



Fife & Tayside

Wider Access Forum

Strategy 2004-2008

FIFE AND TAYSIDE WIDER ACCESS FORUM

Strategy for 2004-2008

1. Introduction

The current Fife and Tayside Wider Access Forum was established in 2000 funded by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, with subsequent funding support also from the Scottish Further Education Funding Council. The Forum is a partnership of three Universities, six local FE colleges and the Open University in Scotland. The purpose of the Forum is, through cross-sector collaboration, to promote widening participation in higher education to those from traditionally under-represented groups. Progress has been made in achieving this aim, in that partners within the Forum have been working together on a number of projects and activities, including awareness raising events with selected communities, research projects, information production and marketing of opportunities. This has been a valuable exercise in fostering a greater understanding of cross-sector partnership working and building bridges between the sectors.

In 2003 the Funding Councils carried out an evaluation of all the regional Fora in Scotland, the outcome of which is that funding is to be extended for another four years. In the light of the recent review and evaluation and within the context of recent policies and priorities of the Scottish Executive in relation to Scottish Higher Education and lifelong learning, the Forum recognises that to be effective in achieving its aims certain changes will need to be made.

2. Rationale for change

The Funding Councils have been given a clear remit to continue the work of the Regional Fora with a view to meeting the ambitions and targets set out in the Scottish Executive's strategy "Life through Learning: Learning through Life" and the recent Higher Education Review. The Executive's strategy specifically asks the Funding Councils to build upon the initial work of the fora to facilitate cross-sector links, to encourage progression from community-based learning, to promote effective transitions and to encourage participation by under-represented groups. Likewise, the Higher Education Review includes statements of intent to widen access and participation and to set sector-wide targets for increased participation rates from the most economically disadvantaged groups.

In order to achieve these goals the Forum recognises that there is a need to:

- Develop a broader strategic role
- Continue to develop effective cross-sector partnership working
- Incorporate relevant and successful aspects of Strand Four projects into future activities
- Present a case for continued funding for the period 2004-2008

3. Current members of the Fife and Tayside Forum

HE Institutions

University of Abertay Dundee
University of Dundee
University of St Andrews
The Open University in Scotland

FE Colleges

Angus College
Dundee College
Elmwood College
Fife College
Glenrothes College
Perth College

Associated member - Careers Scotland
Observer status - Lauder College, Dunfermline (full members of the SE Forum)

4. Aims and objectives

The aims of the Forum are to address under-representation in higher education by promoting fair access, and enhancing subsequent achievement, for the following groups in the region:

- school pupils
- students following further education routes to Higher Education (including access to degrees and HN programmes)
- adult returners to education from the social and business communities

It will do this by developing and implementing a regional wider access strategy, which both recognises the individual contribution of particular institutional approaches and encourages collaboration.

The Forum recognises the importance of developing routes to employment in the context of the national Lifelong Learning Strategy as a means to enhancing the employability of individuals and so helping deliver a better educated workforce able to contribute to sustainable economic development.

The objectives of the Fife and Tayside Regional Forum are to:

- develop and implement a regional wider access strategy including the setting of regional targets, within the context of the Lifelong Learning Strategy. The Forum will be accountable for meeting its targets
- enhance opportunities for individuals to access higher education through collaboration, as well as assisting individual institutions to increase the effectiveness of their own wider access provision by sharing good practice
- work to enhance the achievement of students entering institutions in the region through wider access routes (note – the Forum funding is not to this end, but the Forum agrees that the area should take an holistic approach and student achievement should be part of the regional strategy)
- work with other agencies (eg the SACCA mapping, tracking and bridging projects) to gather information on wider access activities across the region that informs the development and evaluation of regional and institutional strategies
- agree priorities for the funding of projects and activities designed to enhance access to higher education in the region from under-represented groups
- monitor and evaluate the projects and activities funded through the Forum
- collaborate with the other regional fora to share best practice and work with the Funding Councils and other agencies to develop and implement a national strategy for wider access
- raise the aspirations of those from under-represented groups and provide guidance and advice that enables them, as learners, to make an informed choice about the

educational opportunities available to them

- identify the wider access needs of the region, taking a learner needs approach rather than a recruitment of students approach

5. Developing the Fife and Tayside Widening Access Strategy

Early conclusions from Forum members, in relation to developing the Strategy, are set out below under each of the principal themes.

