



Universities
Scotland



Widening access to university

Widening access is about creating opportunities for individuals not postcodes or data-zones.

Summary of Universities Scotland's position

- Every one of Scotland's universities is committed to widening access to university to those who have the ability and potential to benefit from a higher education, irrespective of their background or economic circumstances.
- Universities are nearing the end of a new process of signing up to outcome agreements with the Scottish Funding Council that cover widening access. They come into force for academic year 2012/13 and look to challenge each individual institution to deliver more in this area.
- Universities are already deeply involved in a vast range of projects and initiatives to widen access to university; working individually and collaboratively. This extends to outreach activities into primary and secondary schools, summer schools that help to bridge or 'top-up' qualifications after school, support with applications, mentor and familiarisation schemes and the use of contextual admissions.
- Universities Scotland is concerned to ensure that the policy debate around widening access is considered holistically and that all stakeholders take sufficient account of the inequalities that exist in educational attainment in Scotland from pre-school through to Highers. This is evident in a wide range of independent evidence focussed specifically on Scotland as detailed below.
- Widening access is a complex issue with many root causes. Ultimately it is about creating opportunities for individuals not postcodes or data-zones. We need to be careful about putting too much weight on one statistical measure, such as the SIMD, which has a number of serious limitations, and instead allow universities to continue to focus efforts on projects that are known to make a difference to people's lives.

Every one of Scotland's universities is committed to widening access to university to those who have the ability and potential to benefit from a higher education, irrespective of their background or economic circumstances.

The fundamental challenge in widening access

In terms of admissions, the fundamental challenge facing universities is the inequality in educational attainment between pupils from the most and least deprived areas at school level. This is widely recognised and borne out in a series of challenging statistics that relate specifically to Scotland:

- The 2009 Literacy Commission found: *“The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that, whilst other factors have a modest impact, the most important cause of correctable poor literacy is socio-economic disadvantage. Figures given earlier in the report show that, whether the measure used is National Test scores or the more objective SQA results, children in less affluent areas tend to be less successful... It is evident that socio-economic circumstances continue to outweigh other factors such as quality of teaching, a point made forcibly by the OECD 2007 report Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland.”*
- In Scotland, by the time a child is five years of age, there is an 11-19 month age gap in the expressive vocabulary of children from the most advantaged and disadvantaged families. (Bill Maxwell, transitional CEO of Education Scotland to the School Leaders Scotland Conference, November 2011).
- The 2011 Survey of Literacy and Numeracy for Scotland found: *“Pupils from areas of least deprivation continue to have significantly higher attainment than pupils from the most deprived areas, at all stages.... The largest differences between pupils of different deprivation categories are at S2, where 44 per cent of pupils from the more deprived areas were “not yet working within the third level.”*
- Up to S4, when schooling is compulsory, pupils from the 20 per cent most deprived areas of Scotland (MD20) constitute 20 per cent of the school population. In post-compulsory education, this proportionate share drops to only 15 per cent in S6.
- Only 10.5 per cent of pupils from the 20 per cent most deprived areas obtain the normal minimum entry requirements for university compared to 48 per cent from the least deprived 20 per cent, as shown in the table below. This means that the pool of potential applicants from the most deprived areas in Scotland from which the universities can recruit is relatively small, and must be grown if there is to be a very substantial improvement in widening access. This highlights the need to focus effort and investment on a range of early years and other interventions that can properly address some of the structural inequalities in society which contribute to educational disadvantage and limit the potential of those from deprived backgrounds.

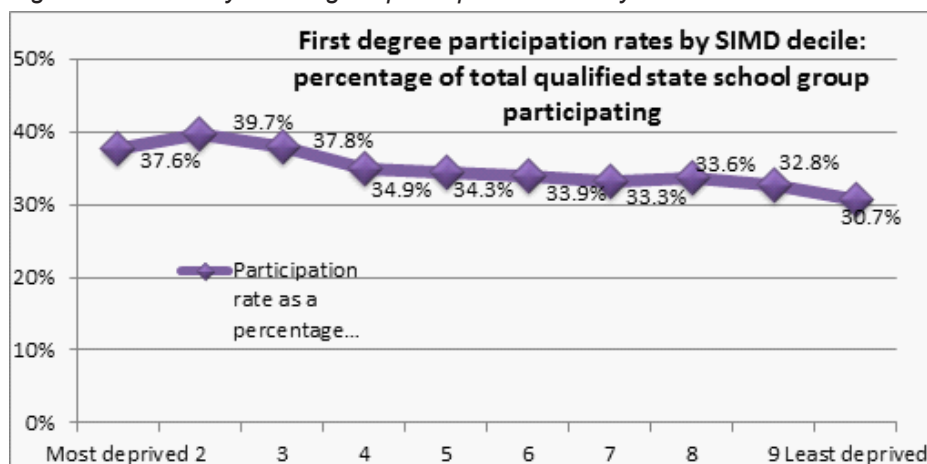
Table 1: Highest qualifications attained by Scottish state school leavers by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation decile (2010-11)

SIMD Decile	Percentage achieving 5+ SCQF Level 6 (Highers) %	Percentage achieving 1-2 SCQF Level 7 (Advanced Highers) %	Percentage achieving 3+ SCQF Level 7 (Advanced Highers) %	Total = % school leavers likely to be qualified for direct university entry
Most deprived 20%	4.9	5.2	0.45	10.5
20-40%	8.25	9.25	0.7	18.2
40-60%	10.2	14.55	1.7	26.45
60-80%	13.05	19.05	2.85	34.95
Least deprived 20%	17	26.9	4.65	48.55

Able pupils from disadvantaged areas, who obtain the right grades, are just as likely to attend university as anyone else

Scottish students from challenged backgrounds who do achieve university entry-level qualifications at school may, in fact, be just as likely to go to university (if not more so) as their more advantaged peers. As figure 1 below shows, between 37-40 per cent of all pupils that satisfy entry criteria from MD20 areas actually go on to university compared to an equivalent figure of only 30-33 per cent of all pupils from the most advantaged areas that achieve the grades. This data is important as it shows that where attainment is reached there is a corresponding progression into university education – irrespective of background.

Figure 1: University first degree participation rates by SIMD decile



Other concerns with the data on widening access

Is SIMD a reliable measure?

Although it may be preferable to some UK-wide measures, there are inherent limitations to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) as an indicator for widening access that should not be overlooked. Critically, although the SIMD datazones are small, they are not uniform and do not function at the level of the individual. There are anomalies within all SIMD datazones so the high-earning family in a large house on the periphery of an otherwise deprived area and the low-income family in a small home with no income other than child support may come to be treated identically. In addition to this generic issue, there are specific issues in identifying deprivation by SIMD category in rural areas which are large and where SIMD is not a robust indicator of disadvantage. There are parts of Scotland in which there are no SIMD20 zones, including for example Shetland, so

the introduction of targets which promoted recruitment of MD20 learners could have detrimental impacts on learners from parts of the country which do not include MD20 datazones. The SIMD's limitations will become particularly concerning to universities if this measure is to be used in conjunction with penalties or legislation.

Further, SIMD status may not be a reliable indicator of educational aspiration. Recent research by Joseph Rowntree Foundation looked at the influences on young people's aspirations living in disadvantaged communities in Glasgow and other UK cities. It found young people's aspirations for education and jobs were high and found that places with a shared status of deprivation could be quite different in their social make-up and how this played out in people's life experiences. This suggests SIMD does not necessarily co-relate to low aspirations and its use as a measure of widening participation makes generalisations about attitudes and behaviours

surrounding aspirations and life chances in disadvantaged communities which are unhelpful and, as JRF urges, should be avoided.

Scotland relative to the UK. Where Scotland's performance on widening access is compared to other countries within the UK, comparisons often fail to take account of the fact that Scotland's universities are a net importer of close to 20,000 students at undergraduate level from the rest of the UK. The socio-economic profile of this significant minority group of students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland is enough to skew Scotland's widening access statistics. If, however, you concentrate only on Scottish-domiciled students at Scotland's universities, the proportion from disadvantaged backgrounds is broadly on par with the performance of English universities as table 2 shows below using the indicator of socio-economic class (which is a comparable measure between England and Scotland unlike SIMD for obvious reasons).

Table 2: Comparative performance in widening access between universities in Scotland and England using socio-economic data fro 2010-11.

Institution (young entrants)	Proportion from SEC classes 4 to 7 2010-11
Scotland (Scottish domiciled)	29.6%
England (all students)	30.7%

Tracking progress over time.

Most of the interventions to widen access to university take place in compulsory and post-compulsory school education and therefore take years to manifest their impact in participation rates at university and progress can fluctuate one year to the next. As the latest report into the impact of the successful Lothians Equal Access Programme Scotland (LEAPS – more below) indicates, there are variations in progression from individual schools from one year to the next. For this reason, LEAPS looks at a five year mean figure to identify a more consistent trend and repeats the analysis every three years. Some schools targeted by LEAPS have shown considerable progress over time and have changed status from Group One (16% to 21% progression threshold) to Group Two. Changes to college provision in the light of the funding settlement are also unpredictable at present and create a complex environment which is not susceptible to crude target-setting. Any future statutory regime for WP would need to be flexible enough in recognition of the complexity and fluidity of the widening access landscape.

What is the role of universities in widening access?

Universities recognise that they have an important part to play in ensuring fair access to higher education, and this is evident from the huge range of successful initiatives - individual and collaborative - now underway to widen participation across the sector. Importantly:

- these initiatives are not just seen as side-line ventures to the main function of universities, but are embedded as core parts of their missions and strategic aims.
- these activities take place across all of Scotland's universities including both the ancient and post-92 universities. Widening access is not limited to only parts of the university sector.

A small number of examples follow, with links to further information.

Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP)

SHEP, funded by the sector and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), is a nationwide widening access programme comprising four large-

scale, regional schools engagement initiatives (the Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools [LEAPS], Aspire North, Focus West, and Lift Off). It aims to support talented young people (S3-S6) in low progression schools, who usually have little or no family experience of higher education, and who will often have experienced adverse social and economic circumstances, to apply to university. Though SHEP was only established quite recently, some of the programmes it encompasses began much earlier. LEAPS, for example, was established in 1995 and has grown to support young people from more than 59 state secondary schools in the south east Scotland region. In each of the last three years the programme has worked directly with almost 2,000 pupils and, as shown in Table 3, over 60 per cent follow on to university with another 25 per cent going on to college. In each of these years, of all those who went on to university, around one quarter did so to the University of Edinburgh. In 2010-11 alone, LEAPS delivered in excess of 330 events to an audience that exceeded 14,000 people.

Table 3: Destinations of LEAPs pupils (2009-11)

Destination	2009	2010	2011
University	1,126 (64%)	1,263 (61%)	1,162 (61%)
College (HNC/D)	215 (12%)	257 (12%)	284 (15%)
College (other courses)	150 (9%)	195 (9%)	186 (10%)
Employment	155 (9%)	238 (11%)	208 (11%)
Unemployment	77 (4%)	100 (5%)	38 (2%)
School	25 (1%)	23 (1%)	12 (1%)
Total	1,748	2,076	1,890

Reach Scotland

Reach Scotland is a collaborative project managed by the universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, Edinburgh and St. Andrews which aims to increase access to high demand professional areas like medicine, veterinary medicine and law. The project works with pupils in S4-S6 in well over 150 schools to introduce them in various ways to the subject areas, introduce work relevant to the subject areas through, for example, summer schools, campus visits, assignment work, and then supports UCAS applications through information, advice and guidance.

ACES (Access to Creative Education in Scotland)

ACES is a national project involving the four major art schools in Scotland, which aims to help young people (S4-S6) from target schools with an interest in studying Art and Design or Architecture at university to explore their options, and to gain an insight into what studying these subjects at university level is like, and what sorts of careers it can lead to. The project does this through a range of events and activities, (such as practical workshops, projects for developing portfolios, campus orientation visits, information days, web chats etc.), and also supports participants through the UCAS application process and beyond, (with UCAS application workshops, individual advice and guidance, and information days for teachers and careers advisers). Further information is available here.

Sutton Trust Summer School – University of St Andrews

This is a week long summer school intended for those who still have a year to complete at school. The School, which is supported by the Sutton Trust, offers 100 places to S5 pupils so that they can get a taster of academic and social life at St Andrews. It is specifically aimed

at pupils who have the academic potential to do well at university, but who may not have family experience of higher education, or who may have attended a state school with little experience of sending pupils to university. Of the previous students who attended the course, 93 per cent gave an excellent rating to the academic programmes on offer, and 97 per cent would recommend it to others. Research from UCAS shows that these summer schools are effective in raising the aspirations of young people and supporting them on routes to highly selective university courses. Tracking data on the 2007 cohort (who started university in Autumn 2009) shows that Sutton Trust students were three times as likely to apply to one of the summer school universities as applicants from the comparator group of students from similar backgrounds and with similar levels of attainment. Further information is available here.

The Caledonian Club

The Caledonian Club is Glasgow Caledonian University's widening participation and community engagement initiative. It employs GCU students as mentors to work closely with children and teenagers at nursery, primary and secondary schools in areas of Glasgow where traditionally few pupils have gone on to university. Children as young as three have taken classes at the university, and there are a range of activities in place for pupils of different ages, from campus visits and follow-ups for nursery pupils, in-school activities for P2, P5 Uni Day projects, S2 Think Ahead project, S5/6 Professor's Induction Challenge and S6 Student shadowing experience. The initiative aims to raise educational aspirations in young people and their families, and build key life skills and confidence in Club members and GCU student mentors. Further information is available here.

What is necessary to enable further progress?

Universities Scotland has expressed strong support for the cross-party belief that early-years investment and interventions should be prioritised. We feel a coherent strategy should be developed from the early years right through to university to ensure that every learner's potential can be fully realised. In practical terms, we consider this could involve:

- funding for high quality research to better understand the nature of the problem and strengthen the evidence base for policy development work;
- a serious examination of how joined-up action from pre-school onwards can help all learners to realise their potential;
- further engagement and dialogue with the sector about challenges and opportunities, and better incentives to encourage partnership working.

Universities look forward to playing their part, and to improving the contribution they make to raising aspirations and attainment. Alone, however, they can only do so much. If primary responsibility for ensuring fair access is laid at the doors of universities, and the system-wide response that is needed to address problems of social inequality remains absent, then a step change in progress will be unlikely.