Widening Access to Higher Education: Does Anyone Know What Works?

A Report to Universities Scotland

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Universities Scotland commissioned this literature review of widening access interventions which have been evaluated as successful, drawing not only on recent published literature, but also on the outcome agreements of the nineteen Scottish higher education institutions for 2012/13. Widening access has been made one of the policy priorities of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to be addressed in universities' outcome agreements for 2012/13 and discussions are still underway about the statutory enforcement of widening access outcomes, with the possibilities of financial penalties for non-compliance.

Methods

The literature search had three strands:

- policy documents and the 'grey' literature, including reports from the SFC, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Sutton Trust, the Helena Kennedy Foundation, Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA), the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), the National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland, and published research and evaluations of widening access initiatives;
- the academic literature on widening access initiatives and their effectiveness, drawn mostly, but not exclusively, from recent journal articles;
- analysis of the Scottish Universities' outcome agreements for 2012/13, supplemented by material sent in by institutions in response to our email request.

Because this was designed as a small-scale, desk-based project, we were unable to follow up with qualitative research in interviews which might have revealed more about what is being done and the pressures which institutions are under to demonstrate success in widening participation. The literature search was undertaken in January – March 2013. This report does not, therefore, claim to reflect more recently published literature, or the continuing evolution of outcome agreements since that date.

After a brief introductory chapter, Chapter 2 considers the statistical data on widening participation in higher education in Scotland, including Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and Scottish Funding Council (SFC) performance indicators, socio-economic status indicators, state school attendance indicators, low participation neighbourhood indicators, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and HESA benchmarks. Additional statistical material is also available in Appendix 1. Consideration of the performance indicators suggests a degree of stratification, with more elite institutions having a far smaller proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and differences are highlighted between SIMD and NS-SEC as indicators of widening participation, suggesting that it might be valid to use a range of measures rather than just focusing on one.

Chapter 3 then considers the policy background from Dearing (1997) to the present day, highlighting some policy milestones for the UK and for Scotland in particular, including devolution and the Equality Act 2010, and some key documents, such as the Schwartz report (Admissions to Higher Education Review, 2004) and Milburn (2012), which sought to influence admissions practice in universities. Some other approaches in Europe are described, before considering the range of under-represented groups of students whom widening access is intended to benefit, and the challenge of finding and targeting them. The diversity of the groups who remain under-represented in higher education and the complexity of factors which may hinder their educational progress suggest that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to the persistent problem of widening

participation, and no one single measure, be it SIMD or NS-SEC, which can be used with confidence to target those who might benefit from outreach activities and additional support.

Chapter 4 contains the bulk of the literature review. We start with a section on methodological debates and general literature on the meaning and practice of widening participation, before presenting an analysis of the types of students who have been the subjects of recent empirical research into widening participation. The remainder of the chapter then covers the published empirical research into initiatives designed to help non-traditional students. The structure is based on that of *University challenge: how higher education can advance social mobility: a progress report* Milburn's (2012), which identifies four stages in the student life-cycle when there is a need for action:

- Getting ready: interventions in schools, even as early as primary or pre-school, but generally in the later years of secondary school
- Getting in: support at point of application; admissions procedures; use of contextual data to identify students with the potential to succeed
- Staying in: measures to encourage retention, through academic, social or financial support
- Getting on: ways in which universities help students be equipped and ready to move into the labour market or further study when they graduate

In Chapter 5, we use the same four-part structure to present the evidence of current practice, plans and successful initiatives in Scottish higher education institutions, drawing on the Outcome Agreements for 2012/13 and additional material sent in by university staff with responsibility for Admissions and Widening Participation in response to our request. Chapter 6 presents our conclusions, both about the weight of the evidence of what works and about further research required.

Key findings include:

- the range of under-represented groups is wide, wider than the current policy focus on young full-time undergraduates might suggest
- there is a broad consensus on the importance of widening access, and considerable evidence of enthusiastic action, particularly on outreach activities;
- there is evidence of success for a broad range of outreach activities, although not enough is known about reasons for not taking up places at university;
- mentoring by students already in higher education, campus visits and summer schools are widely seen as successful in widening participation;
- nevertheless, the multi-faceted nature of outreach programmes makes it impossible to establish with certainty which elements work best in all contexts or for the widest range of potential students;
- there is widespread discontent about the use of SIMD as a measure for assessing progress in widening access, given the uneven spread of postcodes throughout Scotland and the reluctance of some prospective students to move from their home area;
- contextual data is being used in admissions in many universities, but in a variety of ways, and many institutions are planning revisions to their admissions policies;
- measures to encourage retention are in use, although plans to improve monitoring of student attendance and performance and improve support for widening access students and others were also noted;
- pre-entry participation in *Reach* or *Pathways to the Professions*, mentoring, placement experience, emphasis on developing skills for employability, careers guidance and the availability of finance for postgraduate study were all seen as useful to help students succeed in their future careers. The limited evidence available suggests that graduates from under-

represented groups are not disadvantaged when they enter the labour market, but more research is needed on career destinations.

Our suggestions for further research include:

- gaining a better understanding of why offers of places at university are not accepted by widening access students. Is there reluctance to leave home, lack of confidence, or lack of belief in the eventual rewards for the individual who undertakes higher education? The findings of such research might help establish whether outreach activities need to focus more on developing confidence and social capital;
- given the stated intentions of many institutions to revise their admissions policies and procedures, and taking account of the varying ways in which contextual data are used, further research in due course on how these new policies are being implemented would be useful;
- in addition to formal research, there is a widely acknowledged need for improved systems of evaluating outreach activities and tracking widening access students through their courses, in order to be able to demonstrate success in this area. This should include data gathering on part-time and mature students.

Our final conclusion is that, although more monitoring and evaluation are needed, we would stress that a lot is being achieved: students from under-represented groups are entering higher education, institutions are collaborating and progress is being made. It is important to acknowledge the strengths of these initiatives and to monitor them in ways that help them to develop and do not undermine them.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The research project

We have been commissioned by Universities Scotland to conduct this literature review of widening access interventions which have been evaluated as successful. We were asked to focus predominantly on socio-economic status, rather than other social characteristics, e.g. ethnicity, gender, age or disability. The considerable expansion of higher education since the 1990s has benefited students from the middle classes to a larger extent than those from low socio-economic backgrounds (Ross, 2003). Iannelli (2011), however, noted when examining expansion of higher education in Scotland that when saturation point has been reached for middle class students then any additional places are likely to benefit students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This suggests that a high rate of participation is likely to provide more opportunities for all. The current economic crisis and accompanying austerity measures may impact on provision and the likelihood is that more disadvantaged students will be disproportionately affected by any cuts.

Although there is broad consensus that more needs to be done to achieve greater social equality in access to higher education, there is no consensus about the best way of achieving this across the length and breadth of Scotland. Widening access has been made one of the policy priorities of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to be addressed in universities' outcome agreements for 2012/13 and discussions are still underway about the statutory enforcement of widening access outcomes, with the possibilities of financial penalties for non-compliance.

The policy background to widening participation will be explored more fully in Chapter 3, but we note here the important review, *University challenge: how higher education can advance social mobility: a progress report* (Milburn, 2012), which we have used not only as a source of insight into widening participation throughout the UK, but also as an organiser for our findings. Milburn, in his role as Independent Reviewer on Social Mobility and Child Poverty, points to a need for action at four different stages of the student life-cycle. 'Getting ready' covers interventions in schools, even as early as primary or pre-school, but generally in the later years of secondary school. 'Getting in' covers support for applicants at the point of application for higher education, and, perhaps most importantly, the admissions procedures in use and the question of whether contextual data is used to identify students with the potential to succeed. 'Staying in' concerns measures to support students from widening participation backgrounds once they start their courses, either in terms of social and / or academic support or financial support – any intervention designed to promote retention of students and help them achieve their potential. The fourth and final phase, 'Getting on', considers ways in which universities can assist students to be well-equipped and ready, when they graduate, to move into the labour market or on to further postgraduate study.

The questions we seek to address are:

- What types of interventions can be identified at institutional and cross sectoral level in Scotland and the UK?
- Which categories of students are the recipients of particular interventions (e.g. those from low participation schools; those living in areas of multiple deprivation as identified by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD); first generation participants; care system leavers; mature learners)?
- What are the goals of specific interventions (e.g. are they geared towards school level interventions; or towards devising fairer admissions processes through the use of contextual data; or towards providing financial, social or learning support to improve retention; or toward helping students gain access to a profession or post-graduate study)?

- What evidence is there of the success of different interventions, with regard to process and outcomes?
- What metrics have been used to measure the outcomes achieved by particular interventions? Are these measures appropriate and have they been used to track progress over time?

Methods

There have been three strands to the literature search:

1. policy documents and the 'grey' literature, including reports from the SFC, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Sutton Trust, the Helena Kennedy Foundation, Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA), the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), the National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland, and published research and evaluations of widening access initiatives;
2. the academic literature on widening access initiatives and their effectiveness, drawn mostly, but not exclusively, from journal articles;
3. analysis of the Scottish Universities' outcome agreements for 2012/13, supplemented by other material sent in by institutions in response to our email request.

The fruits of the first strand of the literature search are mostly discussed in Chapter 3, while research reports have been integrated with the academic journal articles in Chapter 4.

For the second strand, the search for relevant journal articles in Academic Search Premier by Ellen Boeren in February 2013 was based on four keywords: 'widening access', 'widening participation', 'fair access' and 'student retention'. A first search retrieved papers with the keywords in the *title*, in combination with 'higher education', limited to those published since 2000. A second search then retrieved papers with the keywords in the *text*, in combination with 'Scotland', limited to those published since 2008. Studies had to report on data gathered within the UK context. Comparative papers were included if they referred to at least one of the UK countries. The empirical studies were summarized in tables according to stage in the students' life-cycle (getting ready, getting in, staying and/or getting on), country (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and/or Wales), student type (e.g. mature students, Muslim women, students from deprived areas), aim of the paper (identifying a specific problem or analysing the success of a certain intervention), outcome of analysis and evidence of success. These empirical studies form the basis of Chapter 4, into which material from books and research reports has also been incorporated.

For the third strand, we drew primarily on the outcome agreements for 2012/13, supplemented by material on the websites of institutions and partnerships, and by responses to our email request for any further relevant material, sent to the two people identified by Universities Scotland as having responsibility for Admissions and for Widening Participation in each of the 19 institutions. Responses were received from eleven institutions, some including considerable documentation, others simply reporting that they had nothing to add to the Outcome Agreement. Because this was designed as a small-scale, desk-based project, we were unable to follow up with qualitative research in interviews which might have revealed more about what is being done and the pressures which institutions are under to demonstrate success in widening participation. We learned enough from the material examined, however, to be sure that there is scope to explore more fully the diversity of approaches and pressures within the Scottish higher education system.

The literature search was undertaken in January – March 2013. This report does not, therefore, claim to reflect more recently published literature, or the continuing evolution of outcome agreements since that date.

The structure of the report

The main remit of this report was to conduct a literature review; however, to contextualise this review Chapter 2 considers the publicly available performance indicators used to measure widening participation in higher education in Scotland. This includes Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and Scottish Funding Council (SFC) performance indicators, socio-economic status indicators, state school attendance indicators, low participation neighbourhood indicators, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and HESA benchmarks. Supplementary statistical material is also available in Appendix 1.

Chapter 3 then considers the policy background from Dearing (1997) to the present day, highlighting some UK policy milestones and reports seeking to influence admissions practice in universities, both in Scotland and throughout the rest of the UK. We then note some other approaches in Europe, before considering the range of under-represented groups of students whom widening access is intended to benefit, and the challenge of finding and targeting them.

Chapter 4 contains the bulk of the literature review. We start with a section on methodological debates and general literature on the meaning and practice of widening participation, before presenting an analysis of the types of students who have been the subjects of recent empirical research into widening participation. The remainder of the chapter then covers the published empirical research into initiatives designed to help non-traditional students to, in Milburn's (2012) terms, get ready for higher education, get in, stay in and move on to employment or advanced study.

In Chapter 5, we use the same four-part structure to present the evidence of current practice, plans and successful initiatives in Scottish higher education institutions, drawing primarily on the Outcome Agreements for 2012/13.

Chapter 6 presents our conclusions, both about the weight of the evidence of what works and about further research required.

CHAPTER 2: DATA ON WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN SCOTLAND

This chapter examines the performance indicators used to measure widening participation in HEIs. These data are gathered by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for each higher education institution in the UK as well as some data specifically on students in Scottish higher education institutions. Whilst the main focus is on students studying at Scottish higher education institutions, some comparisons will be made with the rest of the UK.

Two recent documents, *Learning for all* (Scottish Funding Council, 2012a) and *Unlocking Scotland's potential: promoting fairer access to higher education* (National Union of Students Scotland, 2012) already provide detailed analysis of widening access drawing on a range of data, but in particular using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) with particular focus on SIMD20. It is not the intention here to reproduce those data; rather the aim is to pull together data from the most up-to-date performance indicators on widening participation provided by HESA as well as those produced by SFC relating to Scottish domiciled students.

HESA and SFC Performance Indicators (PIs)

Performance Indicators (PIs) for higher education were introduced following the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing committee). In the first instance they were produced for the funding councils in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scottish institutions were included from 2000 at the request of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC). The performance indicators currently cover:

- Widening participation indicators
  - under-represented groups
  - students who are in receipt of Disabled Student Allowance (DSA)
- Non-continuation rates
- Module completion rates
- Research output
- Employment of graduates

These indicators are published annually and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) took over the publication of the indicators from HEFCE in 2002-03. Further information is available on their website:
http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2072&Itemid=141.

The widening participation indicators, used to measure the extent to which universities are becoming more inclusive of students from under-represented groups in Scotland, are (i) the number of students from state schools, (ii) socioeconomic status and (iii) Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). The first two of these are administered and published annually by HESA. They are currently under review (see http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2879/). Socioeconomic status is based on the revised measure developed by Office of National Statistics (ONS), known as NS-SEC (National Statistics – Socio-Economic Classification). This replaced the older social class measure in 2002-03 to reflect changes in the labour market and the different educational levels required for specific occupations. Data on socio-economic status gathered by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for the academic year of 2008-09 cannot be compared to earlier data because the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) changed the wording of the question on SES for the majority of applicants (HESA, Summary of performance indicators 2010/11, accessed from website 25.02.2013).

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is a standard measure of area deprivation in Scotland. It identifies small area concentrations of deprivation across Scotland based on the following seven individual domains: employment; income; health; education, skills and training; geographic access to

services; crime; and housing (see http://www.scotland.gsi.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SIMD). It has been argued that measures such as SIMD are more appropriate for urban than rural areas because of the indicators/domains used and the size of the area. It is important to note that SIMD is an area measure and not an individual measure (such as socio-economic status) and this is recognised in the SIMD 2009 report (see http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/289599/0088642.pdf). Shucksmith (2003), in a review of rural deprivation in England, examined the use of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). He argued that the focus on crime and, in the case of IMD, the physical environment does not capture aspects of rural deprivation. In addition, using small area wards is not suitable for dispersed rural populations (Shucksmith, 2003).

In the rest of the UK, the low participation neighbourhood measure used by HESA is currently POLAR3[1]. The measure is devised by:

> *'ranking of 2001 Census Areas Statistics (CAS) wards by their young participation rates for the combined 2005-2009 cohorts. This gives 5 quintile groups of areas ordered from '1' (those wards with lowest participation) to '5' (those wards with the highest participation), each representing 20 per cent of UK young cohort. Students have been allocated to the neighbourhoods on the basis of their postcode. Those students whose postcode falls within wards with the lowest participation quintile (1) are denoted as being from a low participation neighbourhood.'*

> (HESA, PI definitions, www.hesa.ac.uk , accessed 03.04.2013)

Unlike SIMD, this measure focuses on participation rates; however, it resembles SIMD with its focus on neighbourhoods that have the 20% lowest participation rate. Although the POLAR3 classification covers the whole of the UK it is not used in Scotland because:

> *'[t]he 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 figure for Scottish institutions could, when viewed in isolation, misrepresent their contribution to widening participation. Therefore, the low participation data has not been produced within the Performance Indicators for institutions in Scotland from 2007-08'*

> (HESA, PI definitions, www.hesa.ac.uk , accessed 03.04.2013).

Undergraduate students

The widening participating indicators published by HESA refer to first year entrants and are split into first degree entrants and other degrees. The only WP indicators for mature and part-time undergraduate students are those based on low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR). As mentioned above, indicators based on POLAR are no longer used for Scottish institutions. The last year that Scotland was included was 2006-07. Data for Scottish institutions for mature and part-time undergraduate students from low participation neighbourhoods (based on POLAR 2) have been included in Appendix 1 (see figure A1-A3). It is quite clear that there are marked differences between Scottish institutions and the rest of the UK, as the participation rate from students in low participation neighbourhoods is consistently lower across Scotland. As explained above, this discrepancy has been explained by the high HE participation in Scottish colleges, which is not included in the HESA data. There is considerable variation between Scottish institutions in the proportion of students who are mature. Generally the new universities tend to have a greater proportion of mature students. The proportion coming from low participation neighbourhoods also varies; but it seems that, among the old universities with low numbers of mature students, this group does include a relatively high proportion of students from low participation backgrounds (see Appendix 1, figure A1). Data on part-time students are more difficult to interpret (see Appendix 1, figures A2, A3). The number of part-time students is small and the majority of these are

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[1]The POLAR3 and POLAR2 low participation measures are based on a UK wide classification of areas into participation bands.

mature students; overall, young part-time students tend to be more likely to come from a low participation background than mature part-time students. These data are, however, out of date and should be treated with caution. Performance indicators for part-time students relating to NS-SEC and state schools are not published by HESA as institutions are not required to provide statistical information to HESA for part-time students (email communication from Katie Martin, HESA). SFC gathers data on part-time and mature students and data relating to mature students by deprivation level are included in the publication *Learning for All* (SFC, 2012b). Information on part-time and mature students does not, however, feature amongst the high level indicators published on the SFC website (http://www.sfc.ac.uk/statistics/higher_education_statistics/HE_performance_indicators/Participation_ind icators_for_Scottish_HEIs_documents.aspx). Since a high proportion of part-time and mature students are from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, it would be a good idea in future for the SFC to include information relating to participation rates of these groups amongst its high level indicators.

Table 1 provides an overview of full-time degree entrants to UK institutions (for a breakdown of numbers for Scottish institutions, see Appendix 1, table A1). These data provide the basis for the widening participation performance indicators calculated according to the proportion of state school entrants and the proportion of those from NS-SEC 4-7. The performance indicators include most UK students but not non-UK domiciled students (for a list of excluded students see Appendix 1, table A2). Young students are those aged below 21 and mature students are those aged 21 and over. As can be seen from table 1, the majority of first degree students are below 21. In contrast, only around half of other degree entrants are young, although Scotland has the highest percentage of young students on 'other degrees' and a greater proportion of these students come from NS-SEC 4-7 (see Appendix 1, figure A4). This may in part be due to a small number of institutions offering HN qualifications as a route to a degree.

Table 1:   Full-time 1st degree entrants to UK institutions, 2010-11, number and percentage

Region	First degree[1]				Other degree[2]		
	Total FT	*Number of young students*	*% who are young*		*Total FT*	*Number of young students*	*% who are young*
Scotland	31,870	24,065	75.5		2,655	1,515	57.1
England	304,015	241,025	79.3		45,465	19,165	42.2
Northern Ireland	9,035	7,210	79.8		150	80	52.3
Wales	21,075	16,485	78.2		2,250	1,240	55.2
Total UK	365,995	288,785	78.9		50,520	21,995	43.5

Source: HESA

1. First degree includes first degrees (including eligibility to register to practice with a health or social care or veterinary statutory regulatory body), first degrees with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)/registration with a General Teaching Council (GTC), postgraduate bachelors degree at level H, enhanced first degrees (including those leading towards obtaining eligibility to register to practice with a health or social care or veterinary statutory regulatory body), first degrees obtained concurrently with a diploma and intercalated first degrees.

2. Other degree is **undergraduate,** includes qualification aims equivalent to and below first degree level, including, but not limited to, Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at level H (unless shown separately), foundation degrees (unless shown separately), diplomas in higher education (including those with eligibility to register to practice with a health or social care or veterinary statutory regulatory body), Higher National Diploma (HND), Higher National Certificate (HNC), Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE), Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE), foundation courses at higher education level, National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)/Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) at NQF levels 4 and 5, post-degree diplomas and certificates at undergraduate level (including those in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector), professional qualifications at undergraduate level, other undergraduate diplomas and certificates including post-registration health and social care

courses, other formal higher education qualifications of less than degree standard, institutional undergraduate credit and non-formal undergraduate qualifications.

(HESA Notes)

Figure 1 shows that five institutions have a number of young students registering for other degrees (e.g. HNC, HND). In UHI and University of Abertay, the majority of young students enter through this route. In figure 2, it can be seen that students undertaking other degrees are, overall, more likely to come from a low socio-economic background than those registering for a first degree. It is therefore important to include both types of degrees when examining widening participation indicators.

Figure 1: A comparison of 1st degree and other degree young entrants to Scottish HEIs, 2011-2012, percentages
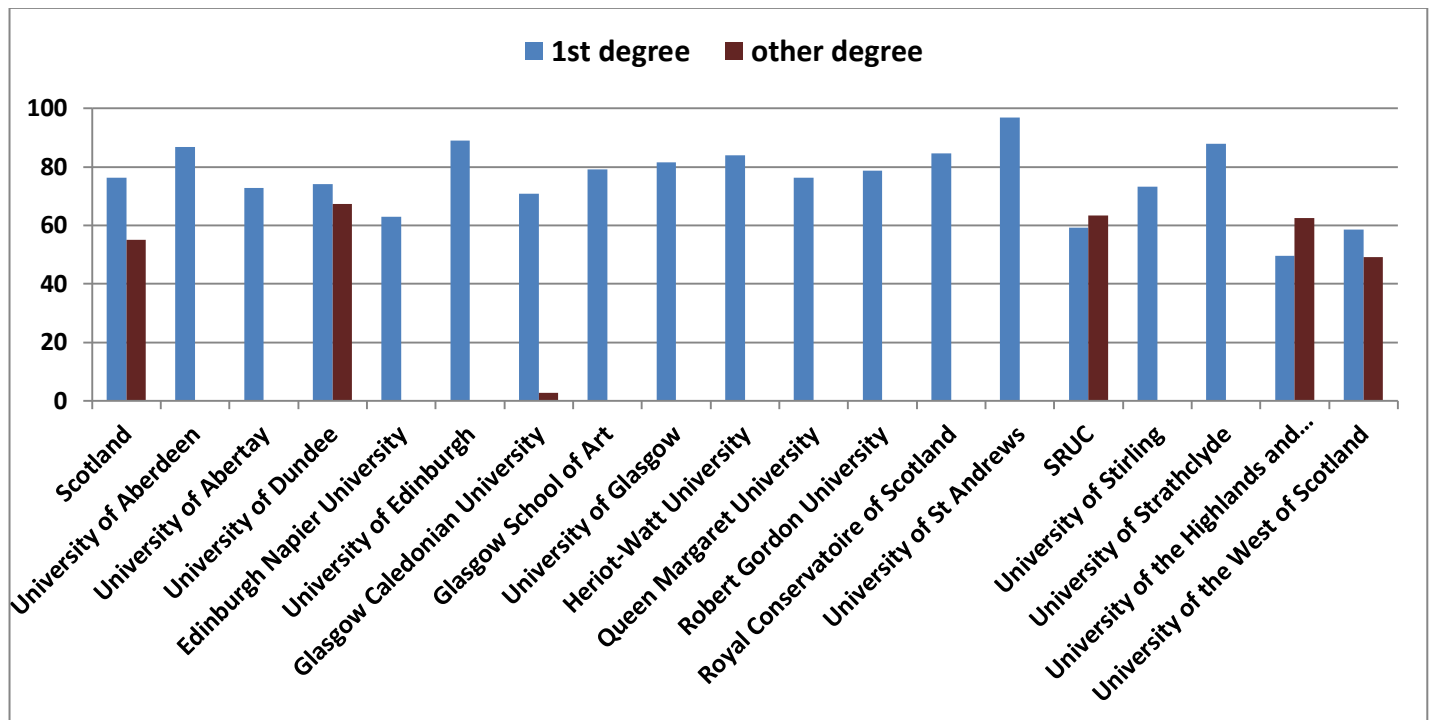
Source: HESA

The majority of first degree entrants, more than 75%, in Scotland are below 21 when they start their course (figure 2). There is considerable variation between the institutions with 3 of the ancient HEIs having a first degree entrant population close to or above 90%. In comparison some of the institutions who achieved university status more recently have a lower proportion of students in this age group.

Figure 2:   First degree entrants who are young, by institution, 2011-12, percentages
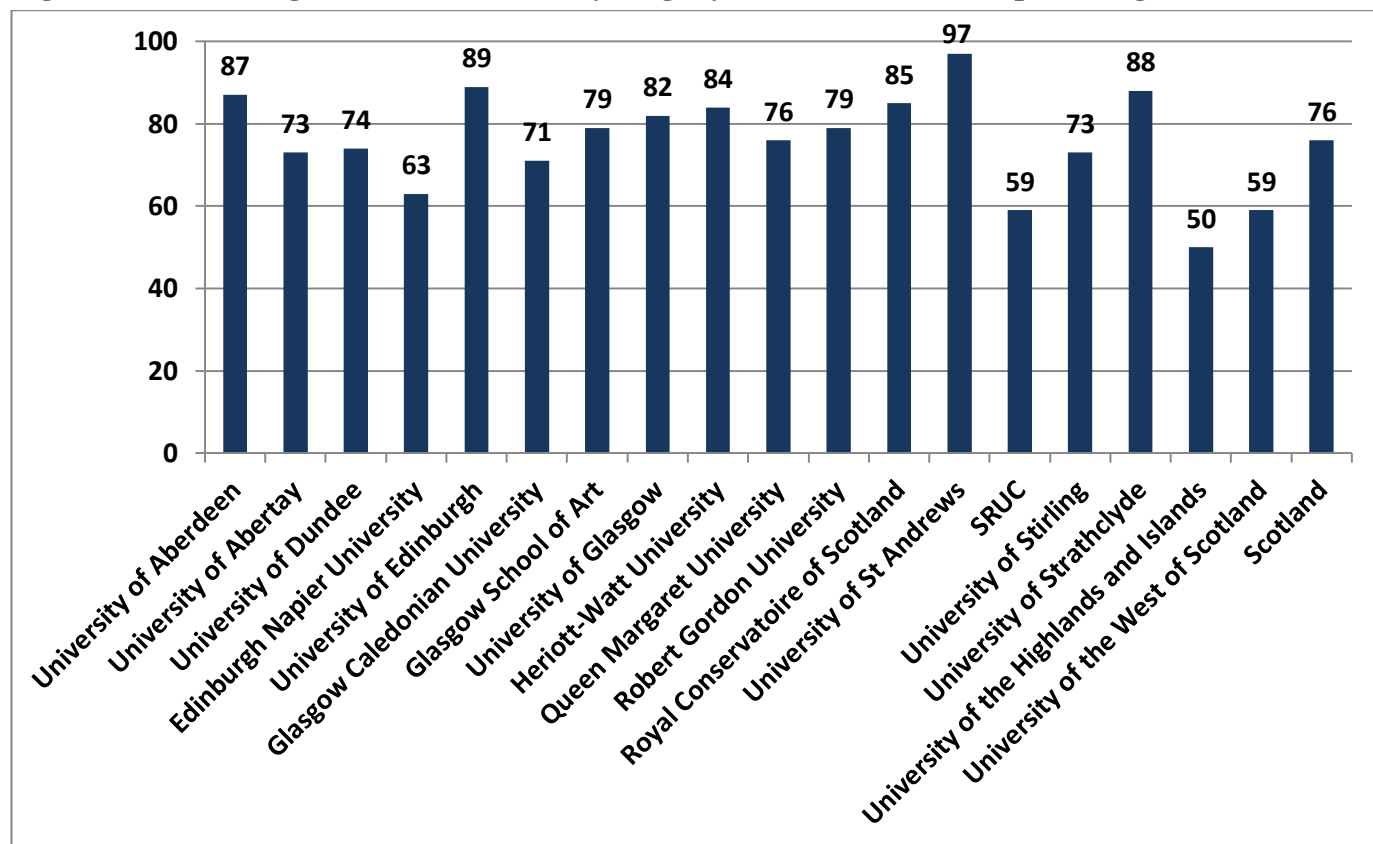
Source: HESA

Figure 3 shows the proportion of all undergraduate students in each of the Scottish HEIs who study full-time and part-time respectively (as defined by HESA). In Scotland overall more than 80% of undergraduates study full-time and there is only one institution where the proportion of full-time undergraduates is below 60%. There are no publicly available data for first time degree entrants showing mode of study and these data are therefore not directly comparable to the other data for first degree entrants.

It should also be noted that HESA treats the Open University as an English institution and the Open University is not included in the performance indicators for Scottish domiciled students published by the SFC.