Schools

The involvement of schools and their authorities in the Forum has been given careful consideration and the following concluded:-

- LEAS have to be fully involved (preferably at an annual meeting to agree strategy and plans)
- Collaborative activity on raising aspirations and awareness and enhancing motivation is most likely to be effective at P6 to S3 (including activities aimed at parents)
- The Forum should build on existing activities eg Progress Group and be informed by other projects – eg GOALS and LEAPs
- Improving the mutual understanding of school teachers and college/university staff will help inform measures to improve student progression

The FE/HE Interface

With regard to the interface between FE colleges and HEIs, the conclusions are:-

- That SWAP-East should continue – covering the SE and F&T
- SWAP programmes should be viewed by Universities as part of wider access provision rather than recruitment
- Institutional subscriptions would be replaced by funding from the forum
- There is a critical need to consider and develop improved articulation from HN to degree provision, and reverse articulation.

Communities

Work within community settings and with community groups would represent a new set of activities for the Forum (although not of course new to individual institutions). Early considerations for this theme are:-

- There is already considerable involvement for all Forum members in processes of community planning – and much working with Local Authorities and Health Boards. Careful thought needs to be given to the interface between the Forum and community planning structures, particularly at the local delivery level.
- The Forum should seek to work with community learning partnerships and adult guidance networks to raise awareness of HE as a target in the context of lifelong learning and job opportunities

- It would be useful to have an exploration of the need for FE/HE partnerships in access programmes to FE & HE for potential students based in communities (ie not currently at school or college)

6. Progress and achievements 2000-2003

LIFT OFF (Learning In Fife and Tayside: Opportunities For the Future) Web Site

The Forum has developed a web site (www.lift-off.org.uk) primarily aimed at adults wishing to enter into formal learning. It provides learners with guidance on a wide range of aspects related to becoming a learner and is also a portal to the partner institutions within the regional area. The web site has been used by practitioners belonging to the Adult Guidance Networks and is being promoted by links from the Peoples' Network Points in the area, and by a series of postcards and tabletalkers distributed through libraries, doctors, dentists and neighbourhood and learning centres. Feedback to-date has been positive and funds are available to maintain the web site over the next 3 years.

Dreamcatcher

The Forum is producing a magazine style booklet, which includes a range of case studies of adult learners experiences. This will be sent out in mailshots to selected post code areas and will be available in libraries, doctors' surgeries, community information points and neighbourhood centres. A potential spin off from this project would be to produce a similar booklet consisting of school pupil case studies to show different routes and pathways.

Research Project: An Investigation into the transition experience from FE into Higher Education for students with Disabilities

This project is concerned with studying the experiences of students with identified disabilities moving from FE to Higher Education. It is currently ongoing and should be completed in August 2004. The outcome of the project will be to produce:

- A booklet for students with disabilities offering guidance on managing the transition from FE to HE
- A report with practical recommendations to be circulated amongst Forum colleges and universities
- Guidelines for institutions on managing the transition process

Motiv8 (Motivational conferences for S4 School pupils)

Four school conferences were held in November 2003, two in Dundee and two in Glenrothes. The project involved workshops from *Insights* and subject workshops on business, construction, science and one on student life generally. The feedback and evaluation from the project has been very positive so far although the complete evaluation will not be available until April 2004. Dependant on the evaluation, the Forum has planned (i.e. allocated the funds) for the conferences to be repeated in 2004.

