



## **EIS RESPONSE TO THE COMMISSION ON WIDENING ACCESS**

July 2015

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The EIS welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Commission on Widening Access to Higher Education. The EIS is Scotland's largest education union representing around 55,000 members employed in Nursery, Primary, Special, Secondary, Further and Higher Education (around 80% of the teaching profession).

### Question 1.

**What are the main barriers to accessing university and higher education in colleges for people from socio-economically deprived backgrounds and those with care experience, and how can these be overcome?**

### Universities

According to Higher Education Statistic Agency (HESA) (Table t1a\_1314 <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis/urg> ) the percentage (of students in 2013-14) from NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 & 7 at UK universities was 32.6%, with England 33.1%, Northern Ireland 39.5%, Scotland 26.8% and Wales 30.2%. A similar picture is reflected in the percentage of students (in 2013-14) that come from state secondary schools or colleges; UK 89.7%, England 89.4%, Northern Ireland 99.4%, Scotland 87.4% and Wales 92.3%.

It is clear from HESA data that Scottish HEIs have the lowest participation of NS-SEC classes 4-7 within the UK and the lowest % of students from state schools and colleges. Some Scottish universities have extremely low % of students from NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 & 7; St Andrews University (14.9%) and the University of Edinburgh (17.5%).

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) produces its own 'Widening Access' data for the university sector<sup>1</sup>, interestingly according to the SFC data table (Table 2) the percentage (of students) from NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 & 7 in Scotland was 29.7% rather than 26.8% in 2013-14 as reported in the HESA dataset. The SFC prefers to use two different performance indicators on 'Widening Access' than the Polar 3 data set out by HESA; the percentage (of students) from the 20% most deprived data zones (SIMD20) and the percentage (of students) from the 40% most deprived data zones (i.e. SIMD40). SIMD data zones are areas (i.e. postcodes).

The SFC's Table 3 within the data table cited in the footnote below shows how widening access has varied in Scottish universities since 2005-06 to 2013-14, its SIMD20 data is summarised below:

	% university students enrolled from SIMD20 areas
2005-06	9.1
2006-07	8.7
2007-08	9.2
2008-09	9.0
2009-10	9.1
2010-11	9.1
2011-12	9.1
2012-13	9.7
2013-14	10.4

Table 1: Percentage of students at Scottish universities enrolled from SIMD20 areas (source SFC data)

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.sfc.ac.uk/PublicationsStatistics/statistics/higher\\_education\\_statistics/HE\\_performance\\_indicators/Participation\\_indicator\\_for\\_Scottish\\_HEIs.aspx](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/PublicationsStatistics/statistics/higher_education_statistics/HE_performance_indicators/Participation_indicator_for_Scottish_HEIs.aspx)

SIMD20 participation rates have risen between 2011-12 and 2013-14, after a period when there seems to have been no clear improvement between 2005-06 and 2011-12. It is worth noting that some universities have improved their SIMD20 performance indicator significantly between 2012-13 and 2013-14. The EIS hopes that this trend will continue.

The 'SIMD20' refers to the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland, and it is used as a proxy for population. In other words, the assumption is that the '20% most deprived areas' serves in place of the 20% most deprived persons – which is effectively immeasurable. If the proxy is accurate, then it is clear that the Scottish university sector does not give proportionate access the 20% most deprived population of Scotland – the 2013-14 average is 10.4%. The sector has consistently admitted around 10% of its students from the 20% most deprived areas (SIMD20) in recent years, this would seem to be a disproportionately small number of such students.

## Higher Education in Colleges

Around 25% of FE College activity is believed to be Higher Education – mainly HNC and HNDs.

The SFC Infact database<sup>2</sup> has data on the level of study (i.e. FE and HE) delivered in the FE sector broken down into bands of areas where people live, ranked by deprivation index. It would have been helpful if the SFC stated that the FE deprivation data is comparable to the SIMD system used in its university sector statistics. If they are not comparable, the EIS believes that they should be amended to make them comparable.

In an attempt to compare SFC data on the FE sector with the HE data, the EIS has added together the 4 lowest areas of deprivation bands<sup>3</sup> to give 0-20% most deprived areas for the number of students that are enrolled on 'HE level of study' using data from the SFC's Infact database. The EIS believes that the sum of these four bands gives the 20% most deprived areas and that it is comparable to the SIMD20 HE performance indicator which includes the 20% most deprived postcodes in Scotland.

