

Taking stock (2): making progress

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1. Introduction

Section D is the second of three with the title *Taking stock*. These have been designed to help guide you towards making decisions that are right for you and your future, especially your future in education.

The aim of *Taking stock part 2* is to help you to think through what and where you might want to go on to study. This will hopefully allow you to identify the best route for you to take from the SWAP East access programme.

2. Find out more

It is a good idea to attend university or college open days if you can - a [list of dates](#) can be found in the student section of the SWAP East website. Open days give you a feel for a place and an opportunity to meet staff and students. If you have any specific questions, you could also contact university admissions staff or staff within the department you are interested in. It may also be worthwhile contacting [Skills Development Scotland](#) or careers guidance staff at your college to discuss your future options.

3. Exercises

At this stage in your access programme you are asked to think about what you want to do next. You will no doubt be very busy, trying to juggle the demands of the course with the demands of daily life, but it is very important that you start thinking carefully about what route you want to take. It's

advisable to start doing this as early as possible; you do not want to make big decisions at the last minute.

In terms of your **future studies**, your decisions are likely to be focused on either **applying to university** to do a degree course or **applying to college** (your own or another) to do an HNC/HND course. While the decision is obviously yours, there are a number of factors you should take into account.

Firstly, progressing to university or onto an HN programme is only one step in the process. You need to be sure you have the skills, aptitude, and motivation required for this level of study. You should ensure that you have a realistic understanding of exactly what will be required and then assess your own abilities and aspirations honestly.

The following exercises are aimed at helping you determine your suitability for a degree programme at this stage. Everyone working with you on the access programme wants to help you achieve your goals. However, it's not just about getting onto the course you want, it's also about making sure you feel ready to progress and have the ability to successfully complete your chosen degree or HN course.

Exercise 1

This exercise will help you assess your strengths and weaknesses.

One of the features of SWAP East access programmes is the breadth of subjects you have the opportunity to study. This lets you to try subjects out you might know little or nothing about, while also allowing you to improve your skills in the core subjects.

Make a list of at least five subjects you have studied so far on your access programme (excluding Communications and Maths/Numeracy) and rate your level of interest and ability in each one.

Subject	My interest (high, neutral, low)	My ability (poor, good, very good)

4. Reviewing your progress to date

Look again at the table and how you have rated the different subjects. You may find that, on the whole, you are good at those subjects in which you have an interest. This is useful to know as it will help shape your thinking about what choices you make.

The access year (as you will likely already have discovered!) is short. It is essential that you take the time to think carefully about what you aim to do once you have completed the programme. Consider the subjects that you have rated as being of high interest to you in which you have a very good ability; it might be a good idea to research which courses are available to you in those areas.

Exercise 2

Rate the following statements on a scale of 1-5, in which 1 means you strongly disagree and 5 means you strongly agree.

	1	2	3	4	5
I can cope with the coursework					
I can meet the assignment deadlines					
I learn from tutor feedback					
I have a clear idea about what I want to do next					

Now add up your scores. If you have a high score (maximum 20) then you are making good progress. If your score is low (minimum 4) then there are some things you need to think about very carefully if you are aiming to progress to university directly from your access programme. Only by making an honest assessment of how you're coping now can you make the best decisions about your next steps in education. If you do not yet feel ready to progress to university, don't despair. You may find that you grow in confidence in the next few months and everything will start to come together. On the other hand, you may feel that you would be more comfortable progressing to an HNC/HND programme and from there move on to a university degree course. Either of these progression routes is a step in the right direction, but only you can decide which the best one for you is.

It might be useful at this stage to make an appointment to see your tutor or a member of the college guidance team to discuss your options.

5. Succeeding at university

It is important that you have a good understanding of the qualities you will need in order to succeed at university. Students sometimes think it is simply a matter of doing well on the access programme and then progressing to university. In reality, there is much more to success at university than academic ability alone.

Exercise 3

The exercise below highlights a few of the desirable qualities you will need to be able to demonstrate. Place yourself somewhere in the scale for each one.

	5	4	3	2	1	
Punctual						Always late
Organised						Disorganised
Motivated						Unenthusiastic
Calm						Liable to worry
Decisive						Indecisive
Self-disciplined						Undisciplined
Willing to learn from criticism						Struggle to deal with criticism
Self-reliant						Reliant on others

Now add up your score. Hopefully you will have placed yourself at least somewhere in the middle for most, if not all, of these qualities. If there are any areas in which you have a low score (1-2), think about why this might be and what steps you could take to improve your score. Your classmates and your family might be able to offer some advice or suggestions. A low score in a number of areas may be an indication that you are not ready to study at university.