Conferences

2001 Partnerships and Projects: the Next Steps
2001 E-Learning: Empowerment or Exclusion

7. Change of focus and direction

While the first four years of the Forum have seen the establishment of a solid foundation for future development, with a high level of trust and experience of active collaboration, it is recognised that some change is required to realise its full potential. Members have addressed the need for a new strategic focus and direction in a series of discussions. One outcome of the discussions is agreement to refocus and move in a fresh direction under the theme of 'Transitions'.

This theme encapsulates the work which lies at the heart of the Forum: to enable individuals to progress from one part of the education system (or the community or work) into more advanced study or employment.

In addition, 'Transitions' is a strong theme with the advantage of offering:

- An overarching framework
- A clear, acceptable and strategically important focus for all members
- Scope for a coherent range of initiatives to complement members' existing activities
- The potential to establish specialist 'transition teams' from member institutions and partners

The forum intends to concentrate initially on the identification of the transition needs of key target groups. One early project will focus on work to aid the transition of students from Colleges of Further and Higher Education to Institutions of Higher Education. The Forum institutions shall collaborate and share good practice with regard to transition at this stage of lifelong learning. In developing this project, the Forum will make every effort to learn from the experience of the North and West Fora in their transitions projects, and to continue to work with SAACA on the bridging project.

8. Project activity

Discussion among Forum members has established a clear need to create a shared information base regarding participation in Higher Education within the region. This is seen as essential to facilitate appropriate focus and prioritisation of subsequent activity. Whilst work is underway to identify the needs of the area and the action required by the Forum to meet those needs, the Forum executive proposes that one project be started in the immediate term as there is a clear need for it, allowing the Forum to be working for active change whilst also developing a strategy. The proposed initial activity of the forum is therefore to undertake:-

- A short-term research project to establish baseline participation information for the forum region.
- The development and implementation of the Transitions theme, as described above.

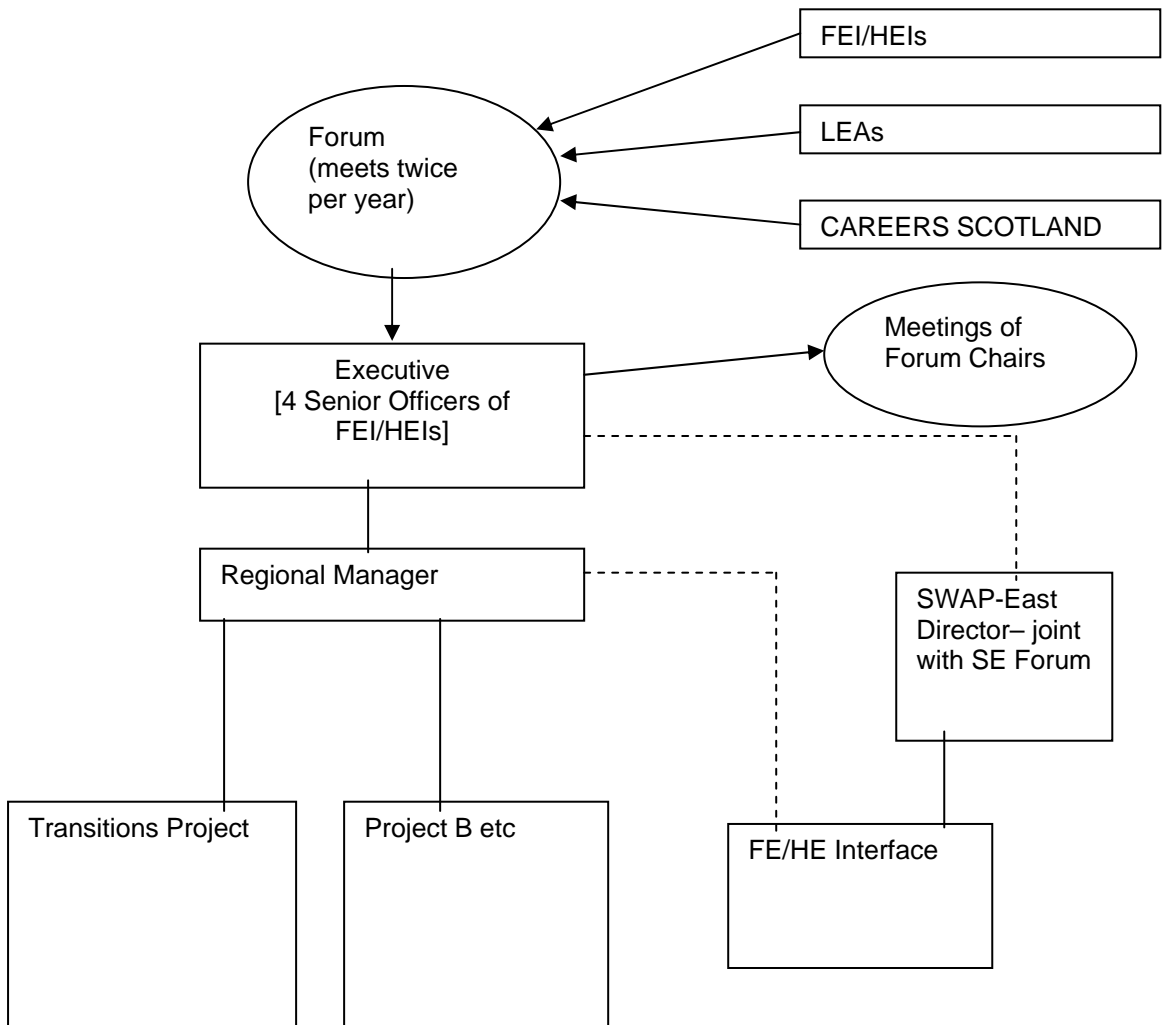
Further project activity would be identified and developed as a result of the initial research described above.