	No of HE students from areas where 0-20% most deprivation population reside	Total no of HE students	% in HE students from 0-20% most deprived areas
2011-12	9,849	46,345	21.3%
2012-13	10,355	45,004	23.0%
2013-14	10,602	45,652	23.2%

Table 2: Numbers and Percentage of students at Scottish colleges enrolled from 20% most deprived areas (source SFC Infact)

It should be understood that 'Areas where x% most deprived population reside' and 'SIMD20' are area based measures and they do not tell us the actual numbers of students come from deprived backgrounds. Both metrics are proxies for the number of such people. Each area may have a complex residential mix, and many of Scotland's most deprived persons may live outside these areas.

Notwithstanding these caveats, it is clear that colleges take in over 20% of their students from 20% of the most deprived areas in Scotland. If this is accurate, then the EIS welcomes this finding.

It should also be noted that whilst Scotland has a % lower enrolment by students from the most deprived backgrounds than England; it does have a higher Higher Education Initial

<sup>2</sup>

[http://www.sfc.ac.uk/PublicationsStatistics/statistics/further\\_education\\_statistics/infact\\_database/infact\\_database.aspx](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/PublicationsStatistics/statistics/further_education_statistics/infact_database/infact_database.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> "Areas where 5% most deprived population reside", "Areas where 5-10% most deprived population reside", "Areas where 10-15% most deprived population reside" and "Areas where 15-20% most deprived population reside"

Participation Rate (HEIPR) rate<sup>4</sup>. In other words, more young people access HE in Scotland than in England.

There does seem to be a number of barriers in place for the population from the 20% of the most deprived areas to access Higher Education in the University sector in particular. Indeed, if the SIMD20 metric is accurate, this group is proportionally half as likely to access Higher Education in the university sector as their share of the population suggests. Furthermore, this group is twice as likely to access Higher Education through college than it is through university.

## **Potential Barriers to Accessing Higher Education in Universities**

Universities select their students using their own admissions systems. Most student offers made by universities are conditional offers using predicted grades – the conditions relate to the grades obtained at Higher or Advanced Higher (or equivalent). It is clear that applicants from the most deprived areas are at a disadvantage in such an applications system. This is mainly due to a clear pattern that pupils from deprived areas leave school with fewer qualifications than those from more affluent areas. This difference is sometimes called the “attainment gap”.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Scottish Attainment Report of 2014<sup>5</sup>, existing research shows that the attainment gap between Scotland’s richest and poorest children begins in pre-school and continues throughout primary and secondary school.

“Data on changes in the cognitive ability of children aged 3 to 5 from different income backgrounds shows that children from high-income households significantly outperform those from low-income households in vocabulary and problem solving at both ages. At age 3 and 5, average vocabulary scores for children from low-income households were significantly below that of children from high-income households (0.77 and 0.73 standard deviations respectively). By age 5, the scores correspond to a 13-month gap in vocabulary development. In problem-solving, the average attainment of children from low-income households was below those of children from high-income households at age 3 and grew by age 5 (0.69 and 0.73 standard deviations respectively). This difference corresponds to a gap of about 10 months in problem-solving ability at age 5 (Bradshaw, 2011). On the whole, while the vocabulary gap narrows slightly from age 3 to 5, it widens on measures on problem-solving. The above data provides evidence that the attainment gap already exists by the age of 3 and begins to widen in certain domains of learning by age 5.”

The same report also highlights the difference in school leavers attainment by socio-economic group, including SIMD20. Table 3 has copied a figure for the JSF report cited above and it shows that the average attainment for SIMD20 school leavers is half that of the least deprived areas. This ratio is the same as the approximate ratio of SIMD20 persons entering university relative to SIMD20’s proportion<sup>6</sup> of the population i.e. around 10%. This reinforces the belief that most university admissions systems are simply using educational attainment to measure applicants, and carrying that inherent attainment gap into the university sector.

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[http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical\\_publications\\_SFCST072014\\_ParticipationRatesforEntrantstoScottish/Participation\\_Rates\\_for\\_Entrants\\_to\\_Scottish\\_Higher\\_Education\\_in\\_2012-13.pdf](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical_publications_SFCST072014_ParticipationRatesforEntrantstoScottish/Participation_Rates_for_Entrants_to_Scottish_Higher_Education_in_2012-13.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/education-attainment-scotland-full.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Assuming that the SIMD20 area metric is an accurate proxy for population.