At university your classes are likely to be bigger than they are at present and they will be made up of students from a wider variety of backgrounds. Academic staff will be available to help - many set aside specific office hours in the week when students can come to speak to them - but they won't be able to dedicate as much time to individual students as college tutors often do. It will be up to you to ensure you manage your workload effectively. You'll need to be self-reliant, determined, and resourceful and have the ability able to work on your own, in groups and to deadlines.

6. Researching what to study and where

It is never too early to start researching your options. The more research you do on universities and courses, the better informed your decisions will be, which will be reflected in your UCAS personal statement. Whatever you do, don't leave it to the last minute and make choices in a panic or just follow your classmates' choices. Remember: you will be able to make five choices available in your UCAS application.

Where should I start?

Progression route search

One of the best places to start your research is the [progression route search](#) facility on the SWAP East website. This allows you to search by subject to find all the degree programmes at SWAP East partner universities that the access programmes provide pathways to. It will also show you what profile grades the universities are asking for entry to each degree programme. It is important to note

that these are entry requirements specific to SWAP applicants and so are likely to differ from other entry requirements you see advertised by the universities.

Progression routes are reviewed and agreed annually by each of the SWAP East partner universities and so they may differ slightly from year to year. Whilst progression to these degree courses is not guaranteed, if a university has agreed the progression route, they will look at your application sympathetically and, if your application and UCAS personal statement are strong enough, you should hopefully receive a conditional offer.

University websites

Have a good look at individual university websites to find out more detailed information on the degree programmes offered. What does the programme cover? Where are the classes based? What are the career prospects? Who can you contact for further information? The university admissions office should be able to give you information on the volume of applications they normally receive for the programme and the number of places they have available.

There are also lots of websites with advice and guidance on comparing universities and choosing where to study (see the Useful Links section at the end for some suggestions). The [UCAS website](#) provides advice for applicants and details of all the degree programmes on offer at universities in the UK.

University open days

Every university will have at least one open day for potential applicants. Details of these will be publicised online by the universities. A [list](#) of all the open days held by universities in the east of Scotland can be found on the SWAP East website. These normally take place early in the academic year, so you'll need to be on the ball.

An open day will give you the chance to get a feel for the university you are visiting, which will help you decide whether it's the place for you or not. Open days usually include tours of the campus and facilities and the opportunity to meet current staff and students. Go to one, or several, of these if you can and go prepared with plenty of questions. Open days are free to attend but you normally have to register beforehand, so the university knows how many people to cater for.

Careers websites

Whether you have clear career plans or not, it is worth investigating what your options are beyond college and university. [Skills Development Scotland](#) is one source of useful advice on careers and qualifications. All the colleges and universities have career services: use them. Even if you do already have a particular career in mind, you need to make sure you are doing the right course to obtain the qualifications you need to get there. You might also find it useful to look for careers information on websites of professional associations relevant to your interests.

7. Entry requirements

Each university will have specific entry requirements for SWAP applicants. These will also vary depending on the degree course you want to study. An offer for a place at university will normally depend on the following:

- ❖ Successful completion of the full SWAP access programme.

- ❖ A strong personal statement and tutor reference.
- ❖ Attainment of specific SWAP profile grades (e.g. ABB or BBC).

It is wise to ensure that your five course courses cover a range of profile grade entry requirements. So, for example, if your first choice is asking for AAB, make sure you have at least one other choice with lower requirements (e.g. BBB). If you apply for five courses which have exactly the same entry requirements and you don't get the grades you need for one, then, obviously, you won't have the grades you need for any of the others either.

For some specific degree programmes, such as teaching, psychology and nursing, universities may require you to have passed an external SQA exam (e.g. National 5/Higher Maths). If you are thinking about applying for a degree course like that but the exams you need are not included in your access programme then you should speak to your tutor as soon as possible.

Universities may sometimes specify that they will want to see evidence of relevant work or voluntary experience and a good understanding of the profession you aim to get into to. This is usually the case for degrees which lead to a particular profession, such as teaching, nursing, social work and careers in the caring professions, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy and podiatry. Your UCAS personal statement is your opportunity to make sure you mention any relevant experience you have.