Figure 3:   Undergraduate students by institution and mode of study, 2011-12, percentages
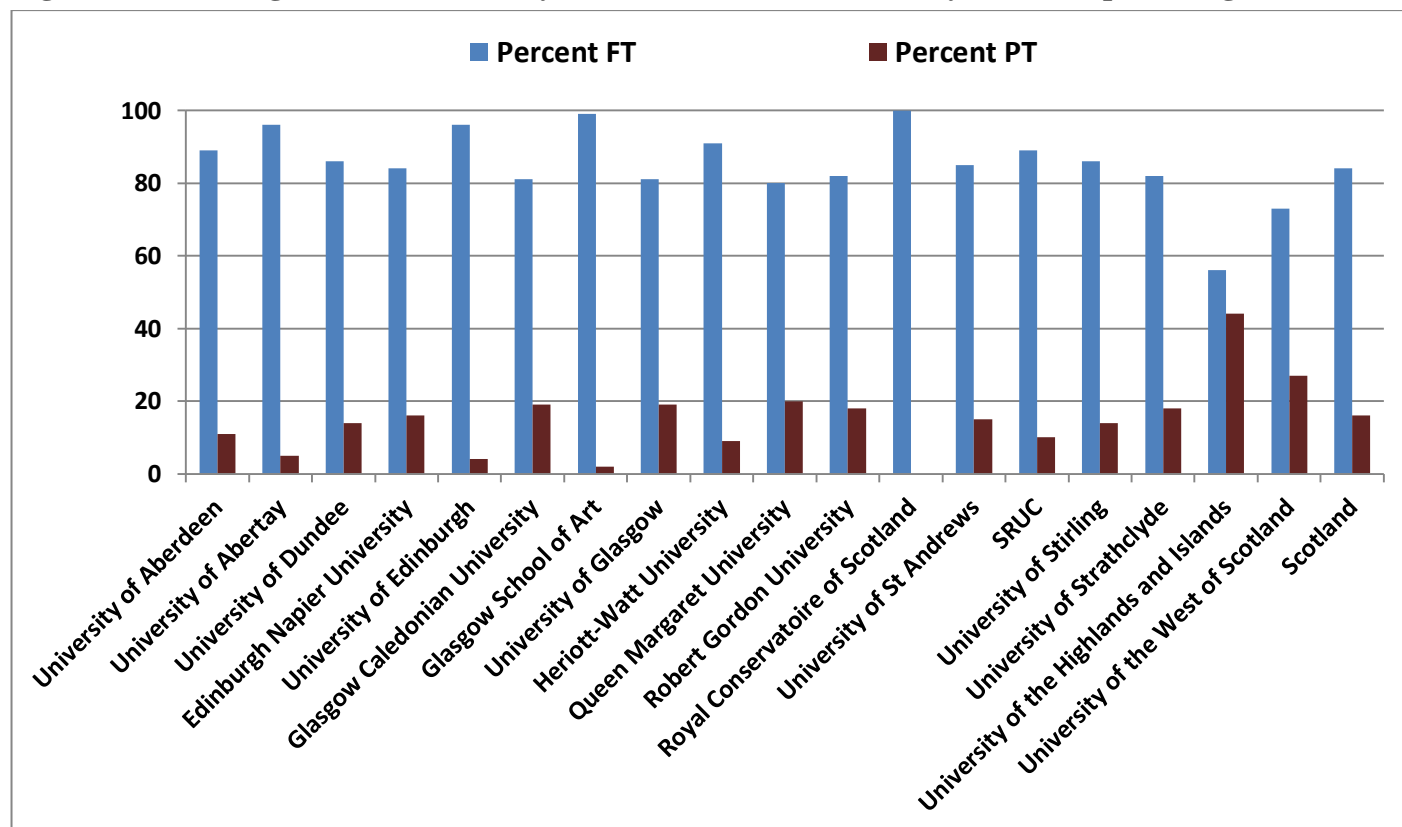
Source: HESA

Socio-economic status indicator – NS-SEC 4-7

As can be seen from figure 4, just over 27% of first degree students in Scotland come from NS-SEC 4-7, whilst a much higher proportion (41%) of those entering via the other degree route come from this type of background. This route is mainly offered by Scotland's colleges but also by a small number of HEIs.

Figure 4:   A comparison of 1ˢᵗ degree and other degree young entrants to Scottish HEIs by NS-SEC 4-7, 2011-12, percentages
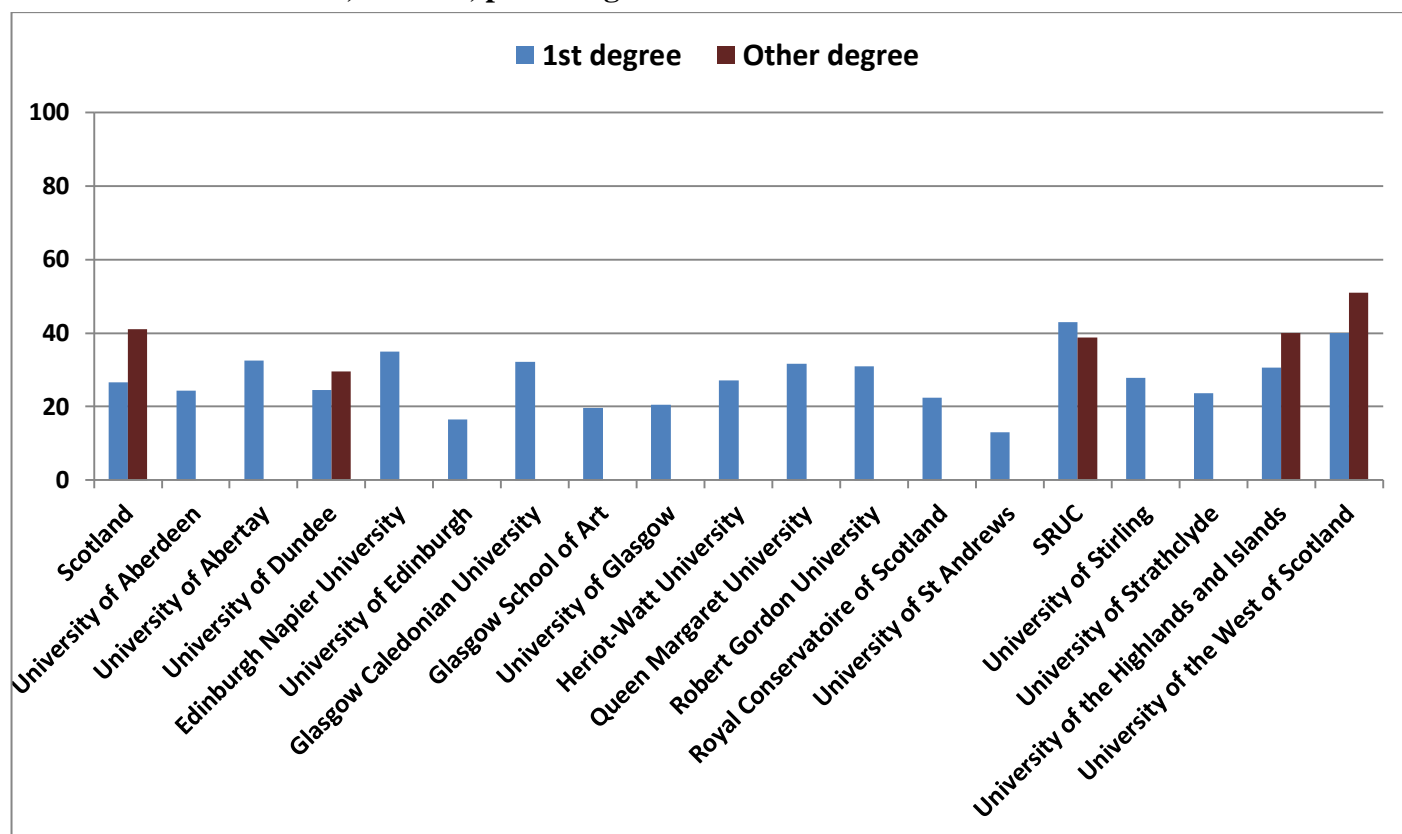
Source: HESA

The most recent HESA data on socio-economic status were published on 21st March 2013. Figure 5a shows a slight decline in first degree entrants from NS-SEC 4-7 in Scotland between 2010-11 and 2011-12 overall and this pattern is evident in most institutions. Only 5 HEIs have experienced an increase in students from NS-SEC 4-7 but the increase is only marginal. It may be that the economic downturn has impacted on students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds, deterring them from engaging in higher education due to the expense. Data on young students from NS-SEC 4-7 studying on other degrees has also shown a marginal decline overall but a 14% increase in one institution (see Appendix 1, table A3). The Scottish Funding Council also published these data but only for Scottish domiciled students and this shows that nearly 30% of Scottish students at Scottish universities came from NS-SEC 4-7. This suggests that Scottish students studying at Scottish universities are marginally more likely to come from a lower socio-economic background compared with Scottish students studying at English universities and English students studying at Scottish universities.

Figure 5a: **First degree young entrants to Scottish HEIs by NS-SEC 4-7, 2000-2012, percentages**
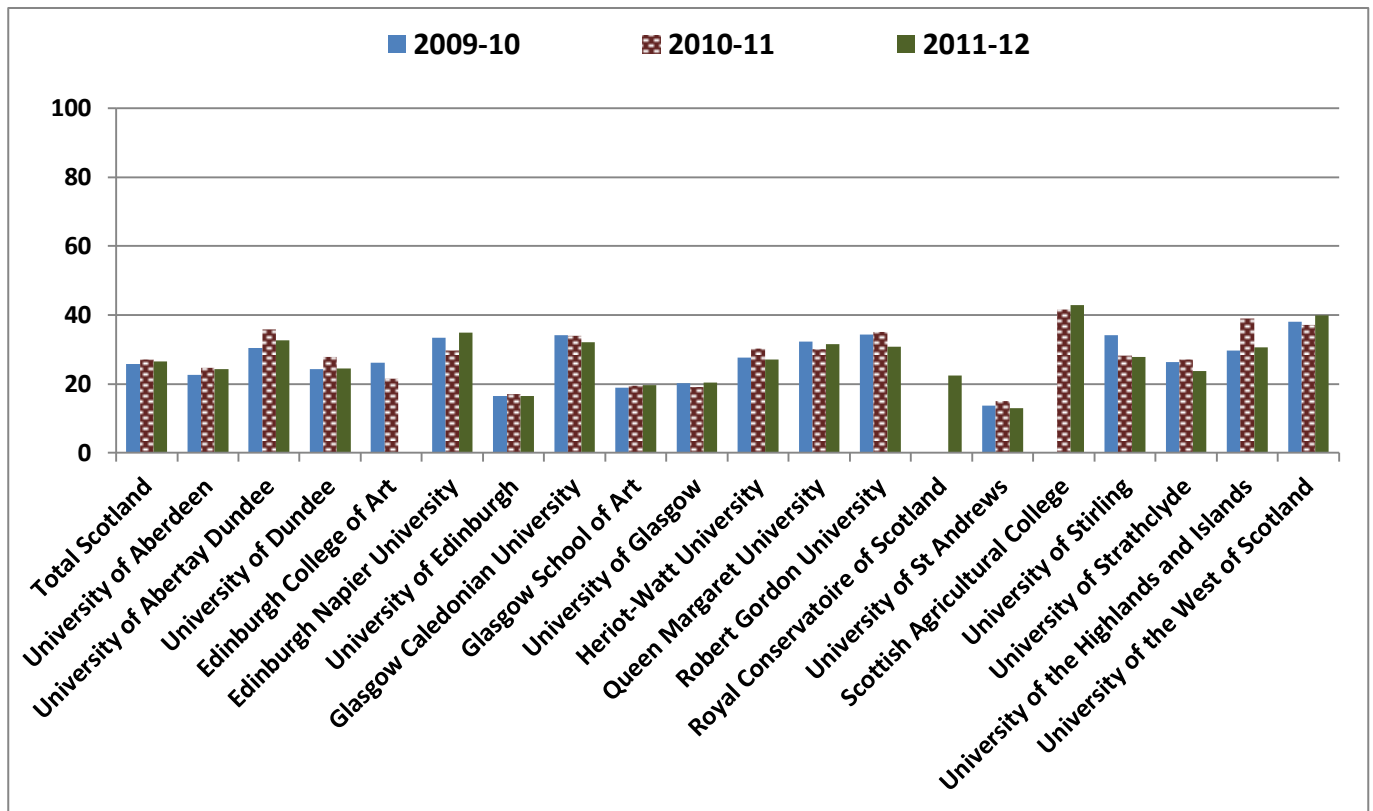
Source: HESA

Please note: Edinburgh College of Art merged with the University of Edinburgh in 2011 and data for this institution are therefore included with the University of Edinburgh in 2011-12.

Figure 5b: **First degree young entrants to Scottish HEIs by NS-SEC 4-7, 2009-2012, Scottish domiciled students, percentages**
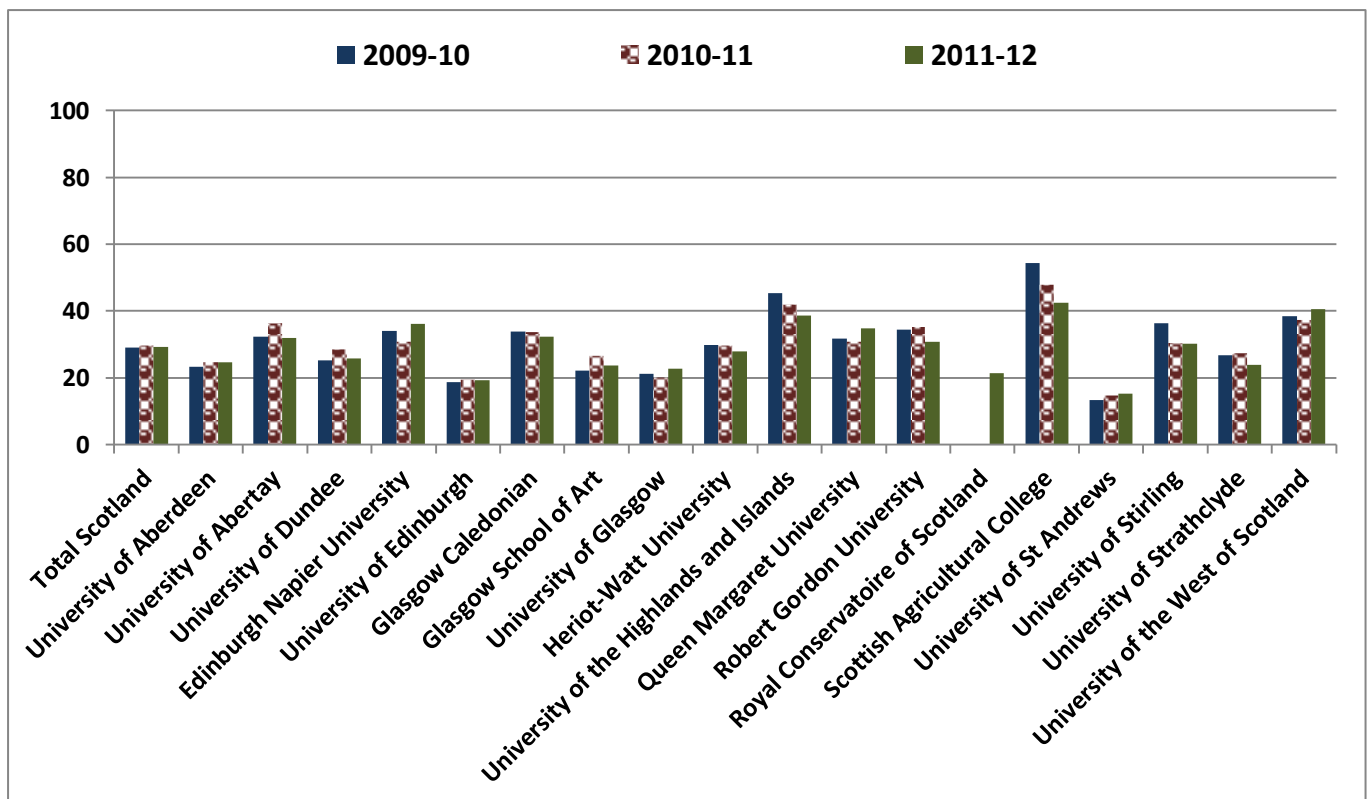
Source: SFC, based on HESA

State school attendance indicator

The second widening participation indicator examines the proportion of students from state schools, which are attended by the majority of pupils in the UK. It is worth noting that pupils from state schools do not necessarily come from low socio-economic backgrounds and there is considerable variation between schools in relation to the proportion of pupils who continue into higher education. Nevertheless, on average, pupils in independent schools are more likely to be from high socio-economic status than are pupils in state schools. The indicator is therefore useful as one of a number of measures. In Scotland 5% of pupils attend independent schools, and in England and Wales the figures are 7% and 1.9% respectively. Table 2 shows that overall 88.7% of UK students come from state schools. In England and Scotland, about 88% of students have attended state schools. The proportion from state schools in 2011-12 is highest in Northern Ireland (98.9%), followed by Wales (91.9%).

Table 2:   Pupils from state schools, 2010-2012, percentages

	2010-11	2011-12
UK	88.7	88.9
England	88.2	88.5
Northern Ireland	98.9	98.9
Wales	92.2	91.9
Scotland	88.3	87.9

Source: HESA

In figure 6, it can be seen that there is considerable disparity between the different higher education institutions with regard to the proportion of students drawn from the state sector. Ancient universities have the lowest proportion of students from state schools, for example, at the University of St Andrews only 60% of students come from state schools and the proportion slightly decreased in 2011-12. At the University of Edinburgh, around three quarter of students come from state schools and at the University of Aberdeen around 80%. The proportion is higher at the University of Glasgow (85%), reflecting the general trend that universities in the west of Scotland tend to have a higher proportion of students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds.

Figure 6:   Students from state schools in Scotland by institution, 2010-2012, percentages
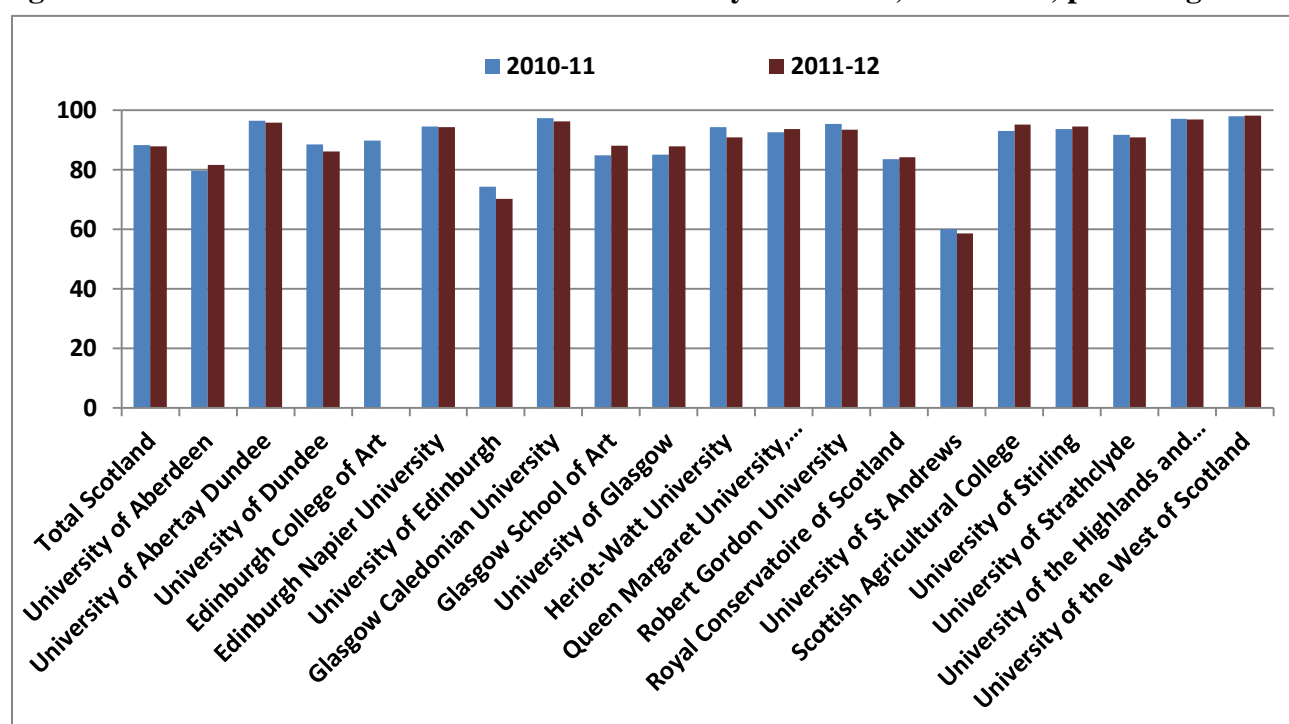
Source: HESA

Low participation neighbourhood indicator and SIMD20 and SIMD40

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is used by the Scottish Funding Council to examine participation of students from different types of neighbourhoods. Figure 7 shows that the proportion of students from the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods is just under 10% for the whole of Scotland and this has not changed much between 2005 and 2012. However, this figure masks considerable differences between institutions, as figure 7 shows. It should be noted that in Glasgow City, around 48% of the population live in the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD 2012, see Appendix 1, figure A12). The equivalent figure for Renfrewshire (Appendix 1, figure A14) which is near to one of the University of the West of Scotland's campuses, is around 28%. Fife has around 19% of its population in the 20% most deprived areas (Appendix 1, figure A11), whilst in Edinburgh City and Aberdeen City (Appendix 1, figures A10, A7) about 12% of the population live in the most deprived neighbourhoods. In Aberdeenshire, only around 2% live in the most deprived neighbourhoods (Appendix 1, figure A8).

Figure 7: **Students from SIMD20 neighbourhoods in Scottish universities, 2005-2012, percentages**
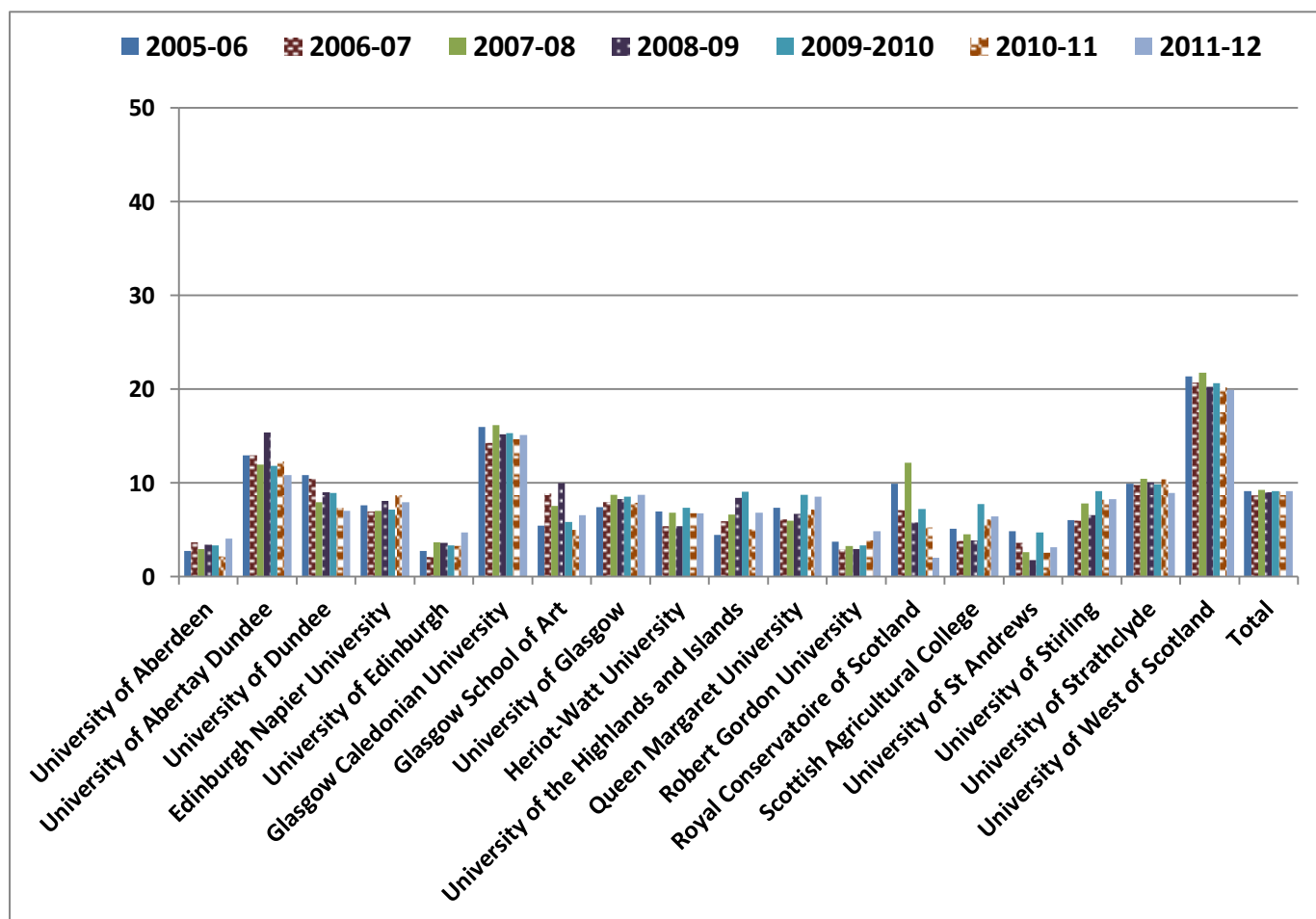
Source: SFC

Figure 8 shows the proportion of students from the 40% most deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD40) in Scottish universities. As reflected in the earlier discussion of students from SIMD20 neighbourhoods, new universities and those in the west of Scotland draw a higher proportion of their students from SIMD40 neighbourhoods.

Figure 8:   **Students from SIMD40 neighbourhoods in Scottish universities, 2005-2012, percentages**
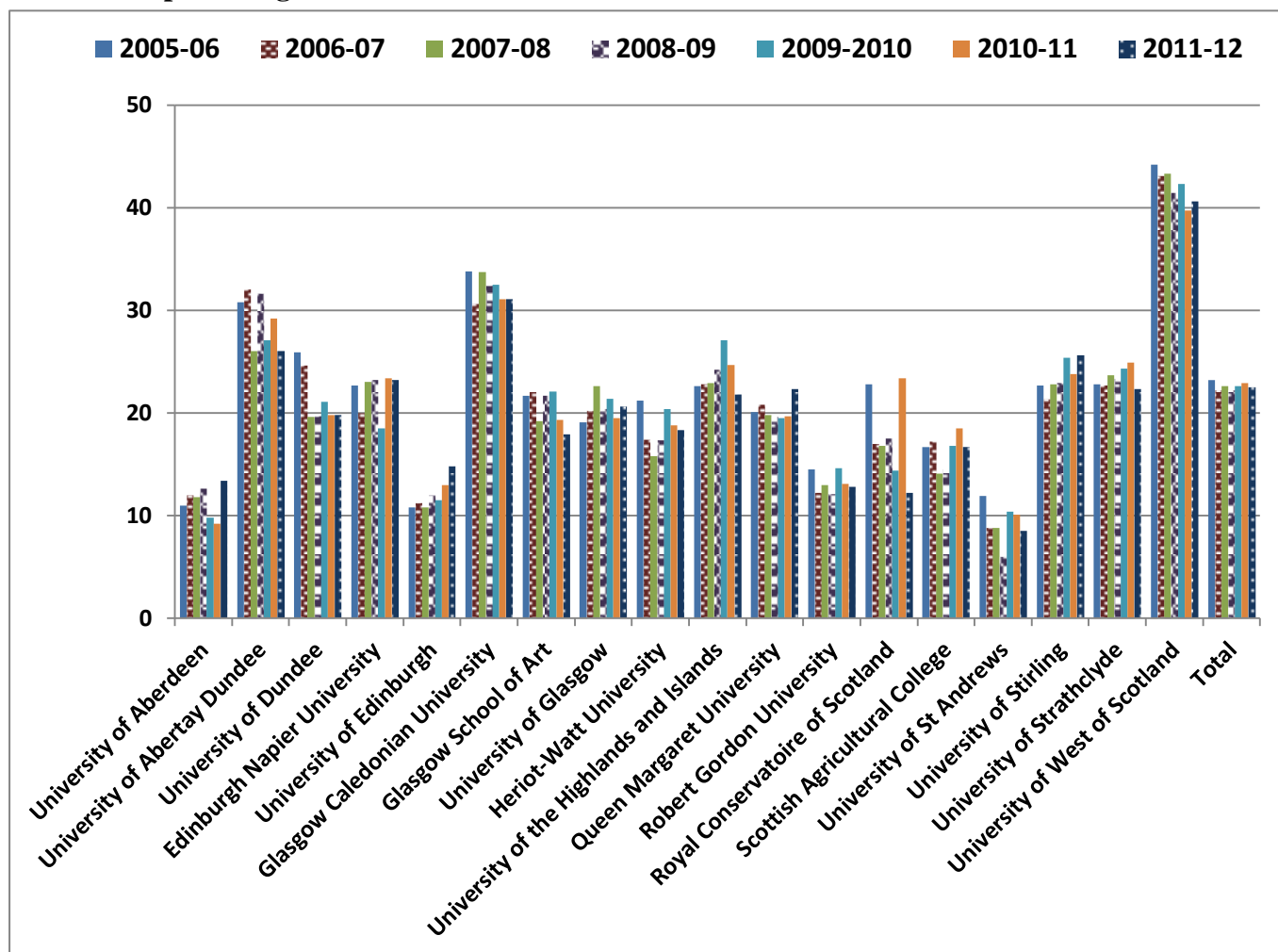
Source: SFC

Figure 9 shows the relative proportion of students from the 40% most deprived areas (SIMD40) in different types of institution. Around 15% of students in ancient universities are from SIMD40 neighbourhoods, compared with just over 22% in old institutions and just under 25% in new universities. The proportion in other HEI institutions is very similar to those in ancient universities. Similar stratification is found elsewhere in the UK. A table showing type of higher education institution attended by student characteristics is included in Appendix 1 (Table A4). However, as can be seen from the previous figure, this masks differences especially between the new universities, which seem to be related to their geographic location.

