

UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION (SCOTLAND)

UACE(S) ACCESS WORKING GROUP

1. *The Access Working Group*

- 1.1 The Working Group is a standing committee of its parent body, the Universities Association for Continuing Education (Scotland).
- 1.2 Each HEI in Scotland, as a member of UACE(S), is entitled to have a representative on the Access Working Group. provision. Membership of the UACE(S) Access Working Group for session 2002/03 is shown in Annex 1.

2. *Background*

- 2.1 Following the establishment in 1984 and 1985 of Access courses by the Universities of Aberdeen and Strathclyde, in addition to the provision established in 1979 and 1980 by the Universities of Glasgow and Dundee, an Access Working Group was formed under the auspices of what was then titled the Universities Council for Adult and Continuing Education (Scotland). When, subsequently, the Universities of Edinburgh and Stirling became direct providers of Access courses, representatives from those institutions joined the group.
- 2.2 The newly-created Access Working Group provided a forum for enabling institutions to exchange information, review and identify good practice, compare research studies of the progress and performance of students in Access programmes, and address matters of concern such as arrangements for the admission of students in Access programmes to degree programmes in a range of other universities.
- 2.3 In 1992, the Access Working Group was re-established to include representatives from the enlarged constituency of UACE(S), which followed from the establishment of the new Scottish Universities under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992. While it is recognised that the quality assurance of individual Access programmes is a matter for the quality assurance arrangements of individual institutions, the Access Working Group played a variety of roles in the promotion and enhancement of the quality of Access provision, including the exchange of information about the quality assurance arrangements of individual institutions as they relate to Access provision.

3.3 The Access Working Group was charged with

- Advising UACE(S) on access to higher education issues, taking these in a wide sense, and in particular on policy and funding issues as these affected the Scottish Universities involved in direct Access course provision;
- Continuing to develop its role in promoting and enhancing the quality of the Access course provision of the Scottish Universities.

3. *Quality Promotion and Enhancement*

3.1 *Peer Group Review*

A function of the Working Group is to provide an informal forum for peer review of new programmes or of new and innovative practice Within established programmes. This function of the Group has links with more formal arrangements whereby members of the group have been invited, in their individual capacity, to serve as external assessors on review boards or assessment panels for Access courses in other universities. Since the Group can supply experienced assessors for such purposes, it has been agreed to establish and maintain a register of the professional expertise of members.

3.2 *Professional Development*

The Working Group, by facilitating formal and informal exchanges of information among members, and providing opportunities where issues of concern to practitioners can be explored in a systematic way, contributes to the professional development of university staff who have responsibilities for Access provision in their roles as co-ordinators, admissions selectors, lecturers or tutors, counsellors or advisers of studies, and assists them to disseminate good practice within their respective institutions.

3.3 *Identification and Dissemination of Good Practice*

This is a clearly identified objective of the Access Working Group. It is achieved through formal and informal exchanges of information, peer review of provision, and seminar sessions of the Access Network on matters of professional concern.

3.4 *Mutual Recognition and Progression to Degree Programmes*

The Working Group was successful some years ago in systematically collecting information about the respective Access programmes directly provided by the various Scottish Universities, including information about how each HEI treated applications for its various degree programmes from candidates in its own in-house programme. Following briefings and discussions which members of the Working Group had with Admissions Selectors for the various faculties in their own institution, the principle was generally established that the universities which provided Access courses would attempt to treat applicants from other providing institutions in the same way as they

made a significant contribution to quality in confirming the mutual recognition of the Access courses of the Scottish Universities and in making them genuinely multi-exit in character. The access Working Group continues to monitor admissions procedures and to provide a forum where any disturbing or exceptional treatment of candidates for degree places can be reported and, where appropriate, followed up through discussions between representatives on the Working Group and Admissions staff in their home institution.

3.5 *Database of Provision*

Having systematically collected information on Scottish University Access course provision and disseminated it to Admissions Officers, the Access Working Group invited SUCE to assist it in publishing a regularly updated database of provision, SUCE referred this suggestion to the Access Committee it was establishing, and this led with the co-operation of the Access Working Group to the annual publication by SUCE of a database of Access courses in Scotland which were recognised by the Scottish Universities in being either courses directly provided by the Scottish Universities or as programmes, offered by FE colleges, which had been approved by the Regional Consortia of the newly launched SWAP initiative. The Access Working Group was represented on the SUCE Access Committee and continues to be involved in the production of the database of provision. Two representatives of the Access Working Group served on the group which prepared, on behalf of HEQC and COSHEP, the recently issued Pathways to Higher Education: a Register of Access Courses in Scotland 1994/95.

3.6 *Monitoring and Review*

Since they are key performance indicators, the Access Working Group now collects and reviews statistical returns from the Scottish Universities on numbers admitted to their Access programmes and numbers receiving confirmed offers of places in degree programmes.

3.7 *Research*

The access Working Group is a forum where research findings in relation to Access provision can be examined. It has also facilitated co-operative research into Access provision and continues to provide opportunities whereby collaboration in research work can be secured. It has been agreed to include an agenda item at each meeting of the Group inviting members to report on any research activity in which they are involved, or which has come to their attention, in relation to Access provision, to assist the Group in planning seminars for its Access Network.

4 *Liaison with other bodies*

- 4.1 The Access Working Group, with its capacity to represent all the Scottish Universities has proved to be useful to a number of agencies including UACE, SHEFC, Universities Scotland, QAA and the regional consortia established under the SWAP initiative.