range of learner pathways that are available to learners through CIAG. <p>We also engaged with users of the system throughout the development of the Purpose and Principles, to hear their reflections on the system, the Interim Purpose and Principles and delivery priorities. This was coded and can be found in our write up of engagement to be published alongside the Purpose and Principles.</p>
<p>Summary of assessment findings</p>	<p>The development of the system outcomes was informed by the engagement and evidence gathered since publication of the Scope and Approach in Summer 2022.</p> <p>The development of the Purpose and Principles has included consideration of a wide number of different inequalities that exist in the post-school education, research and skills system. We have put system users at the heart of the work and our outcomes. We believe that the Principles and high level delivery priorities reflect our commitment to supporting individuals in a fair and equitable way. While inequalities within the system are considered across all of the Purpose and Principles, we have specifically created a Principle to outline</p>

³⁵ Changes to Scottish Carer's Assistance - Scottish Carer's Assistance: consultation analysis - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

our commitment to support individuals in an equitable way:

Supportive and Equitable: People are supported throughout their learning journey, particularly those who need it most.


We recognise and have heard through engagement the number of different learner journeys that happen, and the importance of recognising success in many different ways.

In our final publication we will set out our commitment to equality as one of our core missions:

Equality

That opportunities are available to all based on their ability to learn and that learning presents a pathway out of poverty. That learners who need it most are financially supported to complete their chosen pathway. That we work hard so that those who face the greatest barriers to accessing opportunities are supported and encouraged to do so, based on a genuine understanding of what they need to succeed and, that we use the strength of our social research on poverty and society to further support this work.

We have also gone through a number of iterations of the Purpose and Principles which we have tested with stakeholders both in terms of language and on delivery priorities. Changes have been considered based on engagement and are reflected in the final document to be published. When testing the Principles, stakeholders have agreed that the underpinning ethos of the Purpose and Principles supports our aims. There will be more detailed pros and cons to be considered on further development of the delivery priorities as part of the programme of reform which will be for individual policy teams to consider.

	<p>Recognising the impact of support and the need to support equity of access and support, through logic modelling and the evidence and data gathered through policy development, in addition to the Principles, we have detailed the system outcomes which would allow us to know if we have met each Principle, this includes:</p> <p>System Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The public funding system for student support is perceived as fair, transparent and accessible by learners, providers and employers. • Learners have access to holistic, person-centred support, empowering them to access, sustain and complete their learning. <p>We will continue to engage with other public bodies, stakeholders and institutions to engage with users of the system with a range of backgrounds and lived experience as we further develop our delivery priorities. We will publish an initial set of delivery priorities alongside the final Purpose and Principles but we will continue to reflect on the needs of learners, equity of support and access and other factors when developing future iterations of delivery priorities. We will also continue to assess the impacts of future policy decisions that follow from the Purpose and Principles as part of the broader programme of reform.</p>
<p>Sign off</p>	<p>Name: Naureen Ahmad</p>  <p>Job title: Deputy Director, Lifelong Learning and Skills Directorate</p> <p>Date: 06 July 23</p>