Figure 9: A comparison of students from the 40% most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest at Scottish ancient, old, new and other institutions, 2011-12, percentages
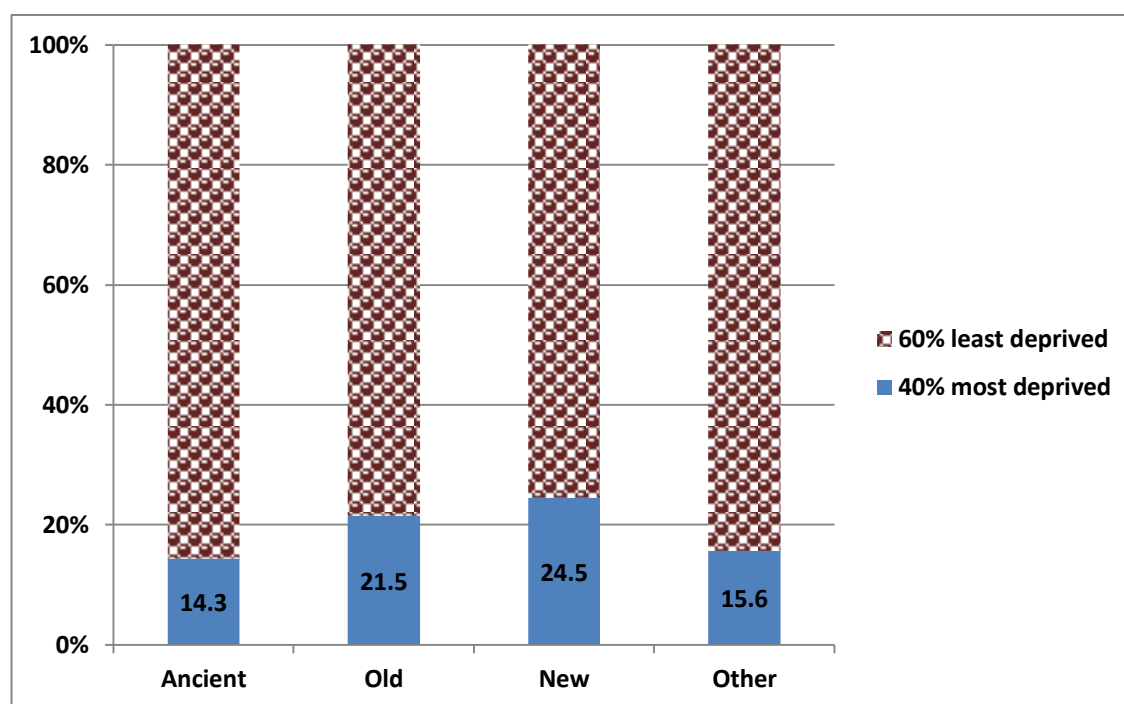
Source: SFC

Ancient institutions are: Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and St. Andrews;

Old institutions are: Universities of Dundee, Heriot-Watt, Stirling and Strathclyde;

New institutions are: Universities of Abertay, Glasgow Caledonian, Edinburgh Napier, Queen Margaret, Robert Gordon, UHI and University of the West of Scotland;

Other institutions are: Scottish Agricultural College, Glasgow School of Art, the Royal Conservatoire.

The performance indicators for Scottish domiciled HE students do not include the Open University in Scotland: it is, however, included in the publication *Learning for All* except for year 2008-09. These data are included in the appendix (see Appendix 1, figures A5 and A6).

In summary, there are clear differences in participation rates of students from neighbourhoods with higher levels of social deprivation and students from less socially advantaged backgrounds are more likely to study at post-92 universities. However, there also seem to be some anomalies when comparing the indicators. This is particularly the case for one institution which has a very small proportion of students from SIMD20 backgrounds, but a relatively high proportion of students from NS-SEC 4-7 (see figures 5b and 7). It should be noted that socio-economic background is only known for around 80% of students which potentially makes it a more problematic indicator (see Appendix 1, figure A15). The socio-economic indicator has the advantage of linking directly to the individual student. In contrast, as discussed earlier, SIMD is based on the area that the student lives in and does not necessarily equate to

the socio-economic status of their family. In addition to publishing widening participation indicators, HESA also publishes benchmarks for each institution. These are examined briefly in the next section.

HESA benchmarks

The HESA benchmarks are produced for each institution to take into account a number of factors. In relation to the widening participation indicators, the following factors are used: subject of study, entry qualifications and government region of domicile (the last one is only location adjusted benchmark). The aim of the benchmarks is to allow comparisons to be made between similar institutions, taking into account different subject profiles and entry qualifications of students. As can be seen from figure 10, only four institutions exceeded their benchmarks and most were relatively close to the benchmark. The benchmarks are not intended to be targets but are intended to provide institutions with a means of gauging their own performance in relation to widening access objectives and to track progress over time.

Figure 10: **Percentage of first degree young students from NS-SEC 4-7 by institutions and the benchmark for the institution, 2011-12**
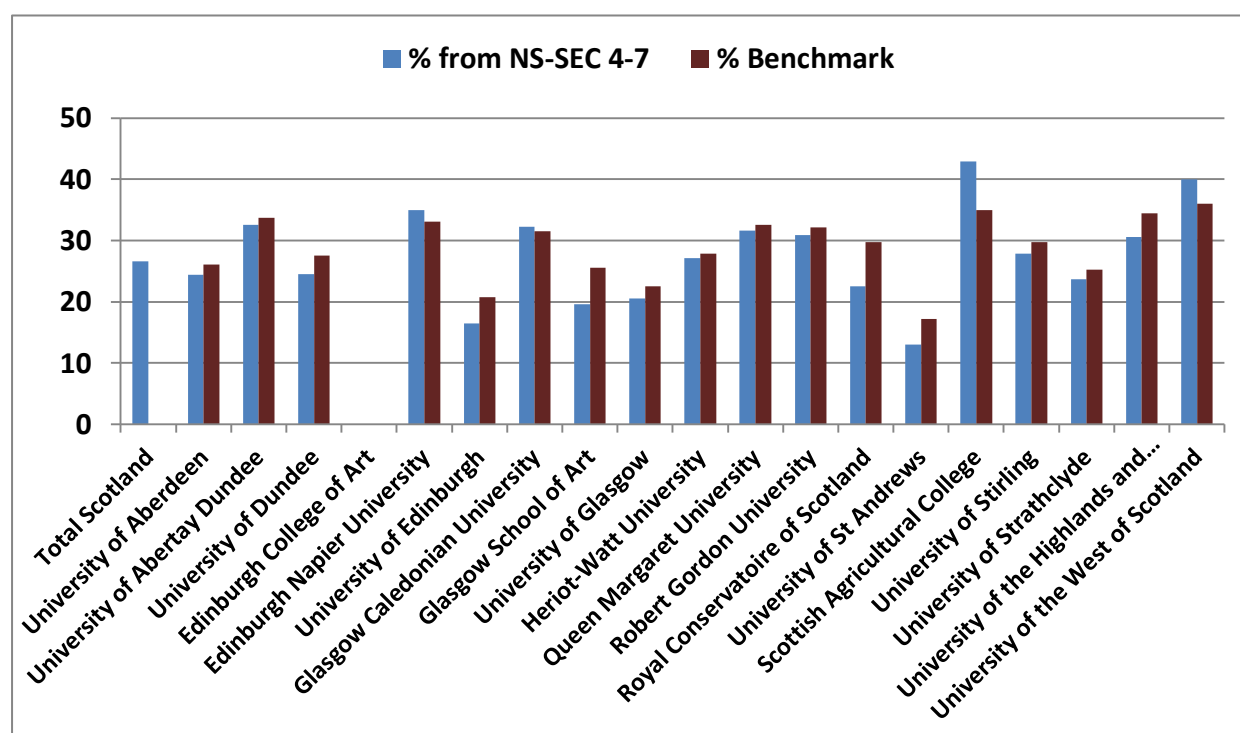
Source: HESA

Conclusion

A number of performance indicators are published examining the extent to which students from lower socio-economic status are gaining access to universities in Scotland. It is clear that there is a degree of stratification with more elite institutions having a far smaller proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It would also seem that there are some differences between SIMD and NS-SEC when used as an indicator of widening participation. This is particularly noticeable for some institutions and seems to be linked to geographic location. This suggests that it might be valid to use a range of measures rather than just focusing on one.

CHAPTER 3: THE POLICY BACKGROUND

In the first part of this chapter, we consider briefly the policy milestones – the UK policy background since Dearing in 1997 and more recent reports and initiatives seeking to influence admissions practice in universities, both in Scotland and throughout the rest of the UK. In the second part, we consider some approaches to widening participation in other European countries, before exploring what is meant by 'students from widening access backgrounds' and how they can be identified.

Policy milestones

The **Dearing Report**, *Higher education in the learning society* (1997), predicted that both national need and the demand for higher education would drive expansion of student numbers. It also gave prominence to the need for widening participation, urging funding bodies to:

> *'give priority to those institutions which can demonstrate a commitment to widening participation, and have in place a participation strategy, a mechanism for monitoring progress, and provision for review by the governing body of achievement.'*

<div align="right">(Dearing Report, 1997, Recommendation 2, p.107)</div>

The associated Scottish Committee, chaired by Sir Ron Garrick, also recommended that FE and HE institutions should collaborate to enhance and publicise access and articulation routes into degree programmes for students at further education colleges. Although the Dearing Committee had been appointed by the outgoing Conservative Government, the New Labour Government accepted many of its recommendations, and HEFCE, after initial doubts about whether higher education should attempt to address problems which had arisen for disadvantaged students at an earlier stage of their education, accepted that they could 'make a contribution to redressing particular imbalances' (HEFCE, 1997, para.24) and went on to make widening participation one of their priorities (Greenbank, 2006, p.148). The Scottish Funding Councils, reviewing the previous five years in their baseline report (2001), also describe widening access as a key priority identified by the Scottish Executive, although they reported only a 'small but noticeable trend towards increased participation in HE (including HEIs and FECs) from the least advantaged areas' (2001, p.15).

The second policy milestone to consider is **devolution**. During that five year period, devolution had transferred powers over education and training in Scotland from the UK Parliament to the Scottish Parliament. Gallacher and Raffe (2012) explore the impact of devolution on education policies in Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales in relation to four areas of activity: student fees and support; widening access; supporting research; and the HE contribution to economic development, skills and employability. Although the second of these is our major concern here, fees, support and employability are also relevant if students from disadvantaged backgrounds are to enter, progress, graduate and move into successful careers. Policy divergence between the four countries had been anticipated, because of five factors: the formal redistribution of power; the different political values, ideologies and policy priorities, reflecting the different traditions of the four countries; the distinctive policy communities, given that policy-making tends to be more collaborative in Scotland and Wales than in England; the different circumstances of the individual countries, such as the tradition of four year degrees and the role of the colleges in Scotland; and the mutual independence of the education systems. Gallacher and Raffe's analysis reveals some of the divergence which had been anticipated, particularly in the area of fees, which in turn led to a greater policy emphasis on ensuring an explicit commitment to widening participation and fair access at institutional level in England and Wales than in Scotland. Here, the Scottish National Party Government decided in 2011 that no fees would be paid by Scottish domiciled students, but universities would be allowed to charge up to £9000 from students from elsewhere in the UK. Nevertheless, the authors conclude that this tendency to divergence appears to be counterbalanced by pressures for convergence or parallel policy change.

Even after devolution, Scotland's universities have shared in many UK institutions, including Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA). The Admissions to Higher Education Review (2004) – generally known as the **Schwartz report** – may also be seen as a policy milestone. Schwartz recommended the setting up of a central source of expertise and advice on admissions issues, which was taken forward by Universities UK, GuildHE and the four funding councils, and despite changes in funding in 2012 leading to a greater focus on England, UCAS and UUK funding ensures that resources, materials and events provided by SPA are open to all UK universities, and has enabled SPA to fund valuable empirical research. Schwartz recommended the adoption of five principles for a fair admissions system:

- be transparent, and provide consistent and efficient information
- select students who are able to complete the course as judged by their achievements and potential
- use assessment methods that are reliable and valid
- minimise barriers to applicants
- be professional in every respect and underpinned by institutional structures and processes.

The steering group also recommended the commissioning of a review of the admissions system after three years, with the aim of assessing progress in implementing the recommendations of their report. This was undertaken by the Centre for Education and Inclusion Research and the Institute for Access Studies (2008a-c), who drew all their case studies institutions from England. However, given that Scottish institutions were also affected by the revisions to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Code of Practice, Section 10, on admissions to higher education, their findings have some relevance here. The reviewers found that many staff interviewed suggested that the Schwartz report itself had not been a major direct influence on their admissions policies and processes. By way of contrast, the subsequent changes to the QAA Code of Practice, SPA and the HE sector-led Delivery Partnership were seen as more influential. The research team concluded that policy and practice had changed, and that much of that change related directly to fulfilment of the Schwartz principles (2008a, p.17). They also noted that it was not clear whether institutions were getting better at selecting students who could complete their studies, and they observed more monitoring, but less evidence of evaluation of admissions practices. Most importantly in this context, they found differences in the development of the principles and processes of admissions practices between institutions that have over-subscribed, 'selecting' courses and those that are mainly 'recruiting' -– particularly in their use of contextual information. In 'selecting' institutions, contextual factors such as disadvantaged backgrounds were being considered in order to widen participation, while 'recruiting' institutions were more likely to use contextual information to identify applicants who would need additional support once accepted (2008a, p.18-19).

Activity in Scotland in this period included the creation in 2005 of the **Scottish Funding Council**, which replaced the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC) and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), bringing together the funding and support for colleges and universities. At the same time, the Widening Participation Review Group, which had been set up jointly by the two former councils, published its report, *Learning for All* (SFC, 2005) which noted that, despite some progress in the FE and HE sectors, educational participation and achievement was still highly skewed by socio-economic background, geography and gender, with retention and achievement rates lower for men than for women. They stressed the need to develop a common agenda across the college and university sector, to build the demand for learning amongst disadvantaged groups, to use the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), to work collectively and systematically to join up qualifications and programmes, and above all to monitor and evaluate the impact of their interventions. Gallacher (2006a) also discusses the distinctive contribution that colleges were making to higher education in Scotland, 'blurring the boundaries' between further and higher education. Collaboration across institutional and sectoral boundaries became an important feature of subsequent widening participation activities. Collaborative structures for promoting widening participation were established in 1999/2000, when, in the wake of the Dearing Report, four Wider Access Regional Forums (WARFs) were set up, centred on the South East, Fife and Tayside, the West, and the North, as partnerships of universities, colleges, local authorities, Skills Development Scotland and other relevant stakeholders, with the goals of widening

access and increasing participation in post-compulsory education. The WARFs continued until 2011: more will be said in later chapters about the detail of their activities and subsequent projects, such as Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP), which has been funded since 2011. Another equally important development for widening access from colleges was the establishment of Regional Articulation Hubs where universities and colleges work together to enable college students to transfer into higher education. Again, we shall return to discussing these schemes in Chapter 5.

This period also saw the publication of *Unfinished business in widening participation* (Stanton *et al*., 2008), which looks at progress made on widening participation since Helena Kennedy's 1997 report to the Further Education Funding Council, *Learning works*. The seminar at which these papers were presented acknowledged that much had been achieved, but there was still much to be done. Outstanding issues identified (2008, p. 6) included: recognition of the need for different pedagogic approaches for different backgrounds; greater pastoral and pre-University support; funding regimes that recognise that part-time and intermittent study may be the best model for some; and recognition by employers that talent can be found everywhere.

Another milestone report in this era illustrates policy concerns with social mobility: ***Unleashing aspiration*** (Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, 2009). Evidence that the professions were growing more socially exclusive, closing doors not only to people from disadvantaged backgrounds, but also to those from average family backgrounds led the Labour government to appoint the panel, chaired by Alan Milburn, 'to work with the professions themselves to identify obstacles including cultural barriers to access and how they can be removed' (2009, p.10). Their recommendations were directed at the government and its agencies, schools, careers services, colleges and the professions themselves, as well as at universities. Of relevance here are their recommendations to improve progression from further to higher education and their praise for:

- the success of outreach activities in primary and secondary schools, such as those of *AimHigher,* a programme established in England to raise aspirations and attainment, particularly for young people from under-represented groups, and widen participation in higher education. It was integrated in 2004, drawing together *Aimhigher: Excellence Challenge* (established 2001) and *Aimhigher: Partnerships for Progression* (established 2003). Aimhigher was to be abolished by the incoming coalition government in 2010 and replaced by the National Scholarship Programme, with very different aims, processes and funding;
- marketing and recruitment strategies linked to a specific institution or department, and
- institutional and collaborative agreements that make modified offers, or provide additional support for young people from under-represented groups, citing the success of the King's College London medical degree programme in admitting and retaining students from non-selective state schools with reduced entry requirements.

Milburn notes that, although HESA statistics showed a rise of 9,000 in the numbers of young people from less advantaged backgrounds entering higher education between 2001 and 2007, participation is still uneven. The report recommends more outreach to both primary and secondary schools, and the strengthening of local partnerships, and partnership compacts with the professions, and urges the use of contextual information in admissions:

> *Recommendation 41: By law it is for universities to determine their admissions procedures but we hope that all universities will take into account the educational and social context of pupils' achievement in their admissions process.*

(2009, p.94)

The report does, however, acknowledge the lack of good data to demonstrate the success of widening participation strategies in terms of outcomes, and recommends better recording of details of pupils' backgrounds and the tracking of their progress year-on-year, 'in a format which enables a transparent

assessment of the effectiveness of widening participation expenditure at the individual university level' (2009, p.92).

Also in this era, Sir Martin Harris was commissioned to report on widening access to highly selective universities (Harris, 2010). Previous reports from the Sutton Trust and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (Sutton Trust, 2004; Sutton Trust, 2008; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills & Sutton Trust, 2009) had shown that even highly qualified students from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to apply to the most selective, research-led universities, and Harris urged early identification of, and guidance to increase aspiration and achievement for young people with potential to succeed. Although some of these selective universities are, of course, in Scotland, his main focus was on England, where, as Callender *et al.* (2009) demonstrate, students were often confused about the financial barriers to higher education and the availability of bursaries and scholarships. Harris's recommendations for extended outreach work with the most disadvantaged students also acknowledge the competing financial demands on universities' funds, to be allocated to bursaries for students struggling to pay fees or to general outreach work.

Equalities legislation was another priority for the New Labour Government. Since 2006, the Equality Challenge Unit, funded by Universities UK, GuildHE, HEFCE, HEFCW, the Scottish Funding Council and the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland, has been offering support to the HE sector across the UK and to colleges in Scotland to seek to ensure that legal requirements are met and that staff and students are not unfairly excluded, marginalised or disadvantaged. The major policy milestone in this area is the **Equality Act 2010**, which consolidated existing equality laws and defined the 'protected characteristics' of age, disability, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or any combination of these characteristics. For institutions, the duty to provide and monitor disability equality schemes, for example, has now been replaced by the requirement to produce a single equalities scheme and action plan, covering all protected characteristics. In admissions, as in all their other work with students and staff, universities have to take these aspects of fairness into account. Lewis *et al*. (2010) suggest that the Equality Act should not be seen as an additional administrative burden, but as:

> *'an ideal opportunity to administrators and academics to develop an inclusive culture. It can engage colleagues in dialogue that challenges traditional institutional structures and adopts a more personalised approach to widening participation.'*

<div align="right">(2010, p.22)</div>

Following the change of government in 2010, Alan Milburn, in his new role as advisor to the coalition government and independent reviewer on social mobility and child poverty, returned to considering the role of universities in improving social mobility. His report, *University challenge: how higher education can advance social mobility* (Milburn, 2012) was produced against a backdrop of rising fees, declining applications from both young people and mature students and government policy which was imposing a cap on total student numbers, proposing to focus growth on places for AAB+ students, to the potential detriment of students from less advantaged backgrounds, abolishing EMA and cutting funding for careers advice – all of which are noted critically in his foreword (2012, p. 7-9).

Several other related reports had appeared in 2011. Kintrea *et al*. (2011) had reported to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations. Through interviews with 490 school pupils aged around 13 in disadvantaged areas in Glasgow, Nottingham and London, and follow-up interviews with 288 of them two years later, the researchers explored factors affecting aspirations. Although they noted that successive governments had made use of the concept of aspirations in their policies, aiming either to reduce socioeconomic inequality or to improve the nation's economic competitiveness, Kintrea *et al*. argue for a different approach, taking into account their findings that:

- *aspirations are high, but uneven*
- *place matters*
- *higher aspirations are not enough*
- *aspirations are complex and require informed support*
- *individual aspirations are influenced by multiple mutually reinforcing factors*
- *parents are important.*

<div align="right">(2011, p. 67-70)</div>

The urgency of considering the role of higher education in promoting social mobility is also confirmed by several publications of the Sutton Trust. In particular, *Degrees of success* (O'Leary & Kendall, 2011), showed that 100 elite schools – just 3% of schools with sixth forms and sixth form colleges in the UK – accounted for over a tenth of admissions to highly selective universities over a three year period, and that four schools and one college produced more entrants to Oxford and Cambridge over that period than 2,000 other schools and colleges with two or fewer successful applicants to those universities (2011, p.3).

Milburn was not the only government appointee reporting in this period. Although many of its recommendations necessarily deal with student fees and funding in England, access was also the focus of Simon Hughes' report in his capacity as 'advocate for access to education', which urges better and earlier careers advice from age 13, and recommends business links and work experience for aspiring professionals in the sixth form, in schemes such as those run by the Social Mobility Foundation (Hughes, 2011, p. 21-22). Milburn's report takes a broader, longitudinal view of widening access, not focusing exclusively on 'getting ready' and 'getting in', but following through the issues of retention ('staying in') and support for establishing a career ('getting on'). Since in subsequent chapters considering the outcome agreements and the research published in journals, we shall be using this four-part structure to organise our findings, we shall return later to consider the contents of *University challenge* in more detail.

We noted above that the English *Aimhigher* programme was abolished in 2010: institutions now set their own widening participation priorities. Since 1999/2000 they have received funding allocations from HEFCE, with guidance rather than prescriptive direction on how it should be used. Recent research (Bowes *et al.*, 2013) was commissioned to provide systematic evidence of the way HEFCE funding for widening participation is currently deployed, exploring institutional perceptions of the impact the funding has had on outcomes and perceptions of the impact that a reduction in funding would have on their activities. Their findings may have some resonance in Scotland: for example, they found that widening access activities were targeted more than retention activities, which tend to be embedded in wider curriculum and support services; and that institutions tried to strike a balance between targeting support at groups that require it most and 'delivering an inclusive offer to ensure that all students are treated equally, are supported to succeed and are not stigmatised irrespective of their individual needs or circumstances' (2013, p.3). The activities which they found to be most effective included:

- work with schools and colleges to raise aspirations;
- activities exposing prospective students to the HE environment;
- pre-entry as well as on-programme academic and pastoral support; and
- provision of a disability support unit.

Although institutions monitored HESA data and sought feedback from participants in activities, the researchers found that 'most institutions appear not to be carrying out robust evaluations of longer term impact' (2013, p.4). They noted that institutions valued the flexibility they currently have, but some found benchmarking difficult; and reported that 'HEFCE are investigating the feasibility of introducing a monitoring and evaluation framework for WP, which may provide an opportunity to introduce a common set of metrics'(2013, p.67).

We end this section with current developments in policy in Scotland. Under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005, ministers were prevented from imposing terms and conditions on

university admissions, but in the pre-legislative consultation document, *Putting learners at the centre* (Scottish Government, 2011) proposals were made to impose financial penalties on institutions whose widening access activities were deemed insufficient. Since then, the Scottish Funding Council has been required to secure improved outcomes in higher education through outcome agreements, and widening access forms an important part of these agreements for 2012-2013, as we shall see in Chapter 5. Moreover, the clear message from the Policy Memorandum for the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill (Scottish Government, 2012a) is that ministers believe that more needs to be done, and that the Scottish Funding Council needs to provide incentives for more to be done:

> *'The broad policy objective for including this in the Bill is to improve participation in higher education institutions for currently under-represented socio-economic groups. The Bill seeks to allow Ministers to impose conditions relating to access to higher education for students from widening access backgrounds when providing funding to SFC.'*

<div align="right">(Scottish Government, 2012a, para 25)</div>

What is less clear is whether the terms 'under-represented socio-economic groups' and 'students from widening access backgrounds' are being used interchangeably, as if they were synonyms. But before we consider target groups here in the UK, we look briefly at policy and practice in other European countries.

Widening participation in Europe

The original Treaty of Rome in 1957 established the European Economic Community (EEC). This treaty focused on trade and did not include education beyond encouraging cooperation between member states. In relation to education, the emphasis was on training (Hingel, 2001) and recognition of formal qualifications as this was seen as helping to promote a mobile labour force (EC, 2006; Keeling, 2006). The focus on higher education came through the Bologna process which involved countries in the European Higher Education Area. In 1998, the Bologna declaration had 29 signatories and by 2010, 46 countries had signed up to its broad objectives. Its main emphasis has been on developing a common framework of qualifications and quality assurance. The social dimension was not initially emphasised but in 2001 a commitment was made to fostering greater social equality with regard to higher education participation. By 2007 it was noted that little progress had been made in this area and the London Communiqué reaffirmed 'the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background' (London Communiqué, 2007: 2.18). In 2009, it was agreed that countries should develop targets to measure widening participation (Leuven/Louvain-la Neuve Communiqué, 2009). In 2010, it was stated that 'the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations' (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2010, pp. 27/28). The report of 2010 noted:

- *The social dimension of higher education presents the most significant challenge to European cooperation as it is understood so differently from one country to another*
- *Very few countries have linked their policy on the social dimension to the Bologna commitment of raising the participation of underrepresented groups to the point where the higher education population mirrors the overall societal distribution*
- *Very few countries have set specific targets to improve the participation of under-represented groups in higher education, and only about half of the Bologna countries systematically monitor their participation*
- *The most common national measures to widen participation are the provision of targeted financial support and the development of alternative access routes and/or admission procedures.*

<div align="right">(Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2010, p. 27).</div>

There has been considerable progress in the Bologna process in the harmonisation of degree systems, quality assurance, the development of the qualifications framework and student mobility. However, the

development of fairer access for under-represented groups has been more patchy (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2010). It is argued by some that whilst the policies exist to support widening access initiatives there has been, according to Lažetić, 'little coherence in terms of implementation at the national and institutional level' (Lažetić, 2010, p. 550).

Difficulties of comparison also arise, in part because of differing school qualifications and entry qualifications required for university studies. The UK has a high proportion of students entering university via non-traditional routes and also a relatively high proportion (in European terms) of pupils leaving school with only lower secondary qualifications. In the Czech Republic around 95% of pupils have at least upper secondary qualifications, while only around 83% of UK school leavers attain this level (Eurostat, 2010). (Of course, countries are responsible for their own examination systems, and there is no means of assessing the extent to which qualifications attained in different countries are comparable). It is clear then that in countries where pupils leave school without the required university qualifications, there will be a greater need for alternative routes into higher education.

Comparisons between countries are also problematic because what constitutes an 'under-represented student' varies across the European countries, and in some countries there is no monitoring, making comparison between the countries difficult (see table 3). Scotland is not, then, the only country which has difficulty in agreeing measures for assessing progress in widening participation, and agreeing exactly who should count as a widening participation student. For further discussion of widening participation in Europe, see Weedon and Riddell (2012).

Table 3:   **Main categories monitored on social dimension as recorded in EACEA, 2010, in 12 European countries and Russia**

Country	Category/categories monitored
Austria	Educational background of parents; occupational type of parents; type of HE accession prerequisite; immigrants/migrant status; dependent children; special needs/handicapped
Belgium (Flanders)	Socio-economic status; migrant background; disability; gender
Bulgaria	Disabled students and students with low socioeconomic background (study free); orphans; people with disabilities; mothers of many children (3 or more)
Czech Republic	No monitoring
Estonia	Young people without sufficient knowledge of Estonian; people with physical disabilities; regional background; gender
Hungary	Disabled students; disadvantaged students; Roma students; students rearing a small child/family supporters/students with a large family
Ireland	Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including members of the Travelling Community and refugees; students with a disability; mature students
Lithuania	Students with low socio-economic background; students with disabilities
Norway	No monitoring
Russia	Disabled people; people from Chernobyl region; orphans; people without citizenship; migrants from the Commonwealth of independent states; foreign students
Slovenia	Gender; students from underdeveloped regions; Roma students; students with special needs
UK: England, Wales, Northern Ireland	Socio-economic class; young people in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) as a proxy measure of low income; geography (low participation neighbourhoods); gender; ethnicity' disability; type of school attended
UK: Scotland	Socio-economically disadvantaged; gender; ethnicity; disability; prior participation in higher education by a family member; age

Source: Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA, 2010)

In summary, there is a growing awareness of the need to develop measures to include fairer access to higher education for under-represented groups in Europe. However, progress has been slow in this area and there is limited data on widening participation as well as variation between countries in relation to who is an 'under-represented student'.

Who are the target groups?