8. Degree courses outside the SWAP East progression routes

Can I apply to study at a university that is not one of the SWAP East partner universities?

Quite simply, yes, you can. But do be aware that we do not have the same progression agreements with institutions outside of the east of Scotland; therefore, there is no guarantee that other universities will be willing to consider your application.

Every university in Scotland will be familiar with SWAP and the SWAP qualification. However, although universities in the west of Scotland will understand your SWAP applicant status, they are not under any obligation to consider your application, since your SWAP East access programme is not a progression route to their degree courses. This does not necessarily mean that the universities in the west of Scotland won't consider your application, just that your chance of being made an offer will largely depend on the popularity of the course you are applying to and the strength of your application. Indeed, over the years, many SWAP East students have gone on to study at universities in areas of Scotland which are not part of the SWAP East region.

Universities outside of Scotland are much less likely to be familiar with your SWAP East qualification and it will very much depend on the individual university as to whether or not they will be willing to consider you.

If it is your intention to apply to a university that is not a SWAP East partner institution, you are strongly advised to explain your situation to the university's admissions office in advance. You should also contact the SWAP East office, so that we can contact the university you want to apply to and provide them with information about SWAP and the access programme you are doing.

You will be able to make five choices in the UCAS application form. To ensure you have the best possible chance of receiving an offer, you are strongly advised to choose at least one course with an agreed progression route at a SWAP East partner university.

9. Progressing to HNC/HND

Not everyone wants to go on to university from their access programme. Some students don't feel ready, others may be prevented by personal circumstances. In some cases, it may not be necessary to go to university to gain the qualifications needed for a specific job or area of employment. With that in mind, moving on to an HNC/HND course at college may be the logical next step.

If you are interested in an HN programme, research your options on individual college websites and speak to your tutors for advice. Keep in mind that many colleges have agreements with individual universities, which allow HN students to progress directly onto specific degree programmes - these are called articulation routes - often into year one or two. It would be a good idea to investigate these options now.

10. Making sense of your research

Trying to sift through all the information that's out there about courses and universities can be confusing and overwhelming, especially if you are not one hundred percent sure what it is you want to do. Everyone will have different ways of filtering the information to make it useful for them. You might find it helps to write lists of pros and cons, draw up mind maps, or develop a scoring system - just some ideas.

As you consider all the information, you will want to focus on three things:

- ❖ Course.
- ❖ University.
- ❖ You.

Choosing the right course

Some people start the access programme with a clear idea of what they want to do next; of course, some programmes, such as Access to Nursing, have more obvious destinations than others. Other people are less certain and may be considering various options. Hopefully, even at this fairly early stage in the year, you will have some idea of what you would like to do.

Carrying out research into the detail of different degree courses is vital. Remember: even if the subject is the same, degree courses are all different, albeit just slightly in some cases. You want to find the course which best matches your strengths and interests and the way you prefer to learn. You should look into the content of the degree course. What subjects does it cover? Is there a choice of units? How many units do you need to take? You should also try to find out how the course is delivered. How is it taught? Is it mainly by lectures or tutorials or practical sessions? Does it involve a work placement? Is there much group work or is it mostly individual study? Where do the classes take place? How many students are in the class? You might also want to ask about how you will be assessed. Is it mainly just final exams or is there a lot of coursework during the year?

Choosing the right university

Your choice of university will depend on a range of factors, not least the degree you plan to do. Each of the SWAP East partner universities is quite different, with different strengths and characteristics. Think about what sort of environment you would prefer to be in. Do you enjoy the hustle and bustle of a big city (e.g. Edinburgh) or would you feel more comfortable in a smaller town (e.g. St Andrews)? Would you prefer a campus university (e.g. Stirling) where everything is close together or one which is spread out across town (e.g. Edinburgh Napier)? Don't let the size of the university put you off. In a big university the classes can seem huge but you're likely to spend a lot of your time in smaller groups or working on your own.

Have a good look at the pages for current students on university websites to get an idea of the kinds of services and facilities that are available to support your studies. There may be some facilities which are particularly important to you, for example, sports facilities or student accommodation. What are the university libraries like and when are they open? You might want to investigate the support available for students with disabilities or those with additional support needs. All universities have a students' association or a students' union; have a look at their website too. Students' associations usually organise events for new students and will also offer a range of support services to students.