Figure 4: Average tariff scores of school leavers by SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation), 2007/8 to 2011/12



Table 3 Average tariff scores for school leavers by SIMD 2007/8 – 11/12 from Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Scottish Attainment Report of 2014 The data in Table 3 is reinforced by recent data on Highers pass rates<sup>7</sup> that show that non-state schools and indeed state schools in less deprived areas get significantly better Highers pass rates than schools in more deprived areas<sup>8</sup>. The EIS believes private school pupil attainment may also need to be contextualised within any universities admission system. There is evidence to suggest that non-state school students with the same attainment as state school students do less well in university<sup>9</sup>.

Scottish Survey Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN) findings have also reinforced a link between socio-economic background in primary school pupils<sup>10</sup> and attainment. Some have argued that a recent drop in results in some literacy indicators are due to increased deprivation in recent times due to austerity policies of successive UK governments.

Socio-economic disadvantage yields further negative impact on the ability of young people from the most deprived backgrounds to access higher education since they have fewer opportunities to gain experiences to add value to their HE applications. Within the context of growing competition for university places, a suite of competitive grades alone is often inadequate currency for securing a place on popular courses. Much can rest on the content of an applicant's personal statement in which they detail experiences and achievements to substantiate their applications. Comparative to those from more affluent backgrounds, young people from the most deprived backgrounds are less likely to be able to document within their personal statements unpaid internships that they have undertaken or experiences gained through foreign travel, or even commitment to extra-curricular activities that have associated costs. Aside from these financial constraints, lack of access to the kinds of social networks that open up many of these possibilities may be a further inhibitor to most deprived applicants' preparation of competitive Personal Statements.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/education/attainment-gap-between-school-sectors-widens.25177762>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/school-exam-results-anger-figures-5408199>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/201403/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00475898.pdf>  
<https://www.holyrood.com/articles/news/falling-literacy-scottish-schools>

Lucy Hunter's recent report has also highlighted that the poorest university students in Scotland leave university with the largest debts<sup>11</sup> due to the current student support funding system – which she described as having a 'long term regressive effect'. The EIS believes that a more generous system of financial support for students living expenses in the form of student grants - especially for students from the most deprived backgrounds- would aid widening access.

In summary, the effect on attainment by a child's socio-economic position is well established. This is one of the factors measured in each OECD PISA<sup>12</sup> round, in the PISA 2012 reports, 11-13%<sup>13</sup> of variation within Scotland's PISA scores was due to socio-economic factors. Whilst this figure is around the OECD average, it is the single biggest external factor affecting Scottish pupils' attainment. The educational attainment gap of school leavers from the poorest socio-economic backgrounds would seem to be the biggest barrier to young people to enter university, and this is currently neither effectively nor fairly mitigated by universities.

**What more can be done specifically by colleges and universities, including institutions with the highest entry requirements, to generate a greater volume of successful applications from people from socio-economically deprived backgrounds?**

In the long term it is clear that the educational system needs to be improved so that the attainment gap between different socio-economic groups is reduced and eliminated. It is too early to say whether the Curriculum for Excellence will begin this process.

Lower attainment of school pupils from the most deprived areas means that they are therefore less likely to enter university because most universities use raw attainment data for their admissions systems – and therefore SIMD20 applicants are about half as likely to enter university as that proportion of the population they make up.

In the short term it is clear that the university admissions system need to change to improve access and mitigate the effects of the attainment gap (accepting that attainment gaps are a systematic bias within the education system), this could be done by:

1. Contextualising applicants' attainment
2. Contextualising applicants' personal statement and experiences
3. Encouraging and facilitate education programmes to improve attainment or HE access
4. Working more closely with colleges to articulate students to universities as efficiently as possible – such as articulation hubs

Contextual admissions approaches have been successfully implemented by many Outcome Agreements between the SFC and Scottish Universities, and are currently being carried out by many universities in Scotland such as the University of Edinburgh and Heriot Watt University. (In England, the Office for Fair Access has also encouraged this approach to support English universities to maximise their student fees.)