Have the priorities changed, in terms of the potential client groups for widening participation in the UK? In her discussion of changing policy discourses on equity and diversity in UK higher education, Miriam David looks back on the Thatcherite expansions of education linked to economic needs, followed by the New Labour promotion of widening participation and fair access 'largely in terms of social groups, although broadly defined, and including social class, gender, ethnicity, disability and race' (2012, p.24). One manifestation of the Labour Government's commitment to gathering evidence on widening participation in the first decade of this century was the extensive ESRC and HEFCE funded Teaching and Learning Research Programme, with seven large research projects on this topic. Their outputs, including David *et al*. (2009), demonstrate the wide range of perceptions of disadvantage, and the different barriers and challenges which diverse entrants to HE and those who teach them may face. In his discussion paper highlighting the complexity of the portmanteau concept of widening participation, Watson (2007) quotes the inclusive definition of the research area which these seven projects were covering:

> *'Widening participation is taken to mean extending and enhancing access to HE experiences of people from so-called under-represented and diverse subject backgrounds, families, groups and communities and positively enabling such people to participate in and benefit from HE. People from socially disadvantaged families and/or deprived geographical areas, including deprived remote, rural and coastal areas or from families that have no prior experience of HE may be of key concern. Widening participation is also concerned with diversity in terms of ethnicity, gender, disability and social background in particular HE disciplines, modes and institutions. It can also include access and participation across the ages, extending conceptions of learning across the lifecourse, and in relation to family responsibilities, particularly by gender and maturity. '*

(Watson, 2007, p.4)

He also notes the subsequent addition of looked-after children as a further group at risk of being under-represented in higher education. The diversity of these target groups and the complexity of the factors - several of which may combine to affect the chances of any individual aspiring student - help explain why there is no simple, one-size-fits-all solution to the problem of widening participation. Moreover, David (2012) argues that 'as the second decade of the 21st century opened, the policy discourses around widening participation shifted towards a concern with social mobility rather than equity and diversity that underpinned previous policy agendas' (2012, p.22). Although musing in retrospect that she and her fellow authors (Arnot *et al*., 1999) may have been over-optimistic about the closing of the gender gap across all social classes, she notes Milburn's (2009) findings on the limitations of progress on social mobility into graduate professions, where there remained a glass ceiling for women in graduate professions (2012, p.32).

Other chapters in this same volume (Hinton-Smith, 2012) provide useful insights into the experiences of specific groups of non-traditional students at different stages of their higher education careers. These include Woodfield (2012) on mature female students; Hinton-Smith (2012) on lone parents' motivations for and hopes of higher education engagement; and Measor *et al*.(2012) on transitions to higher education, both for older students who already live independently and have an adult identity, and for those who live at home with their families of origin. Merrill (2012) uses interview data from non-traditional students, including overseas students struggling with additional language and cultural issues, to illustrate how hard it can be for them to stay the course and develop a learner identity; while Field and Morgan-Klein (2012) consider the importance of social support structures for retention and success, while noting 'the risk of ghettoisation' if non-normative students support one another, but fail to integrate with

the wider student group. The collected volume is a useful reminder of the diversity implied in the term 'widening participation student' and of the diversity of approaches that may be needed to help them succeed in higher education.

The current coalition government has adopted the broad goal of social mobility, seen as driven by financial ambitions, explaining in their White Paper, *Higher education: students at the heart of the system,* (2011) that:

> *'Our focus is on relative social mobility. For any given level of skill and ambition, regardless of a person's background, everyone should have a fair chance of getting the job they want or reaching a higher income bracket.'*

<div align="right">(Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2011, p. 54)</div>

In all parts of the UK, the principal focus of the widening access agenda is social class, with other social characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, disability, and age accorded lower priority. Whilst some might feel that there is an over-emphasis on socio-economic status, it is clearly the case that differences in social class in higher education participation are much greater than those associated with gender, ethnicity and disability (National Equality Panel, 2010). In addition, social class intersects with all other social characteristics, so that, for example, although women are in general more likely to participate in higher education than men, young men and women from more socially advantaged backgrounds, as measured by NS-SEC or SIMD, have roughly equal (and very high) chances of going to university, whilst the converse is the case for young men and women from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Conclusion

This brief review of policy has demonstrated how the motivation for Governments to promote widening access have changed over the last five decades, reflecting both demographic change and Governments' political priorities, both in the UK and in other European countries. The diversity of the groups who remain under-represented in higher education, however, and the complexity of the factors which may hinder their educational progress, suggest that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to the persistent problem of widening participation in higher education, and no one single measure, be it SIMD or NS-SEC, which can be used with confidence to target those who might benefit from outreach activities and additional support.

CHAPTER 4: DOES THE LITERATURE TELL US WHAT WORKS?

This chapter considers the recent literature about widening participation, with an emphasis on empirical research into initiatives designed to help non-traditional students to, in Milburn's (2012) terms, get ready for higher education, get in, stay in and move on to employment or postgraduate study. We begin with literature reviews and papers which span across several of these four stages, raising general questions about how policy is implemented and provoking debates about how outcomes are evaluated. We then present an analysis of the types of students discussed in the recent literature, before turning to the research on the four stages.

Methodological debates and general questions

Gorard *et al.* (2006) produced a substantial literature review of widening participation research, concentrating on the concept of barriers to participation and success. They note that there are inequalities in HE, for example, by socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity, but no clear datasets to substantiate the extent, and suggest that, consequently, research tends to focus on new, young and full-time students. They distinguish between *situational barriers*, such as direct and indirect costs, lack of time, distance from a learning opportunity; *institutional barriers*, such as admissions procedures, timing and scale of provision, lack of institutional flexibility; and *dispositional barriers*,

> *'in the form of an individual's motivation and attitudes to learning, which may be caused by a lack of learning opportunities (e.g. for leisure or informally), or poor previous educational experiences.'*
>
> (Gorard *et al.*, 2006, p.5)

The metaphor of barriers may suggest something that may be mechanically removed. Some may indeed be relatively easily removed or lowered by changes to institutional practice, for example, while others, such as personal attitudes to learning, or indeed the attitudes of those who might encourage a young person to enter higher education, are harder to detect and less susceptible to removal by external intervention. Burke (2012) in her critique of the Schwartz report, notes that:

> *'the focus on barriers overshadows concerns with sociocultural dimensions of access, concentrating primarily on material and concrete issues (such as financial matters), largely ignoring the cultural and discursive practices that produce complex misrecognitions and exclusions in the process of judging who has 'potential' for a particular course of study.'*
>
> (2012, p.123)

Closer to home, the Scottish Parliament Spice Briefing on *Barriers to widening access to higher education* (Mullen, 2010) highlights many factors which may act as barriers, but acknowledges the difficulty of establishing causality:

> *'Without tracking these people throughout their educational life (and possibly their career paths), it is virtually impossible to say comprehensively which policy interventions are most effective at improving access and which ones work less well. This is a problem particularly with targeting resources at school pupils.'*
>
> (2010, p. 11)

In their review, Gorard *et al.* (2006) consider evidence from research on the life stage before HE, transition to HE, learning, teaching and supporting students' success in HE, the implications for organisational change required for the access and retention of non-traditional students, and their destinations after graduation, in the labour market or in postgraduate study. They identify considerable gaps requiring further research, especially on part-time students, non-participants, early life factors affecting educational opportunity, students with disabilities, looked-after students, local students living at home and groups of ethnic minority students.

Throughout the report, they seem disappointed that they cannot glean definite evidence of what works, even expressing regret in their conclusions that they 'encountered no randomised controlled trials (in fact no trials of any kind)' (2006, p.115). We use here their consideration of the literature on pre-entry interventions in summer schools, as an example to illustrate their dissatisfaction with the methodologies of their fellow researchers. They comment that much of the research on school interventions explores staff and pupils' perceptions of interventions, as opposed to their effectiveness, complaining that some studies of summer schools indicate that they encourage students to consider progressing to higher education, but lack data on how many subsequently enter and how this differs from the progression rates of non-participating students (2006, p.32).

By contrast, Gorard *et al.* are less critical of longitudinal studies (2006, p.34), including some which traced progression through the *Aimhigher* programme in England, which was designed to raise both aspirations and attainment amongst school pupils and encourage widening participation in higher education. Morris *et al.* (2005) conducted a large scale evaluation involving young people, schools, further education colleges, HE institutions and *Aimhigher* partnerships, using regression techniques to identify small associations between policy interventions and pupil attainment. Interventions which had higher than expected impact on levels of attainment included:

- being identified as part of a targeted cohort,
- participating in summer schools and university visits and
- discussing HE with university staff and students, friends and family.

Emmerson *et al.* (2005) took a similar longitudinal approach, in relation to *Aimhigher* Excellence Challenge pre-16 interventions, using comparisons between participating and non-participating schools, concluding that being part of *Aimhigher* had a positive impact on attainment in Year 9 (the third year of secondary education in England), but did not increase the number intending to progress to HE at that stage. Two years later, however, they found that in Year 11, both attainment and aspirations had increased.

Debates on methodology pervade the recent literature. Baker *et al.* (2006) are critical of research into widening participation in which, they perceive:

> *'students' accounts of their experiences are taken as if they were a systematic analysis of higher education institutions and result in an individualistic analysis of the problems related to access and progression'*
>
> (2006, p. 169)

They suggest that this approach which may risk 'demonizing higher education institutions and their staff' (p.180). Drawing on their experience of conducting the extensive literature review (Gorard *et al.*, 2006) discussed above, Gorard and Smith (2006) highlight what they see as 'widespread problems' in research into widening participation, including:

> *'pseudo-research, poor quality reporting of research, deficiencies in datasets, analytical error, a lack of suitable comparators, obfuscation, a lack of scepticism in general, and the regular misattribution of causal links in particular'*
>
> (2006, p.575)

They suggest that evidence based research should lead to consideration of two questions:

- *is it the most plausible explanation for the evidence presented?*
- *does it change our prior beliefs at all?*

> (2006, p.592)

Their approach and conclusions are, however, contested. The same issues are discussed in Doyle and Griffin's (2012) article on the impact of *Aimhigher*, entitled 'Raising aspirations and attainment?' They argue that the impact of *Aimhigher*:

'needs to be seen within debates around 'evidence' and particularly the contested area of 'evidence-based practice' throughout the whole of New Labour's pragmatic, but possibly reductive preoccupation with 'what works''

<div align="right">(2012, p.77)</div>

Doyle and Griffin attempt to offer a broader perspective than Gorard *et al.*'s (2006) critique of widening participation research, which they perceive:

'has left a legacy that at worst undermines potentially important and valid interventions, the impact of which cannot be captured in the simple linear causal terms that satisfy their epistemological position.'

<div align="right">(2012, p.78)</div>

Citing many other papers on the impact of *Aimhigher*, including Hatt *et al.* (2005), McCaig *et al.* (2006), Hatt *et al.* (2007) and Morris *et al.* (2009), Doyle and Griffin demonstrate that evidence of positive impacts of the programme 'points to at least correlations with improved attainment and aspiration-raising' (2012, p. 81). They also note, however, that the collaborative approach in partnerships made it difficult to disentangle the impact of *Aimhigher* from that of other interventions. Paradoxically, although the development of local partnerships may be seen as a positive strength of the programme, enabling interventions to be tailored to local needs, the *local* character of the evidence of its success that was gathered created difficulties in evaluating the programme on a *national* level, and this may ultimately have been a contributory factor in the decision taken by the coalition government to abandon it. There are clearly relevant lessons for Scotland from the *Aimhigher* experience, if efforts are made to evaluate local partnerships by nationwide criteria. We shall have more to say about the substance of the *Aimhigher* programme, as opposed to the methodology used in its evaluation, in the section below on *Getting Ready*.

Another literature review which spans several stages of the widening participation student's career is Sanders and Higham (2012). They take as the theme of their literature review the role of higher education students in widening access, retention and success, considering over eighty reports and articles on projects which have engaged students in the delivery of programmes or in student ambassador, tutor or peer mentoring roles – roles which may have benefits both for the mentors and the mentees. They cite Clark and Andrews' (2011) evidence of 340 broad programmes across 159 UK institutions, of which around one third are targeted at specific groups such as widening participation students, mature, students or disabled students. Ylonen (2011) describes how the HE sector increasingly relies on the student workforce to deliver visit days, summer schools and curriculum based activities for prospective students. Sanders and Higham (2012) consider the roles, skills, training and support structures and beneficial outcomes for the student workforce, and also look for evidence of their impact on widening participation and retention. They found some evidence of increased rates of retention and progression amongst learners who had received support from HE students, but, like many others researchers in this field, note the difficulty of assessing the impact of single interventions, particularly when multiple factors and activities are potentially influencing rates of retention and success (2012, p.21).

We also found a range of articles based not on empirical studies, but on a broader discussion of the **meaning of widening participation** and on research into it. Four articles (Saunders, 2004; Bibbings, 2006; Watts, 2006; Clayton, 2012) focus on the moral and / or legal implications of widening access policies. Others critique policy approaches: for example, Jones and Thomas (2005) distinguish two current approaches to widening participation policy, the 'academic' approach to widening participation policy, which seeks to attract gifted young people into an unreformed HE sector, and the 'utilitarian' approach which advocates curricular reform, primarily to meet the needs of the labour market. They advocate instead a 'transformative' approach focusing on the needs of under-represented groups, rather than on elite entry or employability. Archer (2007) discusses the rhetoric of 'diversity' in the New Labour policy discourse around widening participation. She argues that these constructions of diversity derive symbolic power from an association with notions of 'equality', but that:

'this common-sense linkage (between equality' and 'diversity') is conceptually untenable within New Labour policy and practice due to a privileging of the economic, the pursuit of institutional diversity, and the use of the market within higher education.'

(2007, p.635)

A diversity of students in HE should, therefore, not be taken as an indicator of greater 'equality' in the system. Hale (2006) notes that government policy of increasing participation was justified on grounds of individual benefit, the national economic interest and as part of a moral agenda of promoting equality of opportunity, examines some empirical findings and concludes that widening participation in higher education cannot compensate for social and educational disadvantage, and is ineffectual in promoting equality of opportunity. Walker (2008) proposes reconceptualising widening participation as widening capability, rather than in terms of 'economically driven human capital outcomes' (2008, p. 267).

Other articles examined took a **historical approach**. Lewis (2002) traces widening participation policy from 1980 to 2001, ending with an interesting statement of HEFCE's expectations for the twenty-first century at that point:

'While it is apparent that increases in post-16 staying on rates will be the major factor driving growth in student numbers, the Council is nevertheless clear that this should not deflect the endeavours of those with missions to attract mature students.'

(2002, p.218)

Davies (2003) considers the history of the slow development of European Union policies to support widening participation. Greenbank (2006) surveys policy on widening participation in relation to social class in England from Robbins (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) through Dearing (1997) to the passing of the Higher Education Act in 2004. He perceives a lack of participation in policy formulation by certain groups, particularly those affected by widening participation policy. Kettley's (2007) interest is in the history of research into widening participation, rather than just the history of policy. He concludes that past research has been shaped by the current political debates around higher education, the structure of the sector and predominant sociological perspectives of the time, and consequently has provided incomplete accounts of the barriers to higher education, failing to explore fully the relationship between students' social characteristics, learning experiences and university careers. Kettley's advice to present and future researchers is to avoid replicating these mistakes by designing 'empirical, holistic and mixed methods projects' (2007, p. 345).

Other articles deal with **putting policy into practice**. Pugh, Coates and Adnett (2005) assess critically the development of performance monitoring in HE and suggest refinements to avoid the danger of simply redistributing non-traditional students across institutions, rather than genuinely widening access:

'Government policy needs to reassess whether the key objective is to reallocate under-represented groups of entrants between universities or to increase the overall participation rates of those groups.'

(2005, p.35)

Osborne (2003) expressed similar concerns in his overview of increasing or widening participation in higher education across Europe in the late twentieth century, questioning the intentions and effectiveness of some countries' interventions, and noting that:

'improving access is one thing, but ensuring progression both within and beyond higher education is another. It is clear that many more people in Europe now benefit from increased and wider participation. However, gains may not be as widespread as champions of access would wish, and equity in terms of entry to higher education is differentially spread'

(2003, p.18)

Fisher (2012) focuses on staff development activities to support widening participation, in particular working with vocational learners in the Western Vocational Lifelong Learning Network at the University of Bath. Morgan-Klein (2003) explores the practical issues and difficulties around providing flexibility

and access in higher education in Scotland, while Menter *et al*. (2006) attempt to set out a rationale for widening access to create a teaching profession that is demographically representative of the wider population.

Several articles centre on the **financial barriers**, either during students' studies (Adnett, 2006; Callender, 2010) or in their expectations of the graduate labour market (Adnett & Slack, 2007). Most recently, Harrison and Hatt (2012) seriously question the effectiveness of bursary schemes operated locally by individual universities for widening participation. They focus on English universities schemes, but argue that the thrust of their argument about the limited impact of bursary schemes will apply in other UK countries. They review evidence which suggests that the students from lower socio-economic groups targeted for bursaries are often unresponsive to financial inducements, and go beyond the suggestion by Callender *et al*. (2009) and Harris (2010) that better dissemination of information about bursaries and simply more time for schemes to mature will make a difference. On the evidence of studies with widening participation students, Harrison and Hatt argue that:

> *'the whole conceptualisation of the market is flawed. It over-emphasises the mobility of students, ignoring the factors that constrain choice, especially among the very groups that the policy targets. Students from lower socio-economic groups and from minority ethnic communities remain significantly less likely to move away from their home area, limiting the range of universities (and hence, bursaries) available to them. Anxiety about social comfort continues to act as a powerful barrier to progression to elite universities.'*

(2012, p. 707)

Types of students mentioned in the empirical literature

Having referred briefly in Chapter 3 to the diversity of groups targeted by widening participation initiatives, we present here an analysis of key groups found in the empirical studies we reviewed. Three broad, though overlapping, categories were identified in the empirical papers: non-traditional students; special attention groups; and specific subject groups.

1:   Non-traditional students

Pring *et al*. (2009) describe – within the English context – progressing from good GSCEs to good A-levels and then to full-time university study as the 'royal route' to higher education. Most policy makers followed the 'royal route' themselves and incentives given to attend higher education are mostly of benefit towards those who are already on the this route, leading to persisting inequalities and social stratifications, even in times of mass higher education (Gallacher, 2006b). Some articles found were concerned with those who did not or will not come in through this route. Non-traditional students may face additional difficulties in adjusting to being a student in higher education (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002; Hoelscher *et al*., 2008; Pryjmachuk *et al*., 2008; Round *et al*., 2012).

Some students who are underprepared to enter a degree course may follow specific preparation courses, summer schools or widening access courses (Walker, 2000; Heenan, 2002; Holmes, 2002; Christie *et al*., 2005; Hill *et al*., 2006; Jones, 2006; Burke, 2007). Others enter through further education (O'Hara & Bingham, 2004; Knox, 2005; Bingham & O'Hara, 2007; Hoelscher *et al*., 2008; Cree *et al*., 2009; McCune *et al*., 2010; Round *et al*., 2012; Wood, 2012). Mature students, defined as 21 and over (UCAS, 2013), are also classed as non-traditional. The literature suggests that these students may have difficulty dealing with the student identity or struggle to combine full- or part-time work as a student with other responsibilities such as paid work and child care (McAleavy *et al*., 2004; Pokorny & Pokorny, 2005; Do *et al*., 2006; Jones, 2006; MacDonald & Stratta, 2001; Alsop *et al*., 2008). Because of balancing these roles and because of lack of financial resources, these students may choose part-time courses (Callender, 2011).

2:   Special attention groups

A second group of students is distinguished not by their entry qualifications, but by socio-economic and / or socio-demographic characteristics. The 'higher education population' does not reflect the class structures in society (Gallacher, 2006b). Disabled students (Taylor, 2004; Riddell et al., 2005), those living in deprived areas (Do *et al.*, 2006; Bradley & Miller, 2010; Harrison & Hatt, 2010; Mangan *et al.*, 2010; Singleton, 2010; Miller & Smith, 2011; Round *et al.*, 2012), students from ethnic minority backgrounds (Seyan *et al.*, 2004; Smith & White, 2011; Stuart *et al.*, 2011; Tight, 2012), Muslim women (Thompson, 2008) and those from working class backgrounds with parents with low educational qualifications (Hatt *et al.*, 2005; Do *et al.*, 2006; Bradley & Miller, 2010; Mangan *et al.*, 2010; Devas, 2011; Miller & Smith, 2011) are less likely to participate in higher education compared to those from middle class backgrounds and may need more support during their studies. Tight (2012) made an overview of widening participation since 1945, based on HESA data and concludes that while women, people from ethnic minority groups and mature adults have made considerable progress in entering higher education, pupils' from lower socio-economic backgrounds are still lagging behind.

3:   Specific subject groups

The third group is based on the course subjects. While physical sciences and medical courses are least likely to attract students from under-represented groups, the opposite is true for courses in education, social work and nursing. A set of articles focuses specifically on admission procedures in medical courses and how students from under-represented groups fail to participate or choose less prestigious courses (Holmes, 2002; Seyan *et al.,* 2004; Kamali *et al.*, 2005; Do *et al.*, 2006; James *et al.*, 2008). Research by Smith and White (2011) using UCAS data from 1986 to 2009 concluded that widening participation policies have had little impact on the social composition of the full-time UK science undergraduate population in that period, with the physical sciences, for example, still recruiting predominantly white, traditional-age students from professional or managerial backgrounds.

Another set of articles deals with education-related subjects (O'Hara & Bingham, 2004; Bingham & O'Hara, 2007; Hughes, 2007; Knight, 2007; Moran, 2008; Price & Kadi-Hanifi, 2011), social work (Forrester-Jones & Hatzidimitriadou, 2006; Dillon, 2007; Cree *et al.*, 2009; Moriarty *et al.*, 2009; Manthorpe *et al.*, 2010; Gordon *et al.*, 2011) and nursing courses (Hill *et al.*, 2006; McLaughlin *et al.*, 2008; Pryjmachuk *et al.*, 2008). These students are much more likely to come in by non-traditional routes and are predominantly female.

There is thus a considerable overlap between the groups we identified. Those in the second group are more likely to have the 'educational participation characteristics' of the first group, and are more likely to participate in teacher education, social sciences or nursing rather than in physical sciences or medicine.

We turn now to review the recent literature under Milburn's four themes: getting ready, getting in, staying in and getting on.

Getting ready

Milburn describes 'getting ready' as '*the outreach activity which universities undertake to improve attainment and aspiration, and to help potential students make the right choices*' (Milburn, 2012, p.3).

Our first group of papers explores **why potential students may need this help**. Progression to higher education is the result of a complex decision-making process (Pring *et al.*, 2009). In deciding whether to participate or not, potential students have to weigh options such as the location and the reputation of the university, the subject of their preferred course and the opportunities for subsequent employment. One possible explanation is that the decision-making process is based on a cost-benefit analysis (Allingham, 2002). Students face direct and indirect costs, such as buying course materials, paying enrolment fees

(although not in Scotland for Scottish students) and paying for transport and accommodation, and may not be able to combine paid work with studying. Although research has shown that a higher education degree has positive effects on people's well-being and earnings, the initial investment cost might be too high (Hoskins *et al.*, 2010). Another explanation explores the lack of aspiration and self-efficacy and the lack of understanding of what higher education is, because it is not part of the family 'habitus', referring to Bourdieu's notion of values and dispositions acquired through everyday life's participation in specific social structures. It implies that the role of parents in the decision-making is very significant (Bourdieu, 1984; Reay *et al.*, 2005).

The next group of papers focuses specifically on the **positive impact of the *Aimhigher* project**, which aimed to target potential students from under-represented groups throughout England. Hatt *et al.* (2005) investigated whether *Aimhigher* succeeded in this aim. In a sample of over 500 students who participated in *Aimhigher* initiatives in Southwest England, 80% had parents without experience of higher education and 83% achieved at least five GCSE grades A*-C. Targeting was evaluated as positive as it reached those from lower socio-economic backgrounds who had shown 'potential to benefit' through their GSCE achievement. In the same project, Baxter *et al.* (2007) investigated pupils' responses towards these widening participation initiatives in Southwest England by tracking these students who participated in at least one *Aimhigher* initiative between 2000 and 2003. Students, parents and teachers felt enthusiastic about the initiatives and students showed positive attitudes towards higher education. They valued *Aimhigher* as a good source providing information about study and career options. Being informed about career options was especially important for students from working class backgrounds who feared falling into debt. Teachers were well informed about the target groups *Aimhigher* wanted to reach – e.g. those with parents without experience of higher education – and were positive about the integration between the *Aimhigher* initiatives and the schools' equal opportunities and diversity policies.

Miller and Smith (2011) evaluated *Aimhigher* in Herefordshire and Worcestershire, using quantitative data supplied by *Aimhigher* offices and additional interviews with professionals in schools, colleges and *Aimhigher* offices. Some problems were identified, such as the failure to target white boys who lived in the 'better' areas, but had parents with lower levels of education. Nevertheless, staff members in schools perceived that *Aimhigher* was successful in raising aspirations within a relatively low cost framework, had a positive impact on pupils' feelings about higher education and helped them to make informed choices. Miller and Smith noted that the initiatives seemed well managed, both in terms of budget and interventions and that HEFCE figures showed that more pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds made the transition towards participation in higher education, which might be at least partially attributable to *Aimhigher*.

The now defunct *Aimhigher* programme in England is also the subject of Moore and Dunworth's (2011) review of evidence of the 'impact of *Aimhigher* partnerships on the educational progression, attainment and the aspirations of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds' (2011, p.1). The complexity of their task is even greater than our own current task: with 42 partnerships (in contrast to the four in Scotland), designed 'to create the conditions for clear co-ordination without blanket prescription and with the freedom to create projects that suit local needs', *Aimhigher* generated a profusion of evidence, from which it is almost impossible to draw any firm conclusions about cause and effect. For example, in their conclusions about evidence of progression outcomes, Moore and Dunworth comment:

> *'For learners from the most disadvantaged areas, the chances of entering higher education increased by a third to a half of entering by age 20 years, and for vocational learners the change was found to be even higher from a lower starting point. Issues of causality are problematic as it has not proved possible to control for other factors, aside from Aimhigher support, which may have an effect on the young people.'*
>
> (2011, p.11)

Despite some evidence in the empirical literature that *Aimhigher* had positive effects on pupils' aspirations and decision-making, the closure of the scheme was announced by universities' minister David Willetts in November 2010 (Times Higher Education, 2010). Responsibility for widening

participation, by organising summer schools and by granting scholarships and fee waivers, would pass to the universities.

In the remainder of this section we consider several **other successful interventions assisting access to HE** for under-represented groups.

Walker *et al*. (2004) looked at the success of the *Top Up* programme in preparing 17 and 18 year old pupils from schools with low participation rates to enter the University of Glasgow. Between January and April, pupils had twelve interactions with university tutors, three sessions on the campus and nine in school. The focus of the programme was taking part in lectures, preparing a seminar paper and searching for information, helping students develop academic skills before entry to HE. Evidence of the effectiveness of *Top Up* was based on the perceptions of the students who saw the preparation as highly relevant and very supportive in making their transition to university, and also on the fact that those who did succeed in progression to higher education obtained higher grades than those who did not participate in the programme. Although pupils from schools with low participation rates were still less likely to proceed to HE and had a higher drop-out rate, *Top Up* seemed able to combat under-preparedness and to raise aspirations.

Craft *et al*. (2008) explored the 'Aspire' pilot, a project funded by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) carried out at the Open University. The project took place with pupils aged 11-18 and aimed to increase their creativity and dynamic engagement with educated related topics, which are attributes related to being successful in higher education. The intervention increased learners' agency, pupils were highly motivated and teachers reported improved quality of work. Although the 'Aspire' pilot was perceived as a successful project in raising aspirations and attributes among pupils, it is unclear from the paper whether the project succeeded in widening participation in higher education.

Closer to home, Gorard *et al*. (2006, p.34-5) also noted the tracking of Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS) students through to the first year of higher education by Sinclair and McClements (2004), who interviewed 928 pupils, and tracked 328 of them who went to institutions in the region, finding that no individual factor had a statistically significant effect, but that a combination of previous qualifications, family background, summer school attendance and subject studied might be significant. This work was later extended by Paula McClements (2006) using a data set based on anonymised LEAPS student records of 1455 students who entered university from 2001-2004 up to their academic status at the end of 2004/05. She faced methodological challenges tracking students across several institutions, but the evidence shows that:

> *'LEAPS summer school works. It is already oversubscribed and LEAPS staff have to make difficult decisions regarding which students can and cannot be accommodated.'*
>
> (2006, p.63)

She also concluded that the study had shown qualifications to be a strong predictor of success, particularly for males, and advocated focused student support if entry requirements were relaxed; but the data also show that students who were relatively poorly qualified could perform well, and therefore HEIs need to continue to look beyond qualifications as a sole measure of capability. She also noted that the study suggests that dropping out should not always be seen as negative for the students, and highlighted the potential of using the LEAPS data to target additional support for first year students.

Some of the interventions described above focus on the cooperation between different institutions. Partnerships are often mentioned and Murphy and Fleming (2003) also focus on the success universities can achieve if they invest in inter-institutional collaborations and work together with schools and other providers in the local community in order to target groups with the aim to reduce their social exclusion. Another example of institutions dealing with policy messages is the fact that legislations and quality assurance regimes seemed to have some impact on making HE more accessible for students with an impairment (Riddell *et al.,* 2007).

Getting in

Milburn's definition of '*getting in*' is '*the admission processes and criteria which universities use*' (Milburn, 2012, p.3).

We begin with some recent **research-based reports which seek to promote good practice** in admissions for under-represented groups and to provide ideas, tools and case studies for higher education staff wishing to improve their widening access practice. In addition to producing statistical reports on progress towards equality in higher education (ECU, 2011), the Equality Challenge Unit collaborated with Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) in the production of *Equitable admissions for underrepresented groups* (ECU, 2012) taking account of the new legal considerations for universities following the Equality Act 2010. It is designed as guidance for admissions tutors, heads of widening participation and many other academic and administrative personnel, but also presents case studies of good practice researched in a range of institutions.