9. SWAP-East

Over 15 years, the SWAP brand has proven successful in creating opportunities for adults to enter into Higher Education through its programmes operated in partnerships between Colleges and Higher Education Institutions. As the SWAP-East remit covered the geographic areas of both the South-East and Fife and Tayside Fora, the Fora have agreed to include SWAP-East in both Fora, splitting the administration and overhead costs.

10. Governance

The new structure for the working of the Forum will be:



11. Core staffing complement

In the context of the new strategic focus, the following core posts are required:

Forum Manager
Researcher and Evaluator (2004 only)
Administrative support

The Forum Manager shall:

- manage all Forum activity
- manage and support the work of the full Forum, the Executive and the Project Groups
- prepare the draft Forum strategy
- authorise approved expenditure and maintain financial records
- commission and direct research, data collection and evaluations to inform the strategic direction of the Forum
- be responsible to the Forum Convenor and accountable to the Forum Executive

The Forum Researcher shall:

- undertake the gathering of data, research and evaluations to inform the future direction of the Forum
- share the findings of research and evaluations at a Forum conference, the purpose of which would be to determine future priorities for action.

12. Expenditure

In addition to funds to support the core staffing complement, the Forum will require funds for:

- research, data collection and evaluation
- projects in furtherance of the Forum's strategic priorities
- integration of SWAP-East

A budget is attached.

FIFE & TAYSIDE WIDER ACCESS FORUM

Budget for 2004-2008 (NOT adjusted for inflation) (January to December)

	2004	2005	2006	2007
Central expenditure				
Core staffing (Forum manager and p/t clerical support)	55,000	55,000	55,000	55,000
Research and evaluation	25,000	-	-	-
Staff recruitment	5,000	-	-	-
Central costs and overheads	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000
Share of annual costs for integration of SWAP-East	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000
Total annual central expenditure	130,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
 Project expenditure				
	170,000	200,000	200,000	200,000
 Total annual expenditure	300,000	300,000	300,000	300,000

At the end of 2000-2003 the Forum holds a balance of unspent funds. The majority of this is committed to the completion of existing projects but any remaining once the projects are completed will be added to the funds available for projects.