Contextualised admissions system involve lowering attainment grades for certain applicants such as; if an applicant's home postcode is within the SIMD 20/40, if an applicant is at a low progression school that is part of the Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) 'Schools for Higher Education Programme' (SHEP), if an applicant is a mature SWAP (Scottish Wider Access Programme), if an applicant is an HNC/D student (i.e. college student), if an applicant has

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<sup>11</sup>[http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_EducationandCultureCommittee/Scotlands%20educational%20and%20cultural%20future/11.HunterLucy.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EducationandCultureCommittee/Scotlands%20educational%20and%20cultural%20future/11.HunterLucy.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results.htm>  
[www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2013/12/4338/1>

spent time in care/being 'looked after', if an applicant has been a carer for a long-term ill or disabled parent which has had a demonstrable impact on her or his studies.

A contextualised admissions process may not only reduce attainment targets for students but involve flagging applicants' personal statements if they have certain triggers such as SIMD20/40 postcodes, carer responsibilities etc. These students may be more likely to have interviews – which may be used to lower attainment targets for entry.

There are a number of Scottish programmes designed to widen access to university which are funded by the SFC, such as the SHEP and SWAP programmes above. The EIS believes that these programmes should be widened and that all universities must participate and contextualise their admissions to support the programmes. There is anecdotal evidence that some universities are willing to participate in these programmes to assist deprived young people to get to university – so long as deprived students finally enrol at another university.

Articulation hubs or agreements allow smoother and easier progression for college HNC/HND students to articulate into a university, are well established in places and improve access. A recent example of this is the University of Strathclyde Glasgow FE colleges' agreement. Some universities seem reluctant to make articulation agreements with colleges and this will require further pressure from the SFC to resolve, possibly using Outcome Agreements.

Secondly, articulation is sometimes made more difficult by some universities not implementing the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework in practice and insisting that applicants repeat SCQF levels – i.e. do an additional year of study. For example an applicant that has completed a HND has completed SCQF level 8 and should proceed to SCQF level 9 next (i.e. the third year of a university degree) but a number of universities would put such a student into the second year. This is usually explained by claiming that HNDs do not give the same academic training as the second year of a degree – despite both being SCQF level 8. The EIS believes that this practice should be reviewed.

Some credit for the recent improvement in 'Widening Access' must be given to the Scottish government as it made widening access a key plank of the Post-16 Education Act (2013) and a key component of the 'Outcome Agreements' that the SFC uses to fund universities.

### **What actions can be taken to support people from socio-economically deprived backgrounds who enter higher education to successfully complete their course?**

It has been widely reported that students from state schools do better in university attainment than students with the same A-Level grades from private schools<sup>14</sup>. The EIS believes that people from socio-economic deprived backgrounds who manage to enter university are highly likely to be very driven and would have a strong desire to graduate.

Universities do have variable retention rates, and one in particular that seems to have high numbers of students from more deprived areas also has a high drop-out rate. The EIS does not know whether these two factors are linked but it would seem prudent to provide on-going support to students whose families and friends may not have attended university before – and may be away from home in an environment that may be very new to them. Mentors and on-going support from academic staff would seem to be helpful, looking at both academic and pastoral elements.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/201403/>  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-26773830>

## **Question 2. The identification and scaling up of best practice**

### **What can be learned from Scottish access programmes, across the education system and early years, about best practice in relation to improving access, retention and successful completion?**

There are several SFC funded Scottish HE access programmes<sup>15</sup> in place and there is anecdotal evidence that they are successful in widening access at a local level. The EIS is not privy to any hard data regarding their success, however these may need to be expanded if they are to make a significant impact on participation levels for the most deprived HE applicants.

In terms of best educational practice in schools to raise attainment, the EIS sets out its views below:

Of key importance is early identification of children and young people who may be at risk of under-achieving or non-attendance, and appropriate interventions. Much of this is predicated on staff having had good pastoral care training and on there being effective communication between staff both within (from stage to stage) and between, institutions.

Linked to this are effective transition arrangements which ensure that useful data is shared between one educational establishment and another, for example primary and secondary, and that staff have time to consider the data being provided in order that appropriate planning to meet learner needs can occur. The same is true when transitions occur within establishments.