In the same year SPA published a substantial research report on the use of contextual data in admissions in a sample of universities and colleges throughout the UK, *Fair admissions to higher education* (Bridger *et al.*, 2012). The researchers found that the way in which contextual data and wider contextual information is used varies considerably, and concluded that 'the use of contextual data is most effective when used as part of a holistic admissions process' (2012, p.iii). They identified research gaps which need to be investigated to increase confidence in the relationship between contextual data and student performance outcomes, and noted the perceived reluctance amongst institutions to utilise the basket of contextual data made available to them through UCAS. The wording of their first recommendation suggests awareness of the political issues in the introduction of the use of contextual data:

> '*Although it has clear implications for widening participation and increasing social mobility, we recommend that the use of contextual data should primarily be promoted as good professional practice in admissions, contributing to a fair, equitable and consistent approach in which admissions decision makers have as full a picture as possible of each applicant.*'
>
> (2012, p.viii)

More recently, SPA (2013) reported on its survey on the use of contextual data in admissions, to which 67 institutions replied in 2012, revealing that its use is widespread, but institutional practice varies widely and that the impact of contextual data:

> '*is wider than the direct impact on applicants. Some institutions although not using the data in admissions will be using the contextual data provided by UCAS for monitoring purposes; this is likely to be linked to tracking and monitoring their Access Agreement (or similar arrangements outside England) and/or their equality schemes.*'
>
> (2013, p.8)

SPA is also a source of guidance on admissions policies (e.g. SPA, 2009) and continues to monitor issues raised in the Schwartz report and issue updated reports (SPA Fair Admission Task and Finish Group, 2012). It is also planning further research on the evidence base for contextual admissions, to be reported later in 2013.

The Sutton Trust's publications are not exclusively aimed at admissions or widening participation professionals, but some are highly relevant here. Jones (2012) analysed 309 personal statements on UCAS forms, all of which were submitted to the same department of the same Russell Group university by students with the same A level results, and found big differences in presentation and in content, reflecting the support which candidates from different educational backgrounds had received in preparing those statements. He challenges the assumption that the personal statement brings 'greater fairness to university admissions processes' and reports that school type is 'an accurate predictor of key features that may affect admissions tutors' decisions. In the sample, these advantages translate into improved outcomes' (2012, p.5). He reports that 70% of independent school applicants, but only 50% from

comprehensives or colleges secured their place. These findings have obvious implications for universities seeking to widen access.

Other recent relevant research from the Sutton Trust includes Hawdon's (2012) report on tracking the decision-making of high achieving higher education applicants, which distinguishes three mindsets:

- *determined-decided:* *("I'll get the best I can")*
- *determined-decisive:* *("I'll get the best for me")*
- *contingent:* *("I'll get the best I think I can")*

(Hawdon, 2012, p. 7)

Hoare and Mann's (2012) report on the impact of the Sutton Trust's summer schools found that summer school attendees were more likely to engage with the university application process, with 93% of attendees applying to – and 84% registering at – university, compared with 88% and 68% respectively for unsuccessful applicants to the programme. They also conclude that summer schools make the biggest difference to the outcomes for the poorest students (2012, p. 2).

Finally, we note the *Toolkits for Practitioners*, produced under the banner of Higher Education Outreach to Widen Participation and published by HEFCE (Dent *et al.*, 2012). They aim to provide guidance, materials and ideas for the development of widening participation programmes, materials that are useful for strategic leaders and practical tools for those involved in delivering the programmes. They comprise five documents: an overview, and booklets on partnership, targeting, programmes and evaluation.

Several papers in our search dealt with **transitions from further education to higher education,** describing successful interventions in preparing students to go to university and to assisting them through the admission procedures. Holmes (2002) conducted research on the transition between an access to medicine course in colleges and medical schools at universities. A one-year full-time course, open to students aged 21 and above, covered biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, statistics and medical geography. The intervention was monitored over three years in which the successful admissions to medical schools increased from 64% to 85%. Apart from the increased progression, monitoring the programme over several years gave staff members the chance to adapt the curriculum and assessment methods towards the needs of the students.

Taylor (2004) explored initiatives to make transition between further and higher education more successful for disabled students. Taylor's team developed progression routes between FE and HE for these students, by setting up partnerships with medical, nursing and therapy teams and constructing flexible modes of study. Furthermore, they communicated with both FE and HE staff members to increase their awareness of the needs of disabled students. Specific interventions included summer schools, partnership days setting up a dialogue between students, HE and FE staff, insight weeks to make FE students familiar with the HE ethos and information events for staff members. Evidence of the success of the intervention is provided by the fact that over a three-year period, the number of disabled students making a successful transition between FE and HE in this setting tripled.

Knox (2005) looked at the transition between FE and HE at the University of the West of Scotland, which designed the credit-based summer school module *'Next steps at university'* for those who want to enter university based on their FE qualifications. At the time of conducting this piece of research, 103 students had successfully completed the module. As workload, delivery modes and assessment regimes vary between FE and HE, it is vital that students who want to make the transition are well prepared to succeed. Students were taught to understand the importance of widening participation policies, to become better at academic writing and communication, to use academic sources such as libraries and online references, to understand how organisations work and how that will affect their employability, and to enhance their personal development and skills for independent learning. In general, Knox argues that the module worked well as successful transitions were achieved and performances of these students in HE are above average with more students obtaining a first or upper second class degree upon exit.

Research by Hill *et al.* (2006) explored how 'progression agreements' help students from FE colleges make the transition to university. Colleges provided Access to Nursing and Access to Health and Social Care Profession courses in partnership with Kingston and St George's in London. The progression agreement contained objectives broadly referring to the aim of widening participation and increasing lifelong learning among under-represented groups, meeting the needs of these students, providing support for staff members, providing clear information and advice to students, collaborating on curriculum development and design, and developing a high skilled workforce in the region. Specific initiatives were developed for FE students on these access courses such as Open Day visits to university, contact with previous students of the programme, networking with university staff during time at FE college, information on admission criteria, help in preparing application documents, training in interview skills and a study skills weekend. The progression agreements were perceived as successful in raising aspirations and offering help in pre-entry preparations and admissions. Furthermore, it raised the awareness of staff regarding the needs of students who enter with FE qualifications. More insight may be needed on the impact on student achievement and retention.

Bingham and O'Hara (2007) – and similarly O'Hara and Bingham (2004) – looked at the transitions from FE to HE among those who undertook an Advanced Diploma, a Higher National Certificate (HNC) or a Higher National Diploma (HND) course related to childcare and education and who wanted to enrol for a BA in Early Childhood at Sheffield Hallam University. A 'Building Pathways Partnership' was set up between the university and the local colleges to increase aspirations amongst students from under-represented groups and assist them in making the transition to university by providing them with the necessary information and study skills. Bingham and O'Hara found these students well-motivated and once at university, their attainment was satisfactory, with good retention records and final degree classifications similar to those who came in with A levels. This result is positive as it suggests that widening access is possible without lowering academic standards.

Research by Kamali *et al.* (2005) assessed whether offering assistance to students who want to apply to medical schools would have positive effect on the number of offers. Students received advice from undergraduate students on writing their personal statement and the section on extracurricular activities for their UCAS application. They were also able to participate in mock interviews. A subgroup of students received practical support in drafting the application. The help was targeted towards applicants from socio-economically deprived areas. Evidence of the success of the intervention is shown by the fact that the number of offers rose, although more steeply among those who received practical support on top of the advice.

Jones (2006) considers both quantitative data from admissions statistics and qualitative data from interviews and focus groups about students' progression from an Access course to a Diploma in Social Work (Dip SW) course in higher education. These mature learners from the Access course were more likely than any other group on the Dip SW course to have left school without formal qualifications, and at the start of the Dip SW, tended to gain lower marks than their colleagues, but by the end of the second year of the Dip SW they had closed the gap. Jones notes 'a sense of quiet confidence and determination in the face of adversity' (2006, p. 493) amongst the former Access students, who valued the mutual support of colleagues who had come through the same route as themselves. Jones stresses the importance of valuing and nurturing Access and other non-standard entrants to social work, having found that Access students brought enthusiasm, dedication and commitment and felt strongly that 'their own experiences of educational and social disadvantage give them particular insights into the need of users of social care services' (2006, p.497). The research showed that creating interventions in which students from non-traditional backgrounds with non-traditional qualifications get the chance to participate in HE is important in valuing and nurturing the potential of these students.

Staying in

Milburn defines 'staying in' as '*the work of student services and bursaries in improving rates of retention at university*' (Milburn, 2012, p.3).

Robert Jones' (2008) synthesis of research on student retention and success lists over 200 reports, practical guides and articles. Not all of these relate to widening participation students: the author seeks to refute in his introduction:

> '*the largely unfounded belief that the consequence of widening participation is a decline in student retention and thus increased exposure to risk for institutions.*'

(2008, p.2)

He cites the international evidence gathered by Thomas and Quinn (2006) demonstrating that students from lower socio-economic groups do not necessarily have lower rates of success than the majority. He also notes that most measures, policy and research relate to full-time student retention and that there is lack of clarity about the meanings of retention and success for part-time students, interrupted or partial patterns of participation being generally perceived in terms of individual or institutional failure (2008, p.2) Jones' discussion of research focuses on:

- establishing rates of withdrawal and retention;
- factors contributing to early withdrawal, including preparation for higher education, institutional and course match, academic experience, social integration, financial issues and personal circumstances;
- factors enhancing student retention and success, including:

  o pre-entry information and preparation;
  o induction and transition support;
  o curriculum development, noting that research points to the importance of active learning and teaching strategies, formative assessment, relevant courses and flexible learning;
  o social engagement;
  o student support; and
  o data and monitoring of student attendance and performance; and

- experiences and implications of early withdrawal, noting that many students do not regard their decision to leave early as negative, although for institutions there are financial and reputational implications.

Students with care-giving responsibilities may struggle in balancing that care-giving role with their student role, resulting in conflict and lack of time and/or the financial resources to finish their course successfully. Alsop *et al*. (2008) looked at support services in place at one particular university and how students with care-giving responsibilities experienced their participation in HE. Examples of incentives for students included: childcare grants, parent's learning allowance, access to learning fund and adult dependants' grants. Students perceived these forms of support as helpful and having a positive impact on their academic performance.

Evidence of the positive **impact of pre-entry interventions on retention** features in some of the literature about transitions that we have already discussed. Both Knox (2005) and Bingham and O'Hara (2007) found that students continue to profit from their preparation in FE after they have transferred to university. They found these students highly motivated, with increased levels of confidence, achieving good grades and high retention rates. These findings thus contribute to the evidence that preparation courses at colleges may produce lasting benefits beyond just the transition to HE. Similarly, Walker *et al*. (2004) and Jones (2006) found that participation in preparation and access programmes had a positive impact on students in terms of progression, attainment, retention, motivation and increased self-

confidence. Again, these findings indicate that students on these programmes experience multiple benefits within their student life-cycle.

Other papers consider the **impact of specific pedagogical interventions on retention** and success of widening participation entrants. Yorke and Thomas (2003) looked at retention rates of students from low socio-economic backgrounds and interviewed senior managers from six institutions (Aston, Lincoln, Newman, Sheffield Hallam, Staffordshire and Westminster) that score high on retention rates among this group. These HE institutions score high on '*young entrants from state schools*', in combination with either a high score on:

> '*young entrants from working-class backgrounds, young entrants from neighbourhoods with low participation rates or mature entrants with no familial experience of higher education and from low participation neighbourhoods.*'

(2003, p.65)

Common themes found across all these institutions are the enhancement of the student experience and the focus on student-centred teaching. The institutional habitus of higher education (see Thomas, 2002) is often seen to be focused on middle class students, so improving retention may require a shift in institutional culture. Social and academic integration was fostered by student-centred approaches and this was seen as a vital aspect of achieving retention. These institutions were also active in monitoring their curriculum and pedagogies in order to meet the needs of the students. Examples included: organising induction events, investing in the student experience during the first year, rewarding extra-curricular activities such as part-time employment and social engagement, reviewing assessment practices, and offering personal tutoring. Furthermore, these institutions also tended to invest in staff development to facilitate their teaching practices and to encourage research about widening participation themes.

Research by Atkins *et al.* (2005) showed that interventions towards students who lack adequate skills and knowledge for passing a course module can be effective both in the long- and the short-term. The 'MathsAid' project was designed to help students at Kingston University on courses with mathematical and/or statistical components, which many students who have not studied maths beyond GCSE or have entered by non-traditional routes find challenging. The project offered a range of motivational and remedial opportunities such as one-to-one tutoring, ICT support and peer assisted learning. Interviews with students revealed that 'MathsAid' had improved their success in statistical and mathematical modules and had even enhanced their understanding of mathematical topics, suggesting long-term benefits; but Atkins *et al.* also found some evidence 'that students who use 'MathsAid' tend not to be those at most risk of dropping out' (2005, p.364).

Cartney and Rouse (2006) advocate the use of group work in academic contexts, on the grounds that it increases both academic and social integration and may impact on retention rates. This research initially arose from a student counsellor's observation that students talk about the emotional impact on their well-being of learning in smaller groups. Their findings suggest that this 'social nexus' of participation is an important element in retention, going beyond the level of isolated problems with students or teaching staff members. Students reported that working in smaller groups had a positive impact on their interpersonal growth and self-development, contributing to retention.

Price and Kadi-Hanifi (2011) analysed whether using popular media had an impact on the motivation and retention of students studying towards a Foundation Degree in Learning Support and a Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector. Social media such as blogs, Facebook, Bebo, MySpace were integrated in the learning process. Students reported that it had transformed their learning and that these new forms of social learning had increased their motivation together with the social cohesion among students. These aspects therefore impacted on the enthusiasm to stay on the course instead of dropping out.

The focus of Jones and Lau (2010) is on the provision of blended learning for non-traditional students. Some students might be unable to undertake part in full-time daytime education and therefore offers of

blended learning might increase the access for these groups. Jones and Lau report on the 'Enterprise College Wales Project' at the University of Glamorgan in Wales. Despite some initial concerns, such as the need for additional support outside the online learning environment, students were positive about the helpfulness of the induction event in which they met fellow students and staff and during which they were introduced to working with the online environment. Furthermore, some students said that online education enabled them to participate and that the low-budget way of learning helped them over the financial barrier. The fact that modules were credit-based enabled students to pick and choose the courses which interested them, and gave them the flexibility to participate at their own pace.

Monitoring and targeting support to widening participation students may also affect retention rates. Students in higher education experience more autonomy than in initial education but are asked to take ownership of their own learning, combined with making use of support services available through them. One theme that emerged through our synthesis is the level of monitoring built in by the universities and how this has an impact on the retention rates of the students.

Simpson (2004) conducted research on the interventions of staff members at the Open University with the aim of increasing retention among their students. Statistics in the paper show that on average, 38% of the students did not submit the first assignment. After the third assignment, only 52% of them were still on track. Interventions to connect with students took place at various moments, both by e-mail and telephone: at the stage of recruitment, at the start of the course, immediately after students decided not to participate in assignments and in a future year asking the student to re-enrol. Reminding students to take part in assignments increased the submission rates, but had also other advantages for the university, given that investing in student retention was cheaper than attracting new students.

Bowen *et al.* (2005) reported on an initiative, 'Uni-Nanny', tested out at the Business School and School of Technology at the University of Glamorgan in Wales. The two schools were asked to monitor attendance data in an online tool with the aim of targeting approaches related to student success and retention. It was piloted amongst first year undergraduate students. Monitoring attendance was perceived as a good tool for detecting whether students participated in the learning process and absence usually indicated that the student was facing some other problems. Electronic monitoring had many advantages as data were immediately stored in a database and records were usually more accurate than paper-based attendance data. Information was immediately accessible. Not only did staff members appreciate having data available for conducting research on attendance in relation to student performance and retention, but also – perhaps surprisingly - the students themselves expressed positive feelings towards the system as it increased the pressure on attending lessons, which had a positive impact on their motivation.

Hughes (2007) looked at blended learning and noticed how online tracking of students gives opportunities for identifying students at risk and thus targeting support towards them. Comparisons were made between a course module which was delivered in the classroom one year versus delivery by blended learning the other year. The tutor was asked to interact actively with the students online and point out whether problems arose. As a result, submission rates for the assignment increased and interviews with students revealed that their motivation increased because of the strong interaction with their peers and the tutor in the online environment. Results can probably only be achieved when tutors are skilled enough to deliver online or blended modules at a high quality level.

Last, but by no means least, we note the final report from the *What Works?* Student Retention & Success programme (Thomas, 2012) which looks across seven projects aimed at building student belonging, engagement, retention and success in English universities, and the *Compendium of effective practice in higher education retention and success* (Andrews *et al*., 2012) draws on that programme and other examples of effective practice in the UK to provide brief case studies on topics of:

- pre-entry and induction
- learning and teaching
- friendship and peer support

- participation and belonging
- using data to enhance the student experience
- strategic change to enhance the student experience.

Getting on

The final stage in the student life-cycle is 'getting on': *the steps which universities take to help students succeed in their chosen career after graduation*' (Milburn, 2012, p.3).

Clearly for some widening participation students, these steps may begin at the time of admission, or even earlier, if, for example, they have a professional career destination, such as medicine, in mind, and are supported and mentored throughout, as well as having opportunities to develop professional and interpersonal competencies in the course of their studies. For others, the choice of a career destination may come much later, as graduation approaches, and for others again, postgraduate study may be the preferred option.

In their literature review, Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) consider the relatively sparse literature on widening participation in postgraduate study, noting that there is some research on the effect of financial and academic factors on entry to research degrees and on women's under-representation at doctoral level, but that 'the evidence base relating to potential inequalities on the basis of ethnicity and social class is more limited' (2010, p.5). Their findings may be considered in the light of the more recent report from the Higher Education Commission (2012) on postgraduate education, which found that with fees rising and banks being less willing to lend, widening participation may not be the greatest of the problems to be tackled in this area:

> *'Employers and institutions are concerned that future cohorts will be less willing to incur further debt to undertake postgraduate study, whilst changes in the immigration system could limit international demand for postgraduate study. We are concerned that the cumulative impact of these developments may inflict significant damage on the health of the postgraduate sector.'*

> (2012, p.6)

Lindley and Machin (2013) have recently added to the debate, considering the postgraduate premium and barriers to social mobility for those who cannot afford to take a second degree. They recommend steps to ensure that 'our brightest graduates are not priced out of postgraduate study' (2013, p. 6). They recommend that HEFCE should finance data collection on the fees, costs and socio-economic background of postgraduate students, and that professions should take responsibility for ensuring that they fully represent the talents of society as a whole, rather than reflecting the ability to afford postgraduate study. In Scotland, we note the recent welcome announcement by the Scottish Funding Council of 850 additional taught postgraduate places on postgraduate courses that support industry (SFC, 2013). These places are designed to ease students' financial burdens and to provide new opportunities for part-time study, allowing access to those who could not undertake a full-time course.

We also found a few papers that reflected on the transition between studying at university and entering the labour market, with a focus on 'widening access' students/under-represented groups. Bennett *et al.* (2008) explored work-experience placements specifically with reference to widening participation. Their research project investigated the perceptions of vocational degrees amongst graduate recruitment staff members in British firms, with the aim of helping new graduates to make successful transitions to the labour market. Results revealed that recruiters considered the class of degree and the university attended as less important than whether the student had finished a good work placement relevant to the job on offer. A relevant work placement within the framework of a degree was also valued more highly than paid employment during the year or holidays as these activities were seen as less relevant. Employers also valued highly the use of group work as a didactical method within university teaching, as being able to work well with other people was perceived as an essential skill.

Stuart *et al*. (2011) used a substantial sample of 631 students from four universities to explore the impact of involvement in extra-curricular activities on the experiences, outcomes and job prospects of different groups of undergraduates, including 'widening participation' groups. In interviews, employers stressed the value of evidence of participation in university extra-curricular activities when hiring staff, and successfully employed alumni agreed that involvement in such activities had helped their job searches and given them useful skills, confidence and social capital. The survey of current students, however, found that mature and ethnic minority students were less likely than others to engage in such activities, spending more time in family or religious activities. Similarly, students of lower socio-economic status spent more time working, rather than becoming involved in extra-curricular activities. Stuart *et al*. raise the question of whether the differences in participation levels between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' student groups may 'have implications for persistent inequalities in employment (despite widening participation agendas)' (2011, p. 204).

Woodfield (2011) takes a more optimistic view, in her paper which considers whether mature students are disadvantaged when they move from university into employment. She notes that there has been very little research on the employment outcomes for mature students, as opposed to traditional-entry graduates, and the prominence of the 'narrative of disadvantage' describing the challenges facing mature students, in, for example, the accounts of Brine and Waller (2004); Redmond (2006) and Hinton-Smith (2009). The literature demonstrates mature entrants' lack of confidence in whether their educational investment will lead to enhanced employability (2011, p. 410). Woodfield's analysis of a HESA dataset of 232,063 students six months after graduating in 2006 leads to the conclusion that the 'discourse of disadvantage' is not in fact warranted in relation to employment, since:

> *'the headline trends were for mature students to secure paid employment more readily, with greater likelihood of achieving an above-average graduate salary and for them to secure graduate level employment more often.'*

(2011, p. 422)

Conclusions

This review of the literature reveals continuing debates about the practice and evaluation of widening participation activities, and the complexity of issues which may deter those who have the potential to succeed in higher education from applying or accepting a place. The now defunct *Aimhigher* programme also points to important lessons of relevance for Scotland.

The analysis of the range of groups discussed in the recent literature throws into relief the diversity of needs and aspirations of those students. In the sections arranged under Milburn's four headings, we found corroboration of his view that widening access students may need, and will benefit from, support all through their relationship with higher education, from their first experience of outreach in school, through to graduation and employment.

An important recurring theme in the literature is the difficulty of disentangling the impacts of individual interventions, given that multiple factors and activities are influencing students' choices and success: for example, Sanders and Higham (2012, discussed on p. 28) and Sinclair and McClements (2004, discussed on p. 33) both draw attention to the difficulty of attributing success to one factor or intervention, although a combination of factors may be significant. The literature is rich, not only in case studies of successful practice both by individual universities and by partnerships, but also in compendia of ideas for practitioners, such as Andrews *et al*. (2012), Dent *et al*. (2012) and Thomas (2012). We shall have more to say in Chapter 6 about the types of interventions described in the literature, after we have looked at the evidence of activity in Scottish institutions presented in their outcome agreements.

CHAPTER 5: THE EVIDENCE FROM THE SCOTTISH INSTITUTIONS

We assessed the current situation of widening participation in Scotland in the statistics in Chapter 2, reviewed the policy background in Chapter 3, and looked for evidence of what works in the 'grey' literature, books and journal articles in Chapter 4. Now we turn to consider the evidence of 'what works' from the nineteen outcome agreements with the Scottish Funding Council, supplemented by material supplied in response to our request by the majority of institutions.

What we shall **not** be doing in this chapter is producing a league table of institutional levels of activity or success in attracting non-traditional students. As the statistics chapter has shown, the uneven distribution of SIMD20 and SIMD40 postcodes around Scotland would render such an enterprise meaningless; the statisticians who produced SIMD have warned that SIMD identifies areas, not individuals, and that not everyone living in a deprived area is deprived, nor do all deprived people live in deprived areas. Moreover, the range of level of detail in the outcome agreements of the institutions and the differences in their priorities and the measures of success they mention would invalidate any attempt to identify the most successful, or even the most ambitious, in widening participation. We also note that widening access is only one part of these agreements, which vary considerably both in size and in terms of the proportion of the document devoted to access, as opposed to, for example, knowledge exchange, efficiency of the learner journey, patterns of provision – all of which are also very important for the development of the university and its students.

Instead, therefore, we shall consider in turn the types of widening access activities reported, highlighting some examples which are working well, and for which there is some evidence of success. We stress that the fact that a particular institution is not mentioned under a heading does not imply that it does not have good practice in this area. We have tried to draw illustrative examples from as wide a range of institutions as possible, both in terms of geography and in terms of type of institution, and it would have been impracticable and unhelpful to list everyone under every heading. We also appreciate that some institutions sought in their outcome agreements to compare their current achievements with their own record in previous years, while others make comparisons with the practice of other institutions or refer to HESA benchmarks. We have sought throughout to demonstrate the diversity of approaches and challenges faced, but have avoided making any judgments about which of the examples of good practice are 'best', given that the evidence of the outcome agreements is insufficient for any such judgment.

We have also listed, in the glossary provided in Appendix 2, some relevant partnerships engaged in outreach and in articulation hubs, their acronyms, where appropriate, and their member organisations, to avoid the need to bulk this chapter with explanatory accounts as each one is mentioned.

As in the previous chapter, the activities are discussed under the headings used by Milburn (2012) and in Chapter 4: getting ready, getting in, staying in and getting on.

Getting ready

By far the greatest quantity of evidence of activity falls under this heading. Without exception, the outcome agreements list multiple strands of activity, including interventions in primary and secondary schools and colleges. The outcome agreements vary widely in the detail provided about their activities, the groups of pupils which they target, and their rationale for targeting them.

Starting young: laying the foundations

We select here two examples of initiatives which do not expect instant results in terms of meeting targets for widening participation, but which lay foundations for the future. Since 2002/3 Edinburgh University has undertaken pilot work with S1 and S2 groups and in 11 primary schools which feed into secondary

schools with low progression rates. A further initiative, funded by the Sutton Trust and delivered by the University, is *Educated Pass*, which:

> *'works with local youth football clubs in collaboration with local colleges and the Scottish Youth Football Association to develop club based and on campus activities. Following presentations at the football club the teams are invited to local campuses for workshops with the staff and students of sports related courses to give them practical and academic experience and insights. Current University of Edinburgh students are used as role models with the successful University football team taking a prominent part. ... Tracking of Educated Pass participants is being undertaken this year. Educated Pass is a community based project funded by philanthropy. It targets S2 boys in areas of low participation via their football coaches, to raise awareness of and aspiration to HE level study. Attitudinal questionnaires are carried out pre and post intervention re the participants' attitude to HE which have shown positive responses. Since the boys also attend school, they are picked up by the LEAPS project and receive generic aspiration raising etc from S3 to S6. As part of its evaluation we are now tracking the previous cohorts' outcomes.'*
>
> (University of Edinburgh Outcome Agreement, 2012-13, p. 48)

Glasgow Caledonian University established the Caledonian Club in 2008, working in five communities in Glasgow, focusing on engagement with pre-school children in nursery, through primary to S3 in secondary, and beyond:

> *'We continue this work into S4-S6 because we believe continuity is vital to sustaining aspirations. The focus on early years is in line with the Chief Medical Officer's recommendation to the Scottish Government to invest in early years and education to improve health and wellbeing. Furthermore, as the Caledonian Club engages with families as well as young people, it promotes more support at home to take up new learning opportunities. Activities at nursery and primary school are focused on topics linked to the Curriculum for Excellence and are tailored to individual schools. The Club does not solely focus on progression to higher education but is concerned with promoting positive post-school destinations for all pupils and in particular lifelong learning. Subject shadowing in S6, alongside mentoring for pupils applying to GCU, helps with recruitment of the MD20% group and with future retention of that group when they are studying in GCU. Membership of the Caledonian Club stands at 5,300 pupil members and almost 2,000 parent members. Over 250 GCU students have worked as mentors in the Club, and we have implemented mechanisms for students to gain academic credit for this work. ... We have established a longitudinal research programme, tracking the journey of our young people through the Caledonian Club to 2030, evaluating numeracy, literacy and communication skills as well as levels of self-confidence and self-esteem.'*
>
> (Glasgow Caledonian University Outcome Agreement 2012-13, p.5)

Both these initiatives are impressively ambitious, demonstrate success in raising young participants' aspirations and have potential to be extremely valuable in widening participation in future. They also bring other community benefits, and the involvement of current students as mentors is likely to expand the cultural and social capital of the young people, and at least make them aware of opportunities open to them. Only time, however, and the careful tracking which is planned for both these longitudinal projects will demonstrate their success in terms of increasing entrants from under-represented groups to higher education.

Engaging with secondary schools: enabling informed choices

The University of Dundee reports that it admits relatively high numbers of students from SIMD20 areas (10.8% overall in 2010/11; 7.6% of young full-time entrants). It offers outreach with 49 high schools across Angus, Dundee, Fife, Perth and Kinross. Outreach with schools involves interactive workshops for pupils, on topics such as *'Why go to University?* and *'What's it like to be a university student?'* and talks for parents and / or teachers and attendance at school conventions. Undergraduate student volunteers are seen as integral to outreach, acting as role models and dispelling stereotypes surrounding student life. Schools talks also introduce the DUAL Summer School, an alternative route for eligible students to earn an undergraduate place at the University of Dundee, involving a Personal Academic Skills course, three taught introductory subject modules through weekly essay, practical, online and group tests and

assignments, a final exam, sampling further subjects, getting advice from experts, former students and a personal tutor, and gaining experience of university life and facilities. The website (http://www.dundee.ac.uk/admissions/participation/dual/faqs.htm#eligible) explains that criteria for eligibility include demonstrating that past performance may have been limited by being the first person in a family to go to university; having problems at home; having a low income; having suffered ill health; and leaving school before getting the grades you deserve. The summer school attracts students from school, as well as others who have been in employment or in college. We selected this diverse programme as an example because, although it is by no means the only university providing such a broad range of activities, it stresses the suitability of the summer school for individuals of all ages who have been personally disadvantaged in a wide variety of ways, bringing together young and older, including people with disabilities as well as those facing financial barriers or with no family experience of higher education. It can also demonstrate success, as the website explains that over 1,400 students have already successfully used the summer schools to secure a university place and most of those have gone on to earn a degree.

The Robert Gordon University admits that its MD20 entrant numbers remain low at approximately 5% of SFC-funded undergraduate enrolments. Geography, as well as the relative prosperity of its hinterland, makes its task harder, since only an estimated 5.6% of 16-20 year olds in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire schools are from MD20 postcodes. Nevertheless, RGU sets clear targets in its Outcome Agreement to increase the number of MD20 entrants from schools from 87 in 2009/10 to 142 by entry 2013/14; and to increase the number of MD20 students articulating from colleges from 32 to 73 by the same date. They stress the importance of working with the local partnership, ASPIRENorth, noting that in 2010-11, 16 % of their MD20 entrants came from ASPIRENorth target schools, and plan to develop data-sharing arrangements with partners in that organisation to enable better targeting of their outreach. ASPIRENorth works with selected cohorts of 15-20 pupils in each S3-S6 year group in 10 local schools (around 700 pupils in total) in the lowest quintile by progression rate to HE nationally, aiming to raise awareness, aspirations and expectations of higher education. Aims listed on their website (http://www.scotland-aspirenorth.ac.uk/) also include monitoring progression to further and higher education within the target schools, taking cognizance of the sector-wide targets and engaging with regional partners as appropriate to contribute to the achievement of these; and the monitoring and evaluation of programmes and activities to provide meaningful evidence of their quality and effectiveness in relation to the strategic aims of the programme.

Our third example has been chosen to illustrate the diversity of challenges faced by Scottish HEIs. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland declares its commitment to cultural and social inclusion, but acknowledges that:

> *'in dance and music particularly, opportunity for artistic and technical development must be available at a very early age. The Conservatoire is very aware that levels of access to those opportunities vary widely and are dependent upon a range of factors other than a young person's natural ability or potential – not least, a well-resourced primary and secondary education sector.'*
>
> (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Outcome Agreement for 2012-13, p. 15)

Consequently, pre-HE outreach activity is a high priority, reaching nearly 4,000 children annually, nearly 2,000 regularly and a further 2,000 through project work, through Entry to the Creative Industries (ETTCI), their participation in SHEP and FOCUS West; their Junior Conservatoire, with 320 school students in a range of orchestras, choirs and bands (with 10.1% of participants from SIMD20 and SIMD40); and Musicworks, which unlike the Junior Conservatoire is open access, not by audition, and with full bursaries for many participants, ensuring that *'no child is ever excluded by the Conservatoire from participation in its pre-HE activity on the basis of an inability to pay the fee'* (p.24). With an admissions system based primarily on auditions, sometimes several rounds of auditions or a recall system, they can claim to:

'prioritise potential for success at the Conservatoire over previous academic achievement. We have found that innate talent trumps schooled discipline and therefore we believe that we have been practising 'contextualised admissions' long before the term was introduced into the university admissions system.'

(Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Outcome Agreement for 2012-13, p. 23)

Although past successes encourage them to believe their approach to selection is effective, they nevertheless:

'recognise that we must be more systematic in our analysis and evaluation of the demographic of our applicants and of our students so as to better inform our access policy. We will make a preliminary analysis of our pre-HE activity in terms of the promotion of access in 2012-13 and put in place the systematic monitoring that will enable us to evaluate better our success, or otherwise, in recruitment to our HE provision of those with exceptional talent and potential from SIMD20 and SIMD40 backgrounds on a regular basis.'

(Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Outcome Agreement for 2012-13, p. 16)

There are many other interventions with evidence of success mentioned in the Outcome Agreements, including *Access to Creative Education in Scotland* (ACES), provided by the Universities of Dundee and Edinburgh, Robert Gordon University and Glasgow School of Art; *Reach Scotland*, the SFC-funded project that aims to raise awareness and to encourage, support and prepare secondary school pupils wishing to pursue a professional degree at the University of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow or St Andrews; and *Top Up*, the senior element in the FOCUS West programme, provided by the University of Glasgow, designed to help S5 and S6 school pupils who are planning to enter higher education, or considering that option, to prepare for the transition from school and make informed choices about their futures. A published evaluation of *Top Up* (Walker *et al.*, 2004) was discussed in Chapter 4. The annual report of West of Scotland Wider Access Forum (2011) brings together descriptions of activities in their programmes, participant numbers and quantitative and qualitative data from their evaluations, and rates of progression to higher education in the thirty schools across nine local authorities. As well as *Top Up*, these include: *Campus Days*, a two day programme for S3 pupils; *Focus on 4*, a two day experience supporting pupils prior to sitting prelims and national examinations at the end of S4, with emphasis on improving communication and learning / study skills; *Focus on Families*, for parents/carers, with a focus on the targeted S3-6 pupils in the schools that have a progression rate of below 10%; *Routes for All*, targeted at pupils most likely to be taking one or two Highers and progress to a HN course at a college, with the possibility of subsequent articulation into HE; and *Entry to the Creative Industries* and *Portfolio Development Programme*, for S5 and S6 pupils heading for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland or Art School.

Because the need for evaluation has been a recurrent theme in the literature, the last example we have chosen to focus on in this section on working with young people in schools is *Pathways to the Professions*, based at the University of Edinburgh, which has tracked participants in its activities since 2006, and reports that over 3,500 school students have engaged with the project since its initiation in 2001. It differs from many other widening participation projects in that it is inclusive, as it 'aims to work with every state school in Edinburgh and the Lothians aspiring to Law, Medicine, Vet Medicine or Architecture' (University of Edinburgh, 2012, p. 2); but gives priority in certain parts of the programme to 'Pathways Plus' students, whose parents or carers have not experienced university, or are LEAPS-eligible, by virtue of their attendance at a Lothian Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS) priority school, or their receipt of Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The project relies on support, not only from admissions and departmental teaching staff within the University but also from professional organisations such as the British Medical Association and the Law Society of Scotland. Since 2010, it has worked closely with the new *Reach Scotland* project, which works with schools of low rates of progression to higher education in areas outside the remit of *Pathways*, in Scottish Borders and Forth Valley. Students are invited to careers events, lectures, tours relevant to their career choice, such as the Faculty of Advocates for prospective lawyers or an Art and Architecture tour of the Scottish Parliament for would-be architects, personal statements workshops, work observation placements, open days, such as

a Roslin Institute Open Doors day event for prospective vets. They are also offered parents' information sessions, mentoring and post-applications support. In addition, 'Pathways Plus' applicants may apply for bursaries and attend *Moving On*, a one-week bridging course linking pre-university study with undergraduate work. Full statistics of participation and admissions are recorded, showing, for example, over 500 attendances at lectures and symposia in 2012, and 120 attendances at parents' information sessions. Details of numbers of applicants to Law, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine from 2006 to 2012, and to Architecture from 2009 to 2012 are recorded, and Pathways entrants from 2006 are tracked, demonstrating the numbers who have graduated and those who are still on course.

Attracting mature entrants, from SWAP courses and from colleges

The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) stresses in its outcome agreement its commitment to widening participation for 'learners beyond the 16-24 age range, many of whom may follow non-traditional learning pathways, but can make an important contribution to social, cultural, economic regeneration and sustainability' (Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p.6). It reports that over a third of its students are aged over 30, 46% are 25 and over, that 33% of all those who qualified through the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) in 2010/11 went to UWS, and that around 22% of UWS students are from SIMD20 areas. Unlike many other institutions in other areas in Scotland, it seeks to maintain, rather than increase, that SIMD20 percentage, and is also looking to increase applications from care leavers.

SWAP West, a partnership of eighteen colleges and eight universities, provides on its website information about subject access courses and progression routes for mature students returning to learning. SWAP East has twelve college partners and eleven universities. The Open University notes in its Outcome Agreement that its part-time HE work is complementary to the work of SWAP, and will continue to liaise, by referring to SWAP those OU applicants for whom that route is more suitable, and receiving reciprocal referrals of individuals for whom a part-time route with the Open University is more appropriate.

Given that those seeking part-time modes of preparation for higher education may also be seeking part-time opportunities for their subsequent degree study, we searched the outcome agreements for mentions of part-time provision, and found surprising few. Some, including Edinburgh Napier University and SRUC refer to part-time work-based provision; others note plans to develop part-time courses, and Strathclyde University plans to enhance their 'virtual learning environment for on-campus students and to provide more flexible opportunities for off-campus and part-time students' (Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p.11). The University of St Andrews highlights both its evening degree programme which allows students to study part-time in the evening, and is open to 'those who do not present with traditional qualifications and have been constrained by social / educational circumstances'; and also its part-time day study programme, which enables 'those who are returning to study to start at a pace that may be more fitting to their needs before applying to go on to a full-time pathway if they so choose' (Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p.18). Part-time provision is also a focus for UHI, who state that they:

> 'have a predominantly mature and part-time student base drawn largely from within our immediate area. This base includes many students who are first generation University entrants, many who are in work or have care commitments, and many who are impacted by geographical remoteness.'
>
> (University of the Highlands and Islands, Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p.6)

Because of its geographically central position, the University of Stirling is represented on the Steering Groups of both SWAP East and SWAP West, advising and supporting mature entrants to higher education, and continues to run its own access course with a guaranteed place for those who pass at a certain level. It also engages with the local Edinburgh and Lothian Regional Articulation Hub (ELRAH), which includes eight local FE colleges with whom articulation routes into Year 2 and 3 are being developed, and also with colleges in North Lanarkshire, Glasgow and Perth.

Many Scottish universities seek to recruit students who are completing HN qualifications in colleges to complete a degree at university, and setting targets to increase numbers of articulating students is a recurrent theme in the outcome agreements. For example, Edinburgh Napier University has a target of 450 for admitting articulating students, representing 70% of regional articulation and puts considerable effort into its work with ELRAH. Another ELRAH partner, Heriot-Watt University, notes in its Outcome Agreement that it has made an explicit commitment to admit a minimum of 5% of their SFC funded numbers through articulation agreements, and that 'actual admissions from FE are regularly in excess of the minimum guaranteed level, and have been up to 8.4% of Scottish undergraduate numbers in recent years' (p.23). ELRAH also commissioned research (Howieson, 2012) into the students' experience of transition from HN to degree study. Her survey, completed by 347 students, found that university visits were particularly valued as:

> 'the key way in which they gained information and an understanding of expectation of degree study; they provide a structured approach with the opportunity of experiencing lectures / tutorials).

<div align="right">(2012, p. 4)</div>

Less positively, the research also revealed some room for improvement in preparing students for the transition while they were still in college, and the need for progression to a degree with advanced standing to be raised in a consistent way with all HN students. Howieson noted that some students were reluctant to articulate with advanced standing, and recommended further research to investigate the reasons for this and to ensure that all students are able to make informed choices about their options.

Other organisations also report measures to ease the transition from college to university. West of Scotland Wider Access Forum (2011) also describes the provision of *On Track*, a series of six two-hour sessions delivered in colleges and workplaces to groups of HNC, HND and Access students intending to progress to degree-level study. The University of Aberdeen notes links with several colleges, and lists some aspects of its partnership with Aberdeen College designed to ease the transition of articulating students:

- *"taster" days on campus for potential students, and attendance at University lectures.*

- *University talks at Aberdeen College*

- *discipline-based academic links and networks; and an annual joint staff event.*

- *focus groups to obtain feedback from students going through the process of applying to the University; and with students in the first year at the University.*

- *all Aberdeen College students are associate students of the University of Aberdeen and therefore have automatic access to facilities including library and sports.*

<div align="right">(University of Aberdeen Outcome Agreement 2012/13, P.6)</div>

To sum up this section on 'getting ready', we found extensive evidence in the outcome agreements of energetic, creative interventions and enthusiastic collaboration between HEIs, schools and colleges in SHEP, SWAP and hub partnerships and in institutional schemes, and there are many other examples which we might have included and discussed more fully in a longer report. It appears, however, that monitoring and evaluation is not equally developed in all parts of the sector. We need to know more about why potential students choose not to progress to higher education. Yet even when interventions appear highly successful, with many participants progressing to higher education, we must recall Mullen's (2010) observations, discussed in Chapter 4, about the difficulty of establishing causality. Individual young people, regardless of their postcodes, make individual decisions which may reflect aspects of their lives which have nothing to do with widening access initiatives, and even when they do decide to enter university, we can never be sure which element of their preparation programme – the lectures, the visits, the preparation in interview techniques, the student mentor, talking with their parents, or even peer pressure from colleagues on the programme – contributed to that decision.

Getting in

Under this heading, we consider two aspects of 'getting in': the admissions policies in place, and whether these include the use of contextual data.

Abertay University notes in its 2012/13 Outcome Agreement that an agreed admissions policy is operated in all parts of the university, which ensures that:

> *'applicants who are identified as being from SIMD20, schools in the SHEP project area, or local colleges, are interviewed in person. Admissions officers are entitled to vary the standard offer to potentiate admissions from these groups if they feel that the applicant is capable of benefiting from joining the programme.'*
>
> (University of Abertay Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p. 9)

Its neighbour, the University of Dundee, reports increasing its outreach activity with local pupils taking Advanced Highers, in a bid to reverse a recent trend:

> *'The disadvantaged nature of our local catchment has meant that historically such students have gravitated to us naturally; however, SFC data suggests that more recently factors such as increases in entry grades and reduced school subject choices, have reduced this flow. We know that around 50% of Q1 and Q2 students offered places at Dundee decline them.'*
>
> (University of Dundee Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p. 7)

They also show awareness of the risk -– perhaps accentuated now by the requirement to set targets for admissions in outcome agreements – of replacing a tradition of partnership and co-operation with a climate of competition, commenting that 'it is important that activities undertaken by the University to seek to increase its numbers of MD20% and MD40% students are not implemented at the expense of other local institutions' (p.7), and pledging to continue to work with University of Abertay and FE college colleagues to ensure that they achieve an overall increase in the total population of disadvantaged students entering higher education.

Several outcome agreements list characteristics which they use to measure their success in widening access. Glasgow Caledonian University, for example, illustrates their commitment in terms of the percentage of students from NS-SEC 4-7 backgrounds (34%, compared with the Scottish average of 27%), entrants from state schools (97% compared to Scottish average of 88%) and entrants who are the first in their family to attend university (73%) – as well as having over 20% from MD20 postcodes. Strathclyde University can point to their 'solid performance in recruitment from under-represented groups (MD20%)' (Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p.12) and increases in their recruitment to high demand subjects, such as Law and Pharmacy, from that group. Glasgow University highlights that 21.4% of their mature students and 8.5% of their young students have MD20 postcodes, but also attributes their performance to their work through the *Top Up* programme with low progression schools, and sets targets to increase both the numbers of students entering Glasgow University through that route and also the number of participants on that programme. They note that their approach to admissions, including the use of contextualised progression agreements for pre-entry programmes, has earned it a place as a case study in best practice in *Equitable admissions: facilitating entry to underrepresented groups to HE* (Equality Challenge Unit, 2012). It should be noted that all Focus West institutions have admissions agreements offering progression with Top Up profiles.

In parts of Scotland with fewer postcodes in the first and second quintile of SIMD, it is understandably seen as a less appropriate measure. Aberdeen University's Outcome Agreement describes it as:

> *'an entirely inappropriate measure of deprivation across a nation such as Scotland with a highly concentrated urban population and a large (in geographical terms) rural area. The use of MD20 provides biases in the reported data which are impossible to estimate scientifically. Therefore we urge the SFC either to use a more granulated indicator of disadvantage, or to promote the use of multiple measures of disadvantage so as to enable fair comparisons and an informed policy environment.'*

The University of the Highlands and Islands also comments that MD20 cohort analysis is:

'not perhaps the only (or best) measure of access and inclusion for the Highlands and Islands. Issues for our learners may more significantly relate to geographical or social isolation and we would welcome the opportunity to review how access and inclusion is measured in future iterations of the outcome agreement .'

<div align="right">(University of the Highlands and Islands Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p.10)</div>

The Open University in Scotland report that although they have around 18% of new entrants from MD20 zones, they see SIMD as 'a relatively poor indicator of progress in widening access', since nearly a quarter of their students live in rural areas, and significant numbers of other low income students live in other postcodes deemed less deprived as measured by SIMD. This provides confirmation of the caveats on the SIMD document, which noted that 'only about one third (232,000) of income deprived people live in the 15% most deprived datazones, with the other two thirds (468,000) living elsewhere' (Scottish Government, 2012b, p.4).

The University of Edinburgh identifies a role for SIMD data, but as just one element in a basket of contextual data for use in widening participation. Edinburgh has used contextual data in admissions since 2004 and is one of the eleven case studies in the SPA research report, *Fair admissions to higher education* (Bridger *et al.,* 2012). The university uses publicly available data: for Scotland, this is the proportion of pupils in a school progressing to HE, and may also take into account whether an applicant has participated in widening access programmes, such as LEAPs, *Pathways to the Professions* or SWAP; has spent time in care; has parents or guardians who have not attended higher education; has had serious disruption to their formal education; or lives in a disadvantaged area, as identified by SIMD. They do not consider parental occupation, gender, ethnicity or whether an applicant attends a state or an independent school. More detail on how the information is used in the selection process and in making differential offers is on their website.

Other universities report revisions of their existing systems to enable the use of a range of contextual data: for example, Queen Margaret University is working to ensure that information is captured at the point of application, not only about SIMD postcode, but also about whether applicants come from low progression schools or have taken part in widening participation projects. Their aim is to ensure that membership of target groups is taken into consideration in admissions decisions and offer making (Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p. 17). Heriot-Watt University also announces revision of its admissions policy 'to ensure that appropriate use of contextual data is embedded in the admissions and selection process' (Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p. 24).

The University of St Andrews lists its 'metrics used to capture potentiality and diversity' including 'pupil attainment, attainment environment (school), mature and young SIMD20 and 40; in-care and looked-after backgrounds, St Andrews pre-HE engagement, and refugee status. Applicants who have the greatest potential and any diversity factors will be flagged up to the Academic Admissions Officers through the transparent coding system for Admissions Officers' (Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p. 12-13). It also announces its intention of increasing intake of SIMD20 students by 45%, to a total of 19 students per annum by 2014/15, anticipating that 'the School of Medicine will be very much a part of the increase in numbers' (p. 13). This emphasis on medicine reflects this University's pre-entry activity in medicine, not only through *Reach Scotland*, but also in the provision of *Medicine A104 Pre-Med*, a one-year science course for those wishing to study medicine who have 'just fallen short of entry requirements due to an element of disadvantage' (p.16); and *Pathway to Medicine*, offered in partnership with Perth College 'to enable mature students to study medicine where they have been prevented from doing so through either social or educational disadvantage' (p.16).

Our final example under this heading is a specialist institution, Glasgow School of Art. Here too, a contextualised approach to admissions is practised, on the grounds that:

'educational and social context may have adversely affected academic achievement or the quality of e-folio submissions. This will include applications from pupils and mature students from a number of Scotland's most deprived neighbourhoods, protected characteristic groups, and applications from those who have time spent in Local Authority care.'

(Glasgow School of Art Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p. 18)

In addition to these specified groups, they consider applications from those who have participated in their local SHEP programme, or in activities provided by the *Access to Creative Education in Scotland* (ACES) Project, an individualised programme offering consultations with pupils and teachers to identify individual needs, discussion of what a successful portfolio might contain, support to develop a portfolio, cultural awareness and subject knowledge, and advice on interview technique.

To sum up what we have found in this section on 'getting in', it is clear that there is widespread acceptance of the need for contextualised admissions, although there is considerable variation in the categories of students for whom they are designed and some differences between subject areas. Some institutions are ahead of others in establishing their procedures for implementing and monitoring their contextual admissions system, but several are planning changes to their systems. We are aware that an analysis based primarily on the evidence of the outcome agreements is by definition superficial, and suggest that, after allowing an interval of perhaps two years to allow time for adjustment to new systems and for tracking through students who have been made contextualised offers, both quantitative and qualitative research with widening participation officials, the admissions officers or tutors responsible for making the offers and the students who received them, would give a much better understanding of how well this is working.

Staying in

Almost all the outcome agreements include plans to improve retention rates: an honourable exception is the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, which, with an retention rate for Scottish domiciled full time undergraduates of 98.5% and a retention rate for MD10/20 described as 'marginally higher than it was for the rest of our student population', seeks simply to maintain their excellent retention rate and continue to analyse progression rates and other more refined indicators of achievement.

The University of Edinburgh reports above average retention rates, with no significant differences between SIMD20 students and others. Queen Margaret University set a target to increase the retention rate of MD20 students to a level that is less than or equal to 1% below the retention rate of the total entrant body, and sets similar targets for male students. They aim to achieve this through a range of retention activities, including extending a pre-entry course, previously designed for mature entrants, to include these groups; enhancing their mentoring programme and first assignment support scheme; reviewing their personal academic tutor system to address variation in student experience and to identify and disseminate good practice; and to increase monitoring of target groups. They also plan to set individual retention targets for subject areas and to increase staff development on the topic, having already offered a staff development workshop run by the project lead from the *'What works? Student Retention & Success Project'* (see Thomas, 2012).

The University of St Andrews invites SIMD20 students to their pre-transitional summer schools to help them form networks and have a positive start to their university experience. The University of Strathclyde is seeking to narrow the gap in retention between MD20 entrants and all Scottish students, as part of a programme of transition support with the focus on transition to the first year of study and also retention into the second year. They also intend to improve their data collection, tracking and monitoring, to 'ensure appropriate and effective support mechanisms are implemented' (Outcome agreement 12/13, p. 14). Robert Gordon University reports that concerns about the achievement and retention of articulating students had led to new monitoring and support arrangements through the North East Articulation Hub, and that subsequently:

'this work has paid dividends with the retention rate of articulating students increasing from 81% in 2007/08 to 92% in 2010/11. In addition, none of those withdrawing did so due to academic failure. Also of note, although based on smaller numbers, the retention rate of articulating students from MD20 backgrounds has remained high and reached 96% in 2010/11.'

(Robert Gordon University, Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p. 7)

In addition to offering transition courses, additional support from tutors and other staff and mentoring, many outcome agreements mention financial support to encourage retention, through offering or increasing the availability of bursaries. Others focus on the provision of academic advisors or support within the students' subject area. The University of Abertay describes two specific approaches:

'First, we employ differentiated assessment strategies across levels of study that are discipline specific, aimed at identifying the most appropriate point in time for the assessment of knowledge, skills and understanding. Secondly, we support students from SIMD20 and colleges through providing opportunities for earlier formative assessment, supported by targeted staff recruitment. There is an established link between individual contact hours with staff and student achievement, particularly in areas with a large recruitment of 'access' students.'

(University of Abertay Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p. 10)

Edinburgh Napier University funds academic advisors in faculties; collects data to alert them to modules which are proving problematic and might damage retention; uses the outcomes of the student engagement monitoring to determine how students from particular groups are engaging with the institution and revise strategies if necessary; and has funded the appointment of a Mental Health Advisor. The task of monitoring and increasing retention is even more complex for the University of the Highlands and Islands, with thirteen separate implementation plans to administer on the college sites. SRUC explains that their relatively small student numbers and patterns of regular contact with staff help identify students who might be struggling, and has procedures in place for contacting and supporting students who are failing to engage with their learning.

With its part-time student body, the Open University in Scotland has an understandably different perspective on retention, noting that:

'Retention of part-time students is complex since for many students success is measured by progression to other HE providers and/or professional development outcomes based on successful module completion. Part-time learner journeys are often non-linear and cannot be measured and monitored by the same measures as full-time campus based study.'

(Open University in Scotland, Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p.8)

Winterton (2010) sheds useful light on the retention issues affecting adult access students in her *SWAP East Tracking and Retention Project report*. In addition to statistical analysis of patterns of retention among mature students, she analyses qualitative data from interviews with early leavers about their reasons for withdrawal, the nature of their decision to leave and the consequences of that decision. Reasons for withdrawal within the personal domain are categorised as unexpected events, financial pressures, levels of interest, levels of integration and levels of stress, while reasons for withdrawal linked to institutional processes include lack of understanding, inflexible support mechanisms, placement issues and difficult course arrangements. Her recommendations include the need for clarification of roles, particularly among support staff and those on placement; the provision of mentors as a way of solving early problems, the extension of counselling services; increased flexibility within institutions; and the provision of a mature students' society, both for peer support and to give them recognition and representation within their institution.

Before leaving this topic, it is worth noting that students' retention depends not only on the quality of support available from institution's central student services or widening participation staff, but also on the skills and attitudes of the subject staff who teach them. Poor understanding on their part of the challenges faced, particularly in the early stages of University life, by students from under-represented groups or

articulating students, may do a lot of damage. In the light of this, the staff development described above in the Queen Margaret University Outcome Agreement may be very important indeed.

Getting on

Milburn's final stage is the most difficult to relate to the outcome agreements, because the evidence is scattered throughout, rather than being brought together under one outcome. The issues which Milburn highlights are:

> *'the need for universities to focus on graduate outcomes to improve social mobility; how universities can help identify and provide the skills employers are looking for; the steps careers services can take to improve outcomes for students; how league tables can be reformed to focus on student outcomes; the need to reform postgraduate outcomes.'*

> (Milburn, 2012, p.67)

Employability is a frequent theme in universities' discussion of their patterns of provision. Glasgow Caledonian University, for example, highlights achievements and plans:

> *'We are committed to enhancing the employability and career development of our students - 55% of our undergraduate programmes offer work placement opportunities; over 40% of our programmes are professionally accredited; 94% of our graduates are in employment or further study six months after graduation, an increase of 3% on the previous year; and we are embedding a major initiative on 21st Century Graduate Attributes which we developed in collaboration with employers and the professions. We aim to further enhance employment of our graduates, particularly graduate level employment, and activities to support this goal will form a key element of our new Learning and Teaching Strategy and Career Development and Employability Strategy.'*

> (Glasgow Caledonian Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p. 22)

Robert Gordon University also claim an enviable record on this score:

> *'our graduate employment has exceeded that of all other Scottish universities on a consistent basis for many years now, with an average of 77% over the years 2008/09 – 2010/11 of graduates in graduate level employment within six months of leaving the university (statistics from the matrix used by The Times and The Guardian). This consistently high performance on employability places RGU at the top of Scottish rankings and within the top 5 in the UK rankings. These factors illustrate that our provision is in high demand from learners in our local region (as well as from further afield) and that our graduates are in high demand from employers.'*

> (Robert Gordon University Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p. 17)

They also outline plans to maintain that position by embarking on a new strategic development, 'Employability+@RGU', involving alumni, professional bodies, employers and recruitment agencies, amongst others.

Heriot-Watt University explains its use of placements to enhance students' employability:

> *'The University has always used placements within the curriculum as a way to help students enhance their skills for employment. We have been especially successful with our EngD programmes which provide very high level skills to companies. Research and Enterprise Services and the Careers Service work together and have developed policies and procedures now in operation for identifying, evaluating and managing placements to safeguard students and ensure that company expectations are met. ... More and more companies which recruit graduates are developing an approach to graduate recruitment through the use of undergraduate placements. They use these as an extended interview/assessment of a potential new graduate prior to offering permanent graduate employment, or fast-tracking through to final stages of their recruitment process.'*

> (Heriot-Watt University Outcome Agreement 2012/13, p. 13)

While all of these three examples – and there are many more, if we had had space to include them all – attest their institutions' commitment to developing the employability of all their graduates, they do not refer specifically to students who have begun their courses as members of under-represented groups. The stated intentions in many of the outcome agreements to develop better tracking systems may mean that such information will be easier to disaggregate in future years. For a clearer comparative picture, we turn to two publications from the University of Edinburgh Careers Service (2009; 2012) analysing the first destinations of Edinburgh graduates from under-represented groups in the period 2004-2007 and 2007/8-2008-9 respectively. Graduates were separated into two groups: Group U, comprising those who entered as members of under-represented groups, either from low participation schools, through LEAPS, SWAP, *Pathways to the Professions*, Credit for Entry or Access Bursary, and group R, those from more frequently represented groups. Some of the findings are perhaps surprising: in both surveys, a higher proportion of group U graduates had found work than group R graduates. The later survey reports that:

> *'despite concerns about the potential impact of the recession, the proportions of both groups entering work (compared with those seeking employment) continue to be robust. Slightly fewer Group R than Group U graduates entered work while slightly fewer Group U than Group R graduates achieved graduate level employment, but there are no dramatic differences apparent between the two groups of graduates.'*

(2012, p.5)

Further research by Darcey Gillie on these data sets is currently underway, and it would be interesting to examine the data by subject area, since students completing teaching degrees are guaranteed work for a year on completion of their studies, and this may skew the employment figures.

To sum up the findings on 'getting on', the outcome agreements alone are not the best source of evidence to demonstrate whether universities are following through and equipping their under-represented groups to find suitable graduate employment. The outcome agreements do, however, contain considerable evidence that working towards ensuring that *all* their graduates - making no distinction between traditional entrants and under-represented groups - have the skills which employers want is a high priority for many universities. This does not, of course, guarantee employment, nor can universities exert any control over the external economic and political influences on the labour market. First destinations in employment, six months after graduation, may not, in difficult times, represent what the graduate, regardless of his or her level of disadvantage on entry to the degree course, had intended when choosing that degree, or sees as a long-term career prospect.

Conclusions

In discussions of 'getting ready', we found in the outcome agreements lots of evidence of creative interventions and enthusiasm for widening participation, with an emphasis on disadvantaged school-leavers and those articulating from colleges. The range of these interventions will be discussed further in the following chapter, in conjunction with the evidence from the literature. We note here just two key themes:

- the difficulty of establishing causality: since outreach programmes are multi-faceted, and prospective students' decisions are complex, we can never be entirely sure to which element of the programme success should be attributed, although summer schools, campus visits and mentoring by existing students seem particularly successful;
- the clear commitment expressed in outcome agreements to collaborative working with neighbouring universities, colleges and schools – co-operation which some suggested might be strained if penalties were introduced for universities which fail to meet their targets and institutions begin instead to compete for SIMD20 students.

In relation to 'getting in', there is evidence of dissatisfaction in this first round of outcome agreements with the use of SIMD as a measure, especially in areas which do not have a high concentration of

SIMD20 and SIMD40 postcodes. Some who are not overtly critical of SIMD make it clear that they use other measures in targeting potential widening participation entrants, such as schools with low progression rates, first generation entrants to HE and care-leavers. Despite this dissatisfaction, the numbers reported and the targets declared, some of them ambitious, suggest an increase in numbers from under-represented groups. Moreover, several institutions declared their intention to update admissions policies, to take account of the growing use of contextual data in admissions, although the outcome agreements do not always make it clear exactly how, and by whom within the institution, the contextual data is to be used.

Measures identified as having successful impact on retention included: pre-entry summer schools, mentoring by HE students, tracking by tutors and policies of vigilance at the stages when students are most likely to decide to drop out. Many institutions also declared the need to develop or improve their systems for tracking the progression of widening participation entrants.

Targeted measures to help widening participation students 'getting on' into their careers were harder to identify, although many mentioned developing employability skills within their courses and analysis of first destination data may shed further light on the topic.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

What have we learned?

Through the review of the statistics and literature in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 and the analysis of the Scottish universities' outcome agreements in chapter 5, we have demonstrated the complexity of the issues and the sheer volume of published material available on widening access, and high levels of activity in Scottish institutions. Before summarising the findings under Milburn's (2012) headings, we highlight two key points:

- The range of under-represented groups is wide, far wider than the current policy focus on young full-time undergraduates from disadvantaged neighbourhoods might suggest. It includes: pupils from schools identified as having a record of low progression of its pupils to higher education; students with lower socio-economic status (NS-SEC 4-7); residents in a postcode listed as SIMD20 or SIMD40; students in receipt of EMA; those entering from FE college; adult returners; care-leavers; people whose education has been disrupted by health problems or a disability; first generation entrants to HE; students with refugee or asylum seeker status.
- Policy reasons for promoting wider access have varied over the years, but whether those reasons are based on the desire for social justice, or on the desire to meet the needs of employers and the UK economy for well-qualified, skilled graduates, or on the desire to promote social mobility, there is a broad consensus on the need to give everyone with the potential to succeed the opportunity to enter higher education.

Getting ready

Milburn describes 'getting ready' as '*the outreach activity which universities undertake to improve attainment and aspiration, and to help potential students make the right choices*' (Milburn, 2012, p.3).

The first stage in the students' life-cycle is the one on which we found most evidence, both in the literature and in the outcome agreements from Scottish higher education institutions, many of which are enthusiastically engaged in partnerships through SHEP, SWAP and hub activities with colleges and other universities.

Drawing together the literature and outcome agreements discussed in the sections on 'Getting ready' in Chapters 4 (p. 31-33) and 5 (p. 42-47), Table 6.1 presents an outline summary of the types of interventions for which claims of success in raising prospective undergraduates' aspirations, awareness of the opportunities open to them, and/or attainment have been made.

Table 6.1:   Successful interventions: 'Getting ready'

Type of intervention	Target group
Talks in low progression schools to raise awareness and aspirations; Involvement of students as mentors and role models in community activities	Pupils in early years of secondary school, or even in primary schools
Talks about subject choices, in school or on campus; Campus visits, involving current students	Pupils in S3 & S4

Type of intervention	Target group
Campus visits; Discussion of options; taught subject sessions & lectures; Talks on budgeting and availability of bursaries; Guidance on applications and interviews; Mentoring from current students; Summer schools	Pupils in S5 & S6 about to make progression decisions
Talks and discussion groups with parents/carers	Parents/ carers, especially those with no prior HE experience
Talks in colleges, and on university campus; Summer schools; Opportunities for articulating students to form networks and use the university facilities before formal entry	Students moving from college to HE
Pre-entry summer schools	Mature entrants from Access courses; pupils from under-represented groups about to start university courses

Interventions with school pupils are generally multi-faceted, with lectures, visits, seminars, mentoring, and sometimes parental involvement and assistance with applications and interview techniques. Activities targeted at younger pupils (and their parents / carers) aim both to raise aspirations and to give information which may influence subject choices, to give them the best chance of being appropriately qualified for the course or profession they may want to enter in a few years. Interventions with S5 and S6 pupils range from campus visits and mentoring to keep aspirations high and practical advice on choosing a course and making applications, to subject sessions designed to help their attainment in Advanced Highers or to give them a taste of studying for the degree of their choice at university. As the evidence in Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrates, pre-entry summer schools are also highly valued, both by pupils from schools and by mature entrants. For mature entrants from HN courses in colleges or Access courses, campus visits and lectures which help students assess how learning at university may differ from their previous experience are seen as highly useful. Given the reluctance, noted by Howieson (2012), of some college students to articulate with the advanced standing to which they are entitled, opportunities to familiarise themselves with the facilities, culture and academic processes of the university may be a crucial element in their decision-making.

Decision-making is, however, a personal process and some situational or dispositional barriers (Gorard *et al.*, 2006) may prove insuperable, for example, for individuals whose family commitments limit their available time or geographic mobility, or those who lack the confidence to go straight from school to university. The possibility of choosing a college course and subsequently articulating into university is a strength of the Scottish system. This possibility is, however, also a complication for anyone seeking to evaluate outreach work with schools: if success is measured only in terms of those pupils who progress immediately to university, we may miss the slow-ripening fruit, the pupils whose awareness and aspirations may be raised by what they have learned, and although they may not be in a position to take full advantage of their opportunities immediately, will do so later. This points to the need for more research into potential students' reasons for not progressing to higher education, and also the need for longer term tracking of pupils who have been engaged in outreach, if we are to understand fully the impact of those programmes.

Do we know what works in outreach? The two preceding chapters demonstrate that there is no shortage of examples of enthusiastic, collaborative outreach here in Scotland and elsewhere, or of advice for practitioners in compendia such as Andrews et al. (2012), Dent *et al.* (2012) and Thomas (2012). The

multi-faceted nature of most programmes, however, means that it is impossible to establish with certainty which element works best, in terms of influencing positively the behaviour and decision-making of participants. Published evaluations of outreach interventions with school pupils, raising their aspirations and awareness of HE opportunities, are generally positive, although this did not save the *Aimhigher* programme in England from being closed down. The evidence in Chapters 4 and 5 suggests that summer schools, campus visits and contact, including mentoring, with current students are particularly highly valued, and statistics of progression to HE demonstrate that participation in outreach will generally have a positive impact on a school's progression rate.

Concerns emerged about the impact of setting targets, with possible penalties on institutions for failure to meet them: we found lots of enthusiasm for collaborative ventures with schools, colleges and partner HEIs to encourage disadvantaged pupils to consider moving into higher education, and hope that this co-operative spirit will not be damaged if targets in their outcome agreements risk leading universities to compete for the same students.

Getting in

Milburn's definition of 'getting in' is *'the admission processes and criteria which universities use'* (Milburn, 2012, p.3).

Chapter 2 discusses the statistics of students from disadvantaged backgrounds entering Scottish universities. The need for the use of contextual data in admissions is widely accepted, and the much useful research, including research sponsored by SPA (Bridger *et al.*, 2012), is available to guide professionals in using this fairly and transparently. There are examples of the use of contextual data to make lower offers to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, in some institutions to interview MD20 students rather than rely solely on their written applications, and to give them access to summer schools which give them opportunities to strengthen their applications. The evidence from the outcome agreements reveals that there is considerable variation in the ways that contextual data are used, and that many higher education institutions in Scotland are currently in the process of updating their admissions and tracking procedures. It will be interesting to learn more about this activity in due course.

Some important concerns emerged. Firstly, we cannot ignore the widespread discontent with SIMD, and in particular SIMD20, as a measure for assessing progress in widening participation, given the uneven spread of SIMD20 postcodes throughout Scotland. We would suggest that the SFC continue to use SIMD40, but in conjunction with other indicators such as NS-SEC and low progression schools. The intersection of socio-economic status with other variables, such as gender, disability and ethnicity should also be monitored over time. Secondly, we suggest that further research is needed into the reasons why some offers, both for entry into first year of undergraduate courses and for articulation from HN courses in colleges, are not taken up. Tracking the numbers and progress of those who do enter higher education is important, but so too is understanding why some prospective students who have been offered places decide not to proceed.

Staying in

Milburn defines 'staying in' as '*the work of student services and bursaries in improving rates of retention at university*' (Milburn, 2012, p.3).

Consideration of research both on retention and on steps to help students succeed in their chosen career after graduation suggests that actions to promote retention and career success need to be embedded in the students' experience, in the content and assessment of their coursework and in the attitudes and behaviour of the teaching staff as well as student support staff. Table 6.2 gives examples of some of the institutional strategies noted in the literature and in the outcome agreements, and described more fully in the 'Staying in' sections of Chapters 4 (p. 37-40) and 5 (p. 50-51).

Table 6.2: Measures to encourage retention

Interventions with disadvantaged groups (in some cases, with all students)
Pre-entry courses
Induction programmes, opportunities for students to build networks
Mentoring
Regular contact with staff
First assignment support scheme
Curriculum development, active learning and teaching strategies, formative assessment, flexible learning
Monitoring of progress through academic tutor system
Intensifying support at key points - first assignment, transition from year 1 to year 2
Academic advisor posts in faculties
Extension of counselling services, mental health services
Availability of bursaries and other financial support

Other organisational measures
Monitoring of student attendance and performance
Analysis of patterns of retention
Analysis of early leavers reasons for leaving
Staff development on good practice to encourage retention

All of these have been shown, in the examples discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, to have a positive impact on retention, and the literature contains many ideas and case studies, such as those described in the outputs of the *What Works?* project (Thomas, 2012; Andrews *et al.*, 2012), which may also be useful to those seeking to improve retention. There are questions to be raised about whether interventions to improve retention should be targeted specifically at those identified at the start of their course as coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, or at the whole student body, on the grounds that overtly special treatment of the disadvantaged group may hinder their social and academic integration into the full cohort.

Getting on

Milburn defines the final stage in the student life-cycle as 'getting on': '*the steps which universities take to help students succeed in their chosen career after graduation*' (Milburn, 2012, p.3).

We note that for some students who have a clear professional destination such as medicine or law in mind, these steps to help them may start even in the outreach activities while they are still at school, if, for example, they participate in the *Reach* or *Pathways to the Professions* activities described in Chapter 5. Mentoring, placement opportunities, emphasis throughout courses on developing employability skills, careers advice and availability of finance for postgraduate study are all important in this context, although both the literature and the outcome agreements suggest that such help is not specifically targeted at students who have begun their courses as members of under-represented groups. Where research tracking such graduates into the workplace is available (e.g. University of Edinburgh Careers Service, 2009; 2012), the findings suggest that there are no dramatic differences between outcomes for the under-represented groups and for other graduates; but given that several universities have made plans to improve their systems for tracking widening access students, there is more to be learned in future about the career destinations of these groups, and whether they achieve the career roles to which they were encouraged to aspire.

Where more research is needed

Some interesting questions for further research have arisen in the course of the research. There is certainly scope for more rigorous research on widening access initiatives. If widening participation practice is to improve, perhaps we need to know more about those who take part in interventions, but do not apply for a university place, and also more about those who are offered places which they do not take up. Do outreach activities need to concentrate more on developing potential students' confidence and social capital, rather than their subject knowledge, or will it remain the case that 'anxiety about social comfort continues to act as a powerful barrier to progression' (Harrison & Hatt, 2012, p.707)?

We found that many Scottish universities were in the process of revising their admissions policies, systems for using contextual data and systems for tracking students. As noted above, the outcome agreements – quite appropriately, given the context – contained little detail on how these systems would operate, and who would be implementing the policies within the institutions. There may even be scope for collaboration between institutions, which seems to have worked so well in other widening participation partnerships and hubs. There is scope for intersectional statistical analysis of the impact of these changes, and also for monitoring patterns of participation in times of austerity and uncertainty, particularly with regard to under-represented groups. This needs to include data on part-time and mature students.

In Chapter 5, we acknowledged the limitations of an analysis based primarily on the evidence of the outcome agreements, and suggested that, after allowing an interval of perhaps two years to allow procedures for implementing and tracking through students who have been made contextualised offers to settle in, quantitative and qualitative research with widening participation officials, the admissions officers or tutors responsible for making the offers and the students who received them, would give a much better understanding of how well this is working. The SPA research (Bridger *et al*., 2012) already offers some insights into good practice throughout the UK, while Burke (2012) identifies some potential problems and misrepresentations and offers a particularly interesting analysis of the professional identities of those responsible for widening participation in higher education, and the degree of influence they have on their colleagues. If their roles are marginalised, and if responsibility for admissions is dispersed throughout the institution, that seems likely to have impact on any scheme to implement contextual admissions. It would be valuable to investigate whether this is an issue in Scotland.

While more monitoring and evaluation of schemes would be useful, we would stress that a lot is being achieved, widening participation students are entering higher education, institutions are collaborating, and progress is being made. It is important to acknowledge the strengths of these initiatives, and to monitor them in ways that help them to develop, rather than undermine them.

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Appendix 1: Statistics on widening participation

Table A1: Number of full-time first degree entrants to Scottish higher education students, the number and percentage of these who are young, 2010-11

Institution	Total	Young students	% young
Total Scotland	31870	24065	75.5
University of Aberdeen	2260	1950	86.4
University of Abertay	1595	1130	70.9
University of Dundee	2250	1665	74.2
Edinburgh College of Art	275	205	75.0
Edinburgh Napier University	2350	1385	58.9
University of Edinburgh	2715	2385	87.8
Glasgow Caledonian University	2870	1960	68.3
Glasgow School of Art	280	220	79.9
University of Glasgow	3475	2955	85.1
Heriot-Watt University	1075	900	83.6
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	620	425	68.8
The Robert Gordon University	1905	1470	77.2
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	195	155	78.5
The University of St Andrews	1030	1000	97.3
Scottish Agricultural College	255	175	69.0
University of Stirling	1930	1440	74.7
University of Strathclyde	2725	2320	85.2
University of the Highlands and Islands	415	160	38.3
University of the West of Scotland	3665	2155	58.9

Table A2: Students not included in the HESA widening participation indicators data

|	
1	Dormant students (those who have stopped studying but have not yet formally left their course)
2	Incoming visiting and exchange students from outside the UK
3	Postdoctoral students
4	Instances where the whole of the course is outside the UK
5	Instances where the student has spent, or will spend, more than 8 weeks in the UK but the course is primary outside the UK
6	Instances where the student is studying mainly overseas as part of a collaborative course between their UK HE institution and an overseas institution
7	Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) Student Associates Scheme (SAS) and Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) students
8	Students on sabbatical years
9	Non-UK domiciled students (those whose place of permanent residence prior to starting a course was outside the UK)
10	Guernsey, Jersey and Isle of Man domiciled students
11	Students who are in the 'writing-up' stage of their course

Note: The Scottish Agricultural College has been included in the Performance Indicators from 2010/11 because they are now funded by the Scottish Funding Council. (HESA, www.hesa.ac.uk)

Figure A1:   Percentage of full-time mature other degree entrants from low participation neighbourhoods 2006-07, by HEIs in Scotland
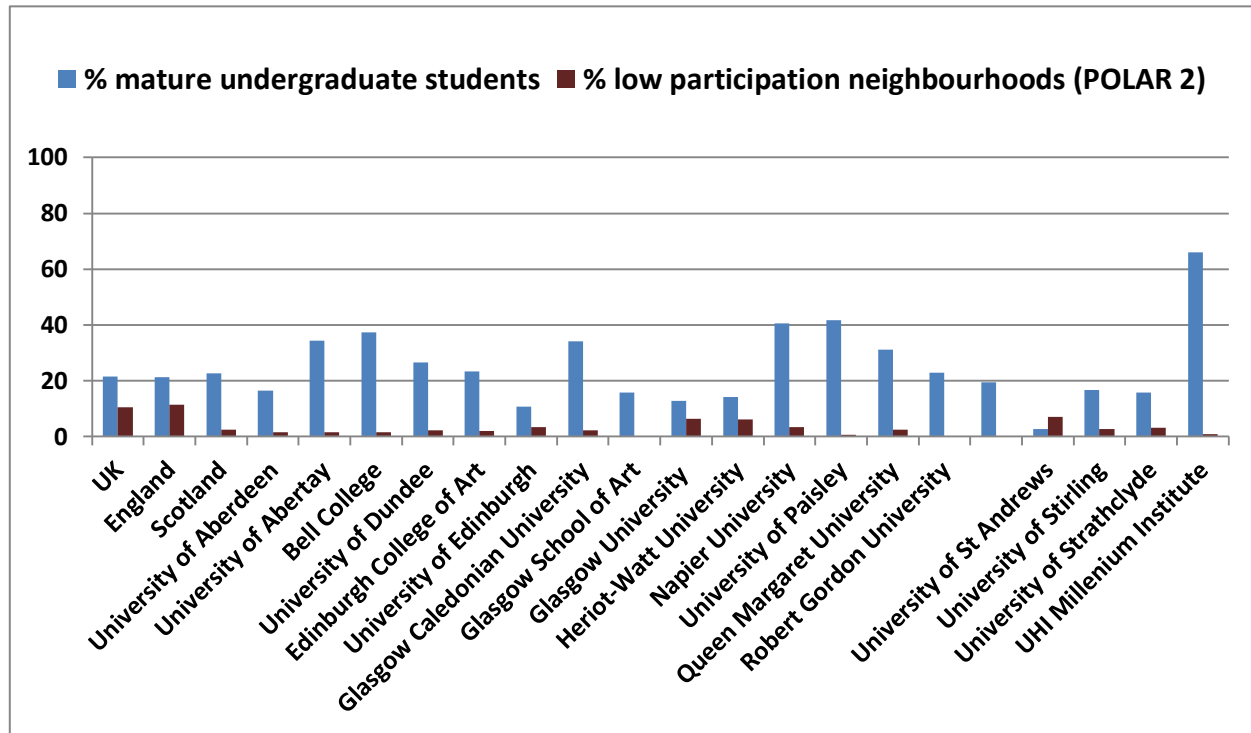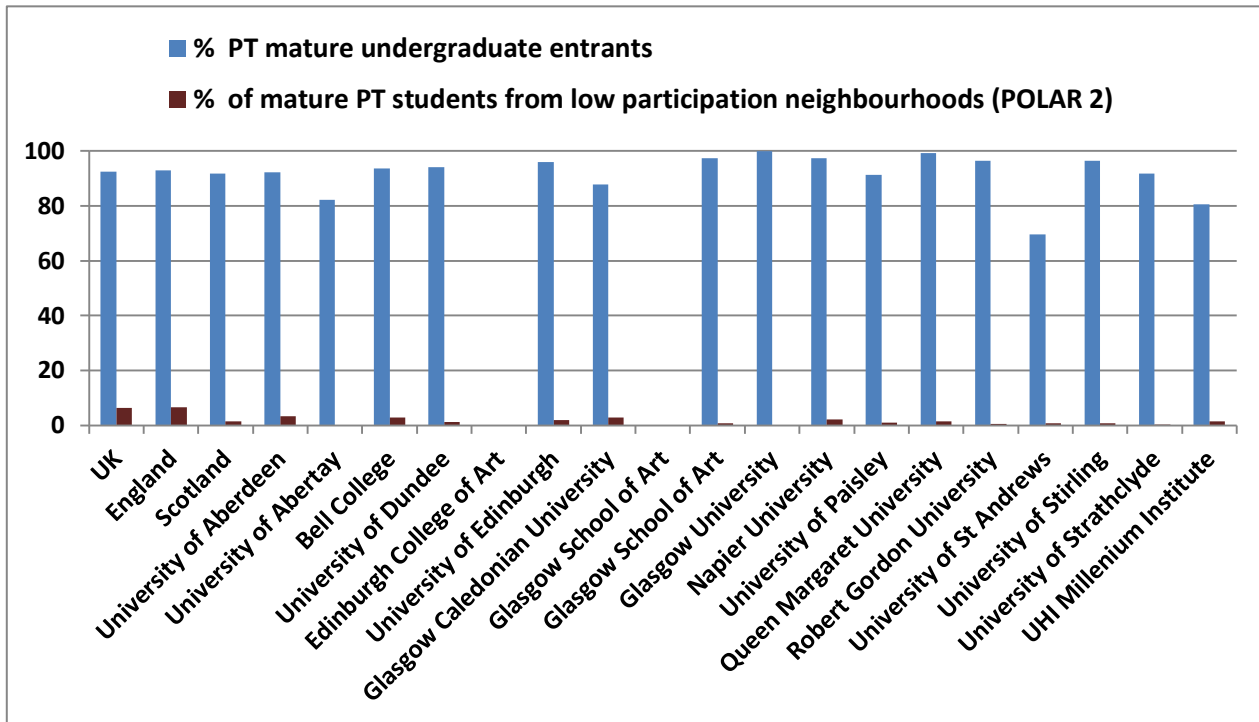

Source: HESA

Figure A2:   Percentage of young part-time young undergraduate students from Polar 2 backgrounds, 2006-07, by HEIs in Scotland
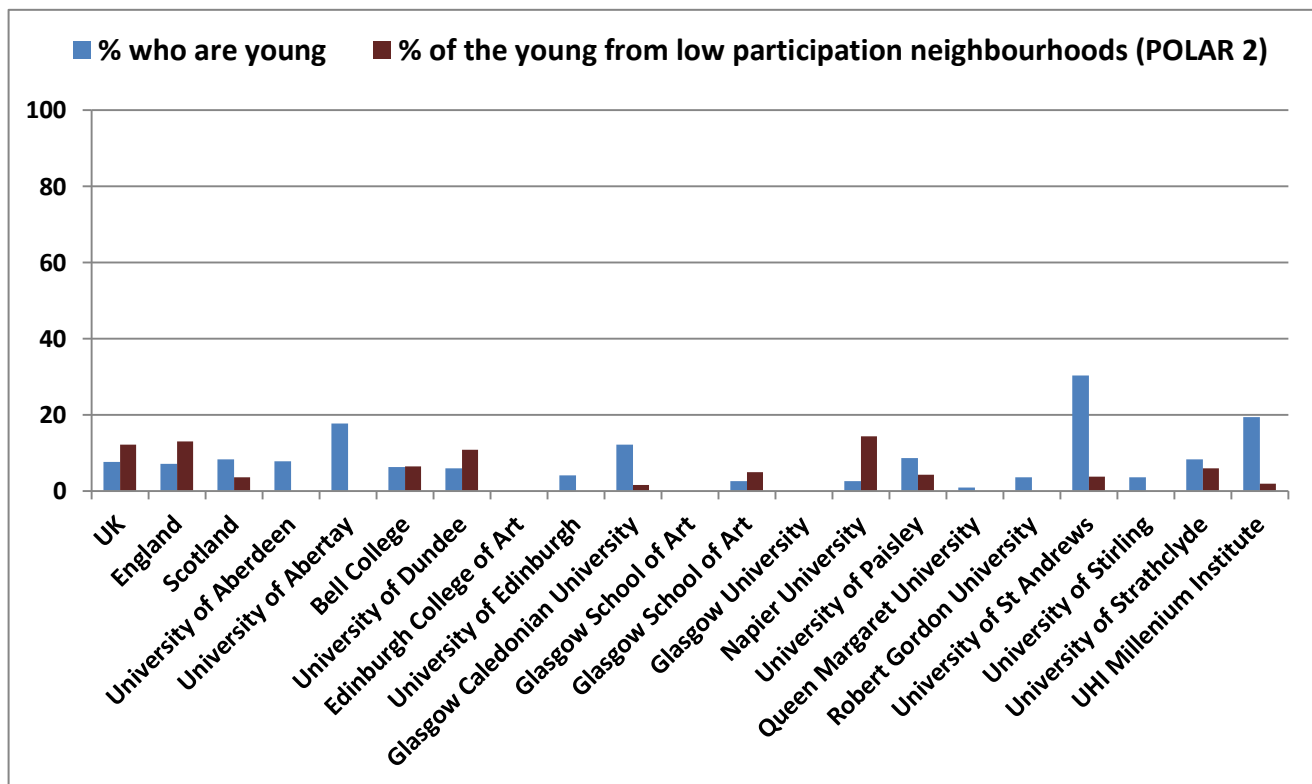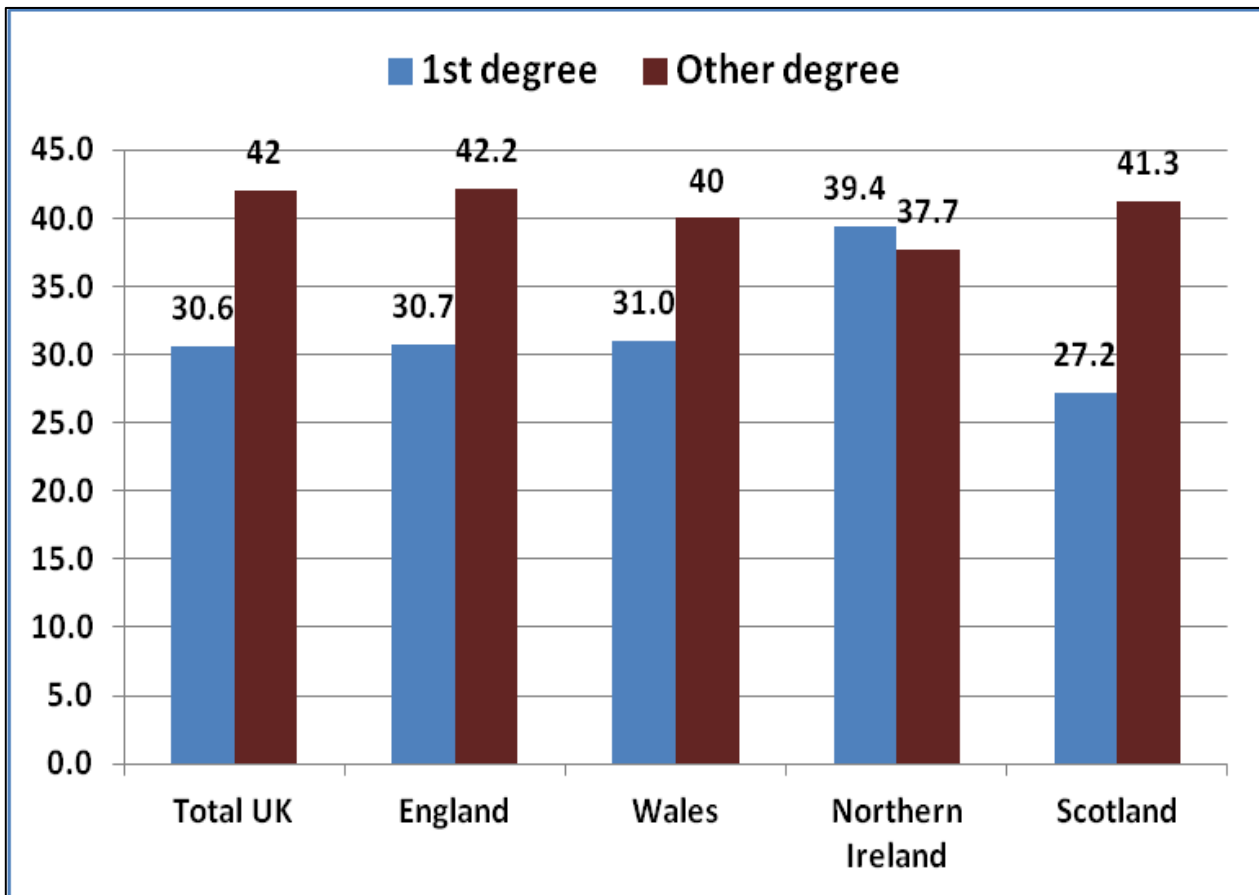

Source: HESA

Figure A3: Percentage of part-time mature undergraduate students from Polar 2 backgrounds, 2006-07 by HEIs in Scotland

Source: HESA

Figure A4: A comparison of 1st degree and other degree entrants by NS-SEC 4-7, 2010-11

Source: HESA

Table A3: Full-time other undergraduate entrants, by institution[1], 2009-2012

| Institution	Total number	Number who are young	% who are young	% from state schools[2]	% NS-SEC 4-7[2]
2009-10					
Abertay University	95	60	61.7	100.0	38.5
Dundee University	75	20	26.7	95.0	
Edinburgh College of Art	25	0	0.0	-	-
Edinburgh Napier University	20	10	45.5	-	-
Edinburgh University	5	0	-	-	-
Glasgow Caledonian University	60	15	22.6	-	-
Heriot-Watt University	5	0	-	-	-
Queen Margaret University	15	0	-	-	-
Robert Gordon University	10	0	-	-	-
Stirling University	5	0	-	-	-
Strathclyde University	15	0	-	-	-
UHI	1385	835	60.3	97.9	46.2
University of the West of Scotland	1055	460	43.5	98.7	37.8
Scotland	**2775**	**1400**	**50.5**	**98.1**	43.8
2010-11					
Abertay University	105	80	73.6	97.1	38.3
Dundee University	15	5	*	*	*
Edinburgh Napier University	10	5	-	-	-
Edinburgh University	5	0	-	-	-
Glasgow Caledonian University	30	5	10	-	-
Glasgow University	5	0	-	-	-
Heriot-Watt University	5	0	-	-	-
Robert Gordon University	15	0	-	-	-
SRUC	245	135	54.5	94.5	50.0
Strathclyde University	5	0	-	-	-
UHI	1525	920	60.4	96.8	42.3
University of the West of Scotland	690	365	53.3	98.8	36.6
Scotland	**2655**	**1515**	**57.1**	**97.2**	**41.3**
2011-12					
Abertay University	5	0	-	-	-
Dundee University	50	35	67.3	*	29.6
Edinburgh University	5	0	-	*	*
Glasgow Caledonian University	175	5	2.8	-	-
Heriot-Watt University	5	0	*	*	*
Queen Margaret University	5	0	*	*	*
Robert Gordon University	10	0	-	-	-
SRUC	180	115	63.3	93.8	38.8
UHI	1370	855	62.5	97.7	40.1
University of the West of Scotland	275	135	49.1	99.2	51.0
Scotland	**2080**	**1145**	**55.0**	**97.4**	**41.0**

Source: HESA

1. Only those institutions with other degree entrants included
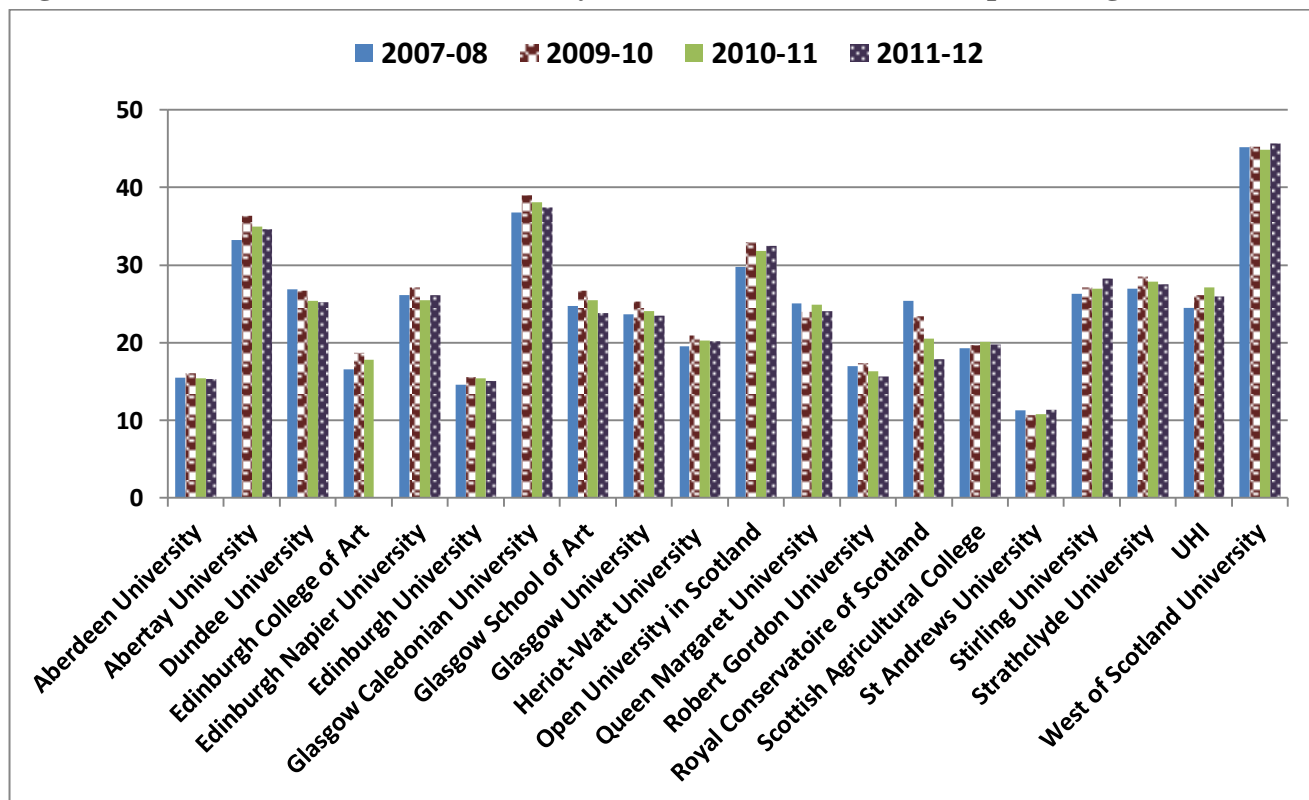
2. Refers to young only

* data not known

Figure A5: **Scottish domiciled students by SIMD 20, 2007-08, 2009-12, percentages**
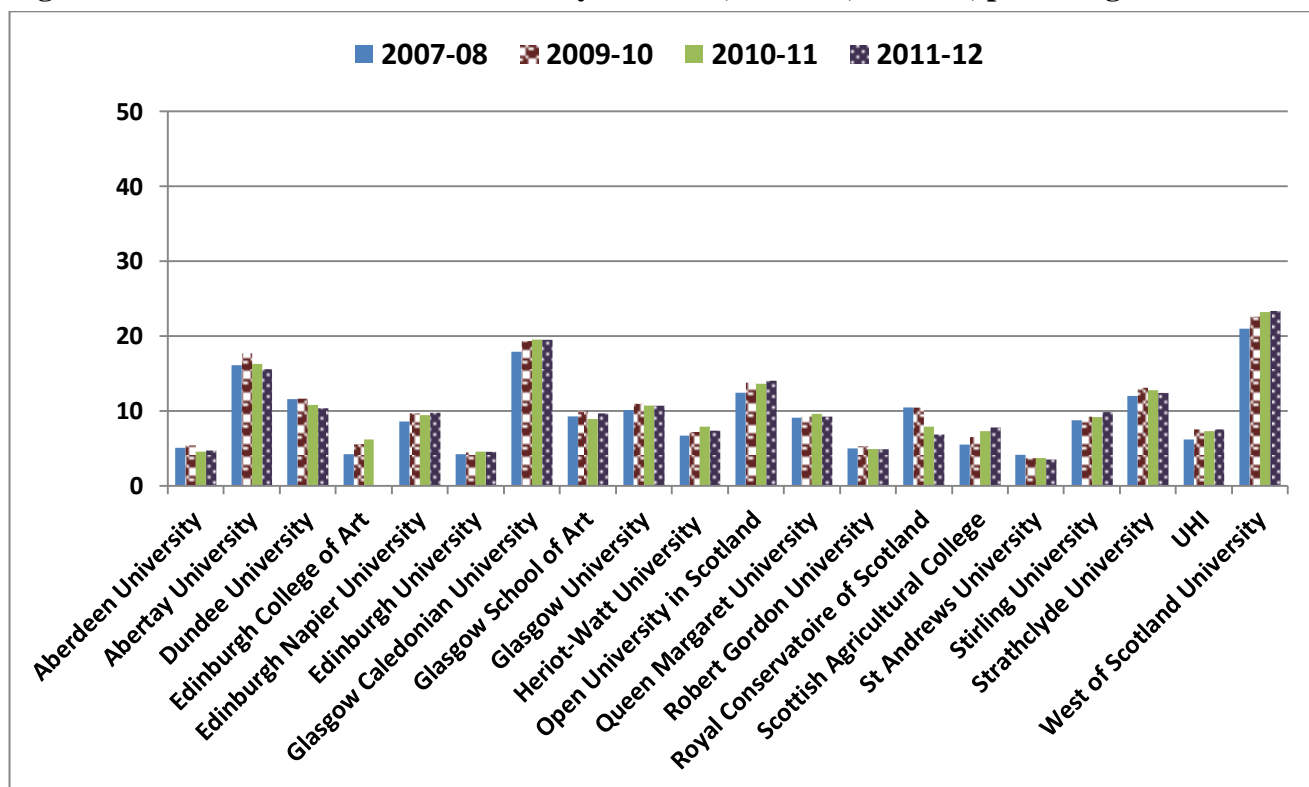
Source: SFC

Figure A6: **Scottish domiciled students by SIMD 40, 2007-08, 2009-12, percentages**
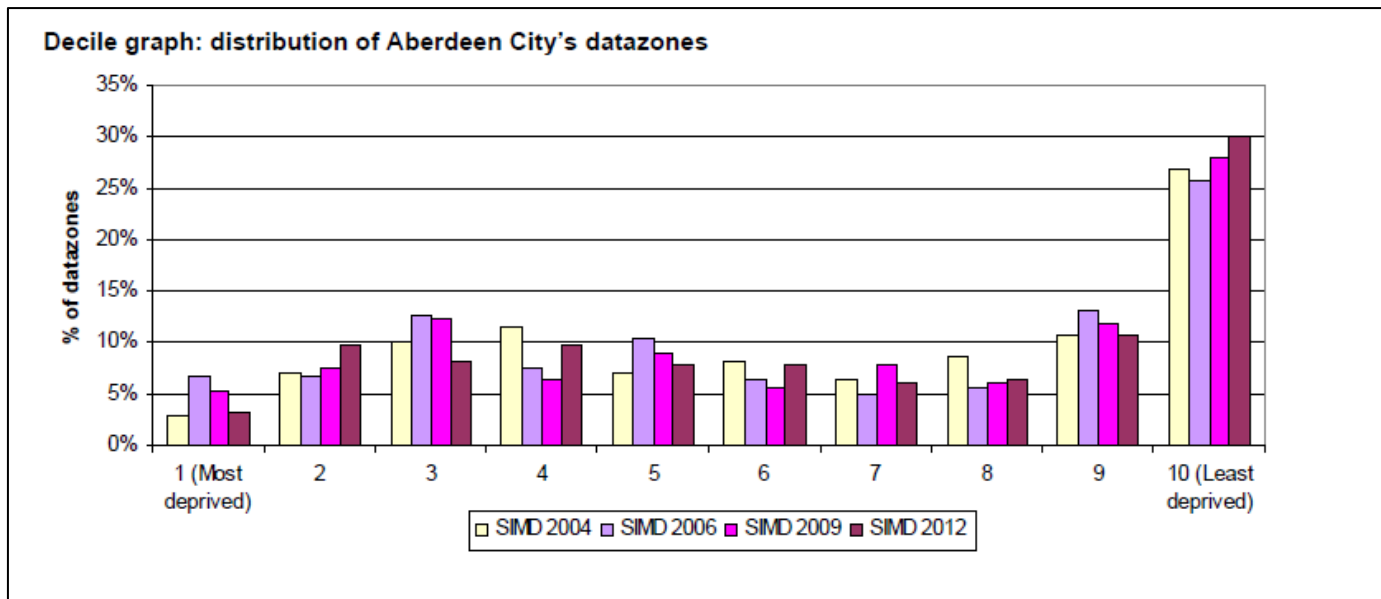

Source: SFC

Table A4:   Type of higher education institution attended by student characteristic at age 19, 2010, England, percentages

| Student characteristic	Oxbridge[1]	Russell Group[2] excl. Oxbridge	All other HEIs	Not in HE
All	1	9	30	60
Gender				
Male	1	8	27	64
Female	1	9	33	56
Ethnicity				
White	1	8	28	62
Mixed	2	8	29	60
Indian	1	13	60	26
Pakistani	*[3]	7	43	49
Bangladeshi	*	8	44	47
Other Asian	*	21	49	27
Black African	*	7	59	34
Black Caribbean	*	4	37	59
Parental occupation				
Higher professional	3	16	41	40
Lower professional	2	13	38	47
Intermediate	0	6	30	63
Lower supervisory	*	3	23	73
Routine	0	3	19	78
Other/not classified	*	4	22	74
Parental education				
Degree	3	21	44	31
At least 1 A-level	1	8	34	57
Below A-level/not sure	0	4	24	72
Eligible for free school meals				
Yes	*	3	18	79
No	1	8	31	60

Source: Department for Education, 2011

1. University of Oxford and University of Cambridge
2. University of Birmingham, University of Bristol, Cardiff University, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Imperial College London, King's College London, University of Leeds, University of Liverpool, London School of Economics & Political Science, University of Manchester, Newcastle University, University of Nottingham, Queen's University, Belfast, University of Sheffield, University of Southampton, University College London, University of Warwick
3. Number suppressed due to small sample size

Local area analysis of Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

Figure A7:   SIMD decile graph distribution, Aberdeen City
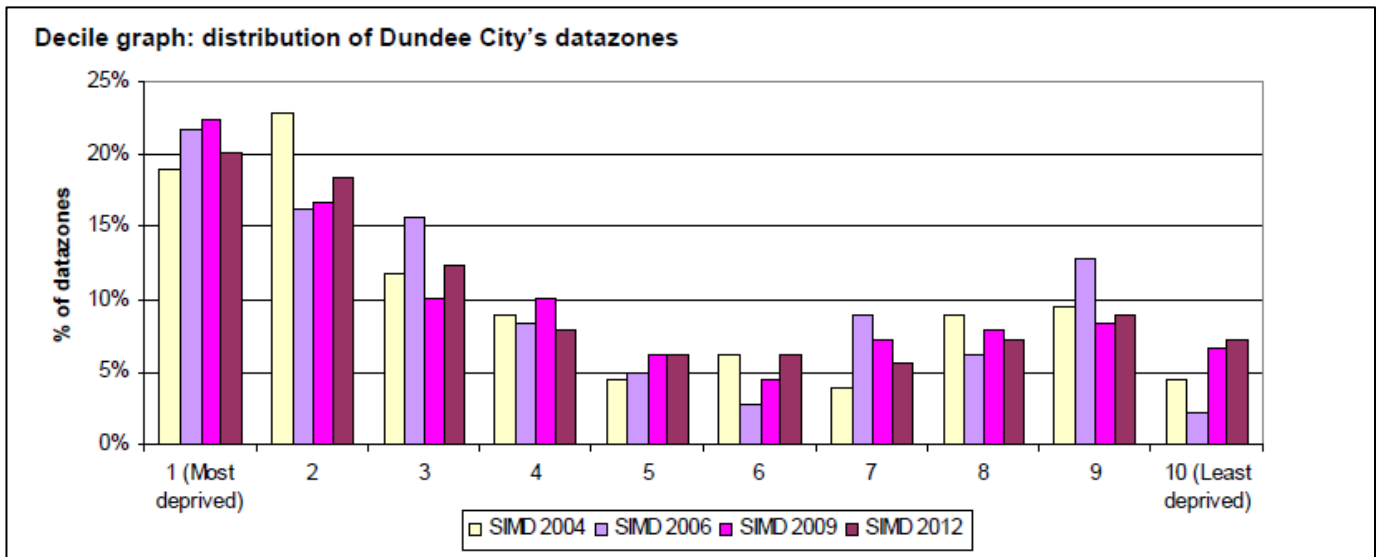

Source: Scottish Government, SIMD website

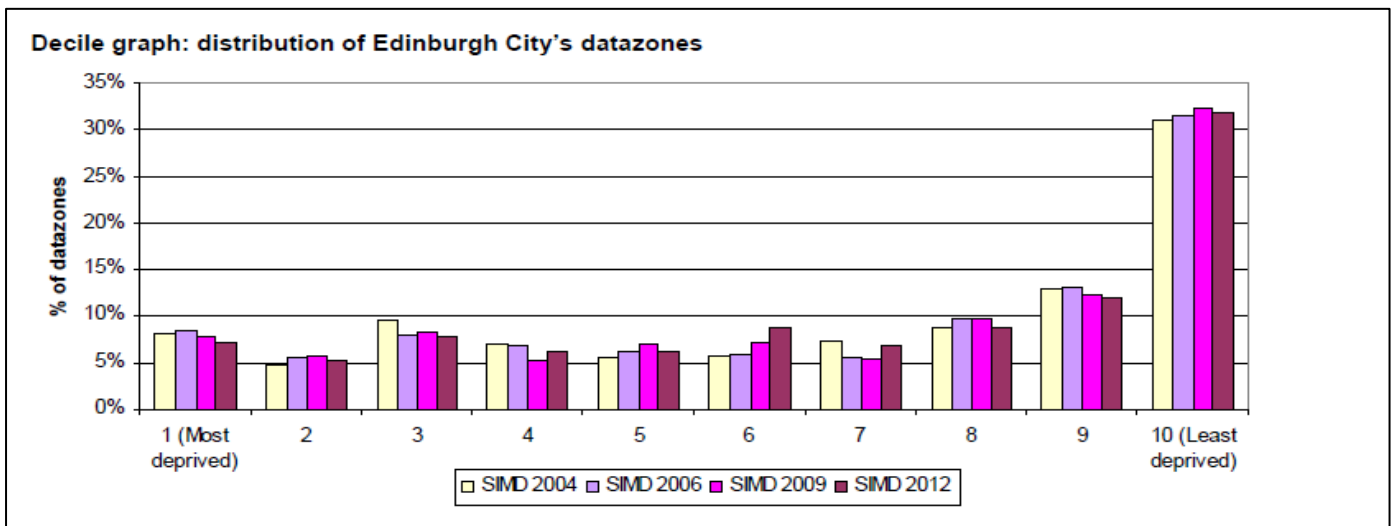**Figure A8:   SIMD decile graph distribution, Aberdeenshire**
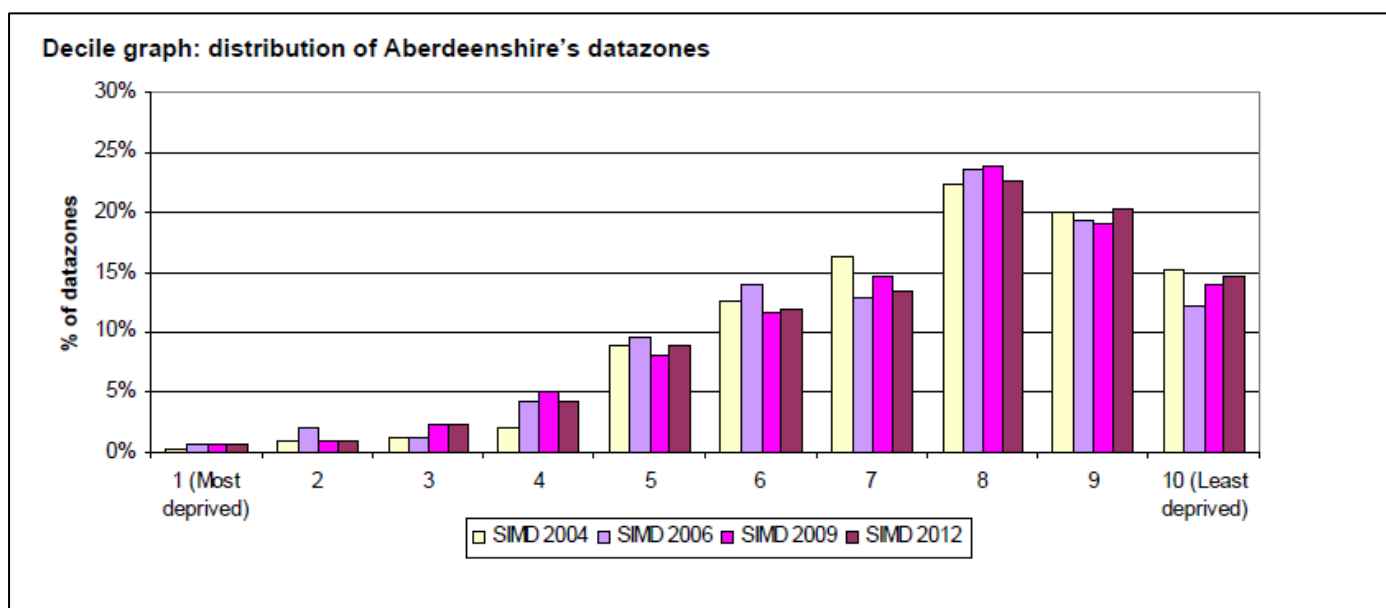
Source: Scottish Government, SIMD website

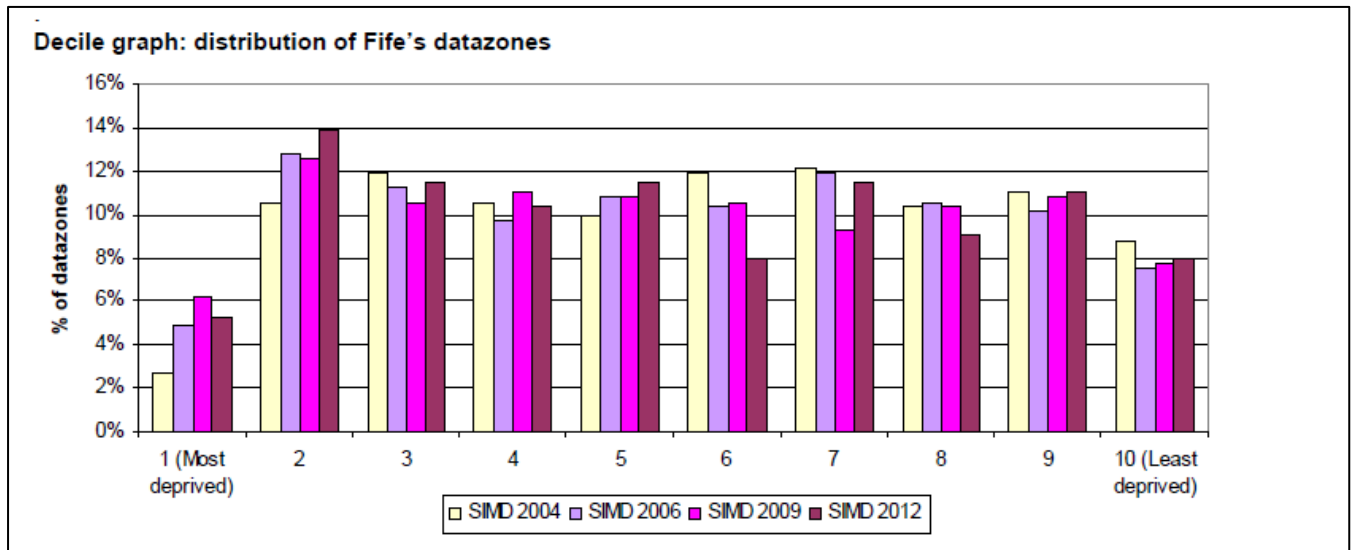**Figure A9: SIMD decile graph distribution, Dundee City**

Source: Scottish Government, SIMD website

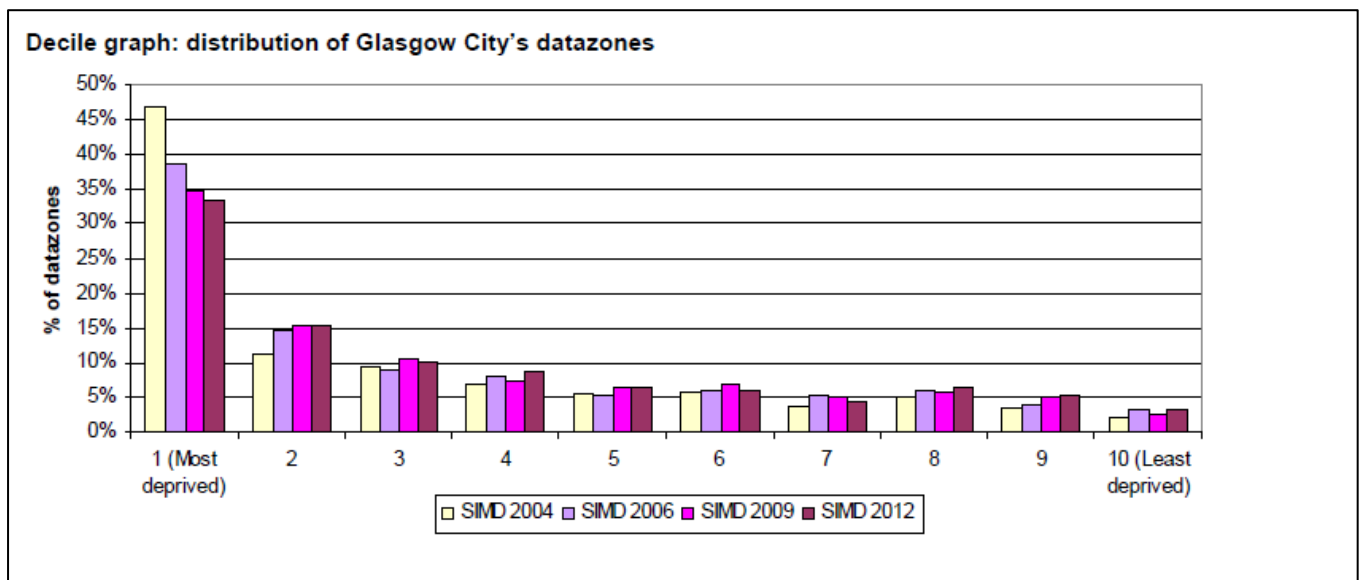**Figure A10: SIMD decile graph distribution, Edinburgh City**

Source: Scottish Government, SIMD website
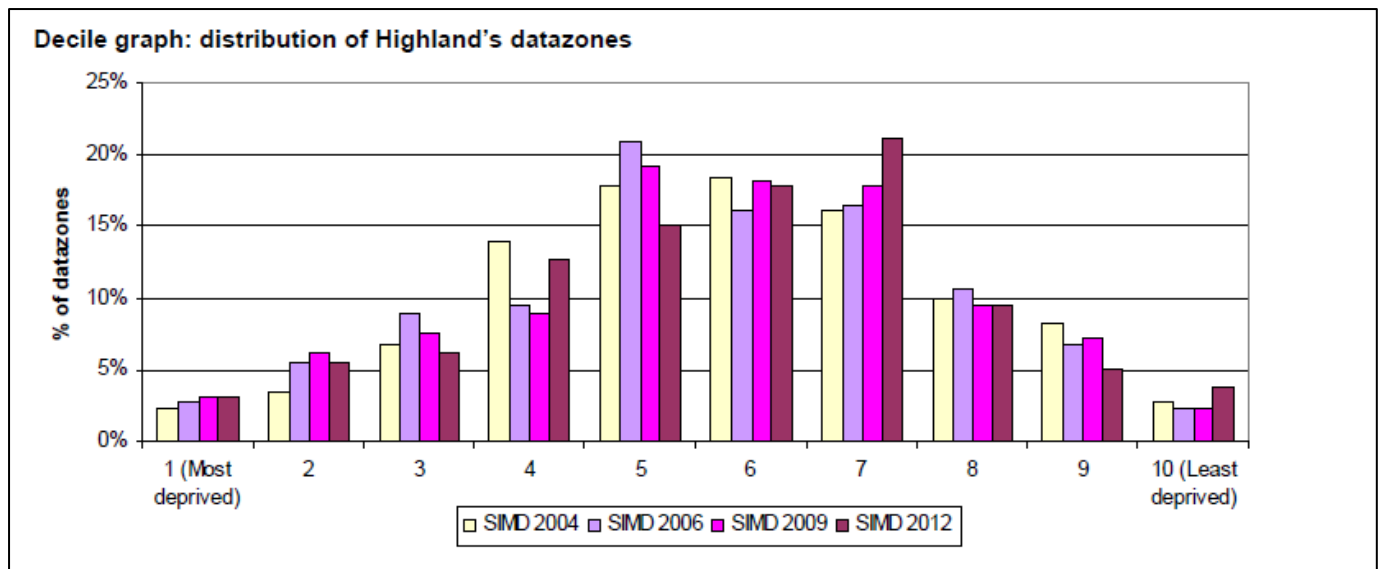
Figure A11: SIMD decile graph distribution, Fife

Source: Scottish Government, SIMD website

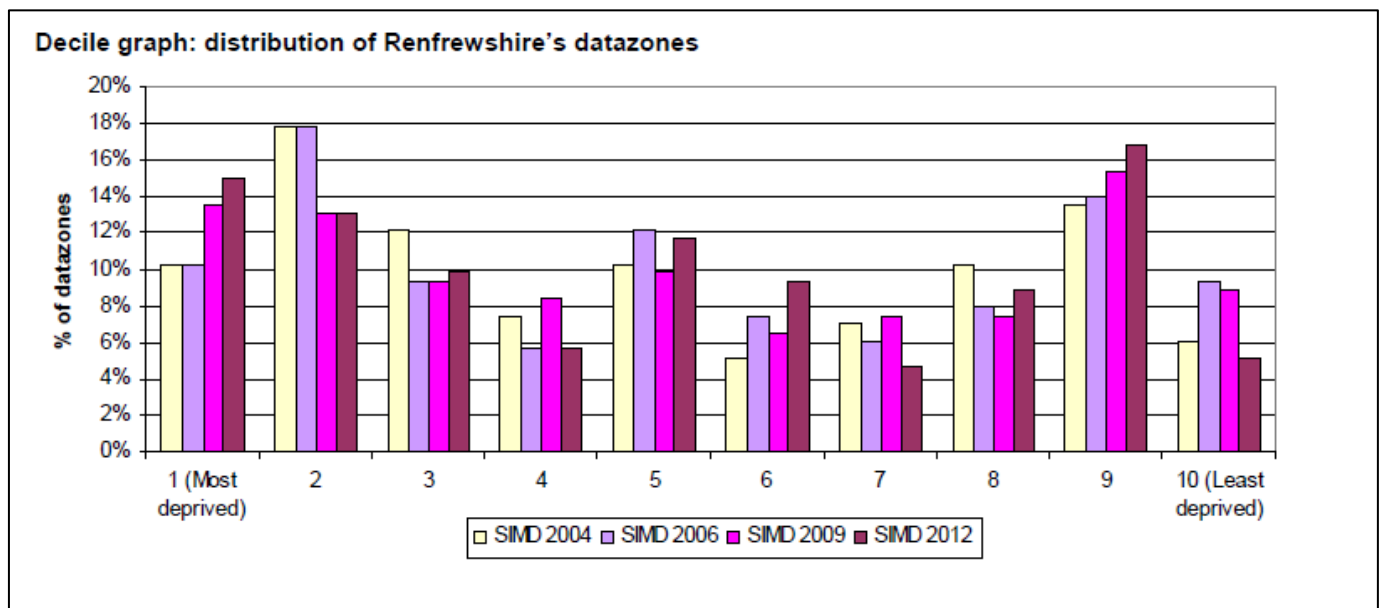**Figure A12: SIMD decile graph distribution, Glasgow City**

Source: Scottish Government, SIMD website