11. Your personal circumstances

Your choice of university is likely to be heavily influenced by your personal circumstances. For example, you may have family or work commitments which mean that you will need to study fairly close to home. Or you may be looking for a completely fresh start and hope to move into university accommodation. But there are many things to consider and each person's priorities will be different.

Travel

How would you travel to and from university? Be realistic about costs and travel time. Car parking may not be available, especially at city universities, or it may be very expensive. Look into getting a student travel card, which can reduce how much you spend on public transport.

Finance

This is a major concern for most SWAP students and is something you'll want to think about very carefully. But don't panic. The Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) and the Student Loans Company (SLC) have lots of information to help you navigate the sometimes tricky financial path of the full-time student. Most universities have scholarships and bursaries available to undergraduate students, many of which you will be entitled to apply for. Information on these can be found on each university's website in the student funding pages. Make sure you don't miss out on funding; check to see what is available and what you are eligible for. If you get into unexpected financial difficulties during your university studies, there are various forms of short-term financial support which can help you get through a difficult time. These are often called discretionary funds. Most universities have them.

Childcare

If you have young children, you might want to look into any childcare provision that universities you are interested in provide and how much it costs. Not all universities have a nursery and if they do, places are usually limited and available only on a first-come-first-served basis.

Family commitments

You might have to juggle your studies with other important commitments, such as looking after children or elderly parents. If this is likely to have an impact on the time you can spend at university, you could try contacting the university department you hope to join and ask to see a first-year syllabus or student handbook, which some university web sites publish on departmental pages. This will hopefully give you an idea of the likely time commitment required of you. Do bear in mind that class timetables will change from year to year.

Support Services

Universities have a range of student support services. If you are likely to need specific support at university (e.g. if you have a disability or a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia) you should make sure you know where to go for help and assistance. Once you know which university you are going to, you should make contact with their disabilities or learning support office. That way, your circumstances can be discussed and arrangements made well in advance; thus, avoiding any adverse impact on your studies.

Exercise 4

Think honestly about your own situation. List any personal factors or issues you will need to take into account when considering which university courses you might do.

Factor 1:
Impact on choices:
Factor 2:
Impact on choices:
Any other factors to be taken into account:

Exercise 5

Make a list of any questions you have in relation to your future plans, how you intend to find out the answers to them (e.g. websites, emailing, phoning) and what the answers are to those questions. Hopefully these answers will help you to make your decisions. If you're not sure where to find answers, ask your tutors or the SWAP East office for advice.

Question	
How and when will you look for an answer?	
What is the answer?	

Question	
How and when will you look for an answer?	
What is the answer?	

Question	
How and when will you look for an answer?	
What is the answer?	

12. Making your final decision

Having worked your way through this booklet, hopefully you will feel more confident about weighing up your options and taking decisions about your future studies. Are there any issues which you still feel need to be resolved? If so, how can they be sorted out? If you still have any issues or concerns, deal with them as quickly as you can; don't let them drift. Get things sorted before you submit your UCAS application form.

Exercise 6

List any concerns that still need to be resolved and the steps to be taken to resolve them.

Issue	Steps to resolve

Remember: guidance and help are available at college. Make an appointment if you have any concerns about your ability to cope with higher education, at an academic or personal level.

13. University choices

Hopefully, working through this section has helped you identify what you would like to do next. If you intend to apply to university, you might find it helpful to list your choices; if your intention is to progress to an HNC/HND course, you could also note down your choices. You are allowed to make up to five choices in your UCAS application; we would strongly encourage you to use them all if you can.

First choice

University	
Degree course	
Entry requirements	
Is there a SWAP East progression route?	

Second choice

University	
Degree course	
Entry requirements	
Is there a SWAP East progression route?	

Third choice

University	
Degree course	
Entry requirements	
Is there a SWAP East progression route?	

Fourth choice

University	
Degree course	
Entry requirements	
Is there a SWAP East progression route?	

Fifth choice

University	
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Degree course	
Entry requirements	
Is there a SWAP East progression route?	

14. Useful links

Use the SWAP East [progression route search](#) to find routes to university degree courses from your access programme.

This is where you apply to university: [UCAS](#).

Look at [My world of work](#) for information on career ideas.

[Prospects](#) has information on employment and further study for graduates.

[Complete university guide](#) can help you decide where you want to study.

You can use the data on [Unistats](#) to compare universities in the UK.

[Good universities guide](#) can help you decide where you want to study.

Student Awards Agency Scotland [\(SAAS\)](#) for information on funding your studies.