

College Connect Strategy 2013-2020: The Development of an Institutional Strategy to Support Articulation

Wayne Yvonne, *Glasgow Caledonian University, UK*

Introduction

In June 2013 the Scottish Government's Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill was approved. One of the central proposals of the Act is to establish a joined-up system that enables learners to readily move between the college and university sectors, especially articulating from Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNC/Ds) directly into the second and third years of a degree programme. Articulation is facilitated by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) which levels HNCs and HNDs as being equivalent to the first and second years of Scottish degree programmes. However, articulation between these sectors has not been without its challenges with students often facing difficulties adapting to the different approaches to learning, teaching and assessment from what they experienced at college.

This paper will provide a brief overview of articulation in Scotland and discuss how it has become an increasingly important route for policy makers, institutions and students alike, with a focus on the Articulation Hubs which were funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to develop and increase articulation activity. Importantly it will address how one institution, namely Glasgow Caledonian University, has responded to this agenda and developed an evidence-based institutional strategy to support articulation and inspire future generations of college students to embrace higher education through to degree-level study.

Overview of Articulation

The current SFC definition of articulation is:

Students gaining entry into second year of a degree with a Higher National Certification (HNC) or to third year of a degree using a Higher National Diploma (HND) obtained in a college as an entry qualification.

(SFC 2011a: 7)

HNs are designed, accredited and awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and were originally designed as vocationally-based higher education qualifications. The 1990s witnessed an expansion in the uptake of HN provision, increasing from 32,952 in 1990-91 to 72,461 in 2000-01 (Gallacher 2006: 44) and this expansion led Gallacher (2002) to argue that in Scotland there were 'two parallel systems of HE' (2002: 8), one operating within the college sector and the other within the university sector. Moreover, as college-based higher education increased so did the number of students moving from one system to another, as students used HNs as 'transitional' qualifications to gain advanced entry to degree-level provision (Gallacher 2006, Ingram and Gallacher 2011, Gallacher and Ingram 2012, Gallacher *et al* 2012).

The Articulation Hubs

The vehicle employed by the SFC to support and develop articulation has been the Articulation Hubs. Five regional hubs¹ were established in 2008 and given the remit to develop a sustainable infrastructure to support, develop and increase articulation. The operational models developed by the Hubs varied, but the Hub under discussion, namely the Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership (GGAP), established a number of strands of work, such as the Partnership Projects strand through which they funded 30 collaborative college-university projects between 2008-10 (GGAP 2013: 6). In addition, they established the College University Subject Partnerships (CUSPs) through which subject-specialist staff from the colleges and University came together to discuss articulation-related issues in their subject areas. GGAP also funded work in the areas of student engagement and support and research. During the period of Articulation Hub funding GGAP's lead institution Glasgow Caledonian University's intake of articulating students increased to 610 students in 2012-13 and the University is committed to increasing this number to 1000 post 2015-16. As discrete Hub funding was due to end in July 2013² Glasgow Caledonian University took the decision to underline its commitment to articulation to develop a post-Hub articulation strategy to support both the strategic and operational partnerships that had been developed through GGAP but also those students entering university via HNQs and the *College Connect Strategy 2013-2020* was launched to facilitate this.

College Connect Strategy

The *College Connect Strategy 2013-2020* underlines Glasgow Caledonian University's commitment to articulating students and working in partnership with Scotland's Colleges. The Strategy builds on the models of articulation and support developed by GGAP and adopts a holistic approach built around three broad objectives, namely:

◆ Enhancing the student experience of articulation

College Connect aims to raise aspirations amongst college students to proceed to the University, enhance their student experience whilst still at college through early engagement and to enable students to maximise their potential and achievement. The flagship activity for enhancing the student experience is the College Connect Academy, the aim of which is to provide timely, relevant and focused interventions to ensure that college students have the resources to gain the maximum benefit from their university studies.

◆ Enhancing partnership working for articulation

One of the main lessons learned through the GGAP initiative was that central to the success of articulation is formalised communication between the University and the colleges at both

1 The other four regional hubs are: Edinburgh, Lothian, Fife and Borders Regional Articulation Hub (ELRAH) led by Edinburgh Napier University; the South West Articulation Hub (SWAH) led by the University of the West of Scotland; the Fife and Tayside Hub, led by the University of Abertay; and the North East Hub led by Robert Gordon University. A sixth Hub which was based in the Open University was also established.

2 The SFC subsequently took the decision to fund the Hubs for a further two years until July 2015.

strategic and operational levels. As such, College Connect will build on and develop these models.

◆ Enhancing the evidence base for articulation

College Connect will develop a robust evidence base to inform articulation developments and will include an evaluation of the impact and success of the College Connect Strategy.

Conclusion

Scottish Government policy in respect of articulation has encouraged greater and more flexible links between colleges and universities and has actively sought to encourage this through the funding of the Articulation Hubs. The *College Connect Strategy 2013-2020* builds on the models and infrastructure developed with the support of Hub funding but heralds a new stage for the University's relationship with its partner colleges and a new model of mainstreamed and embedded support for articulating students.

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