In terms of effective interventions, these may take a variety of forms including:

- ASN support for children with additional learning needs
- English as an Additional Language support for children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds
- Buddying and mentoring by adults and peers
- Adapted curricula
- Alternatives to exclusion approaches which are properly resourced
- Home-school link work to support vulnerable families to remain engaged in education
- Schemes to encourage active parental/ carer involvement in children and young people's education.

The latter of these highlight the importance of the role of parents/ carers in children's education. Regardless of the educational setting, children's outcomes are improved when parental/ carer involvement of the right kind is maximised.

Besides specific interventions to support the more vulnerable of learners, good, inclusive practice as applied to all learners has a positive impact on those who may be at risk of underachieving or of non-completion. These include:

- Good pastoral care provision
- The provision of good quality learner feedback which identifies strengths as well as next steps in learning, rather than emphasis on grades
- Collaborative learning
- Mixed ability learning and teaching
- Recognition of wider achievement and systems to support this
- Careful personalisation and choice
- High quality, equality-proofed careers education
- Access to extra-curricular activities.

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<sup>15</sup> The four SHEP programmes are Aspire North, LIFT Off, LEAPS and FOCUS West.



**What new programmes might be introduced in Scotland, drawing on experiences in the rest of the UK and other countries, that have had proven success in improving access, retention and successful completion for people from socio-economically deprived backgrounds?**

The setting of clear, equality driven targets may be a way forward. As outlined in Euridyce's Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe report, Ireland has a national strategic plan which sets such targets related to under-represented groups. The national plan has five objectives:

- Institution-wide approaches to access,
- Enhancing access through lifelong learning,
- Investment in widening participation,
- Modernisation of student support, and
- Widening participation for people.

Quantitative objectives related to students entering, participating in and completing Higher Education are set for specific groups of students: those with disabilities, the unemployed, adults or mature students, students with vocational education and training, travellers, and students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

The objective in Ireland is to reach a 72% participation rate and a 60% attainment rate in higher education for 30-34 year-olds by 2020 and for all socio-economic groups to have entry rates of at least 54% by 2020.

There is systematic monitoring in Ireland, where all institutions are obliged to return details on all new entrants, progressing students and those graduating through the Student Record System, including data on the socio-economic, ethnic and disability status of new entrants. Of all of the European countries examined in the report, Ireland has achieved the most positive outcomes.

Which widening access programmes, initiatives and curriculum components, with a proven record of success, have the potential to be scaled up nationally?

Most of the approaches outlined in response to the first part of Question 2.

### **Question 3. The data and measures needed to support access and retention**

#### **What evidence or data is required to effectively measure Scotland's progress on widening access to higher education at both a national and institutional level?**

HESA has data from POLAR3 that is based on the HE participation rates of people that entered a HE course in a UK higher education institution or English or Scottish further education college, but HESA does not publish the Scottish data. This information should be published as the excuse on the HESA website as to why it is not published is weak<sup>16</sup>.

Furthermore, the SFC that funds HE both in the university sector and college seems to have different ways to measure participation in both sectors – making direct comparisons difficult. Greater standardisation in data on widening access is required between the college and university sectors.

#### **What evidence or data should be considered as part of the admissions process for students from socio-economically deprived backgrounds?**

The following issues need to be considered by universities and colleges and used in their contextualised admissions process:

- Home post-code
- School
- Nature of pre-school education
- Family history – single parent upbringing, refugee or asylum status
- Looked after child or not
- English as second language
- Amount of time spent at the UK
- Carer responsibilities
- Medical history
- Disability
- Access programme completion
- College attainment
- Work experience

#### **Do we have enough evidence on the effectiveness of existing widening access programmes and initiatives and, if not, what else do we need to do to build a robust evidence base in this area?**

The EIS does not have enough data to respond meaningfully to this question.

#### **Any further comments?**

"A 2007 OECD report indicated that parents' socio-economic background mattered more for children's attainment than their school. The 2009 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) report showed a stronger association between parental background and poor reading in Scotland than the OECD, English or Welsh averages. Findings from the 2012 PISA survey suggest that the attainment gap in Scotland narrowed slightly in comparison to the 2009 survey. While this is welcomed news, the impact of disadvantage on attainment was still substantial.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "The relatively high (in UK terms) participation rate in Scotland coupled with the very high proportion of HE that occurs in FE colleges means that the figures for Scottish HE providers could, when viewed in isolation, misrepresent their contribution to widening participation."

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/closing-attainment-gap-scottish-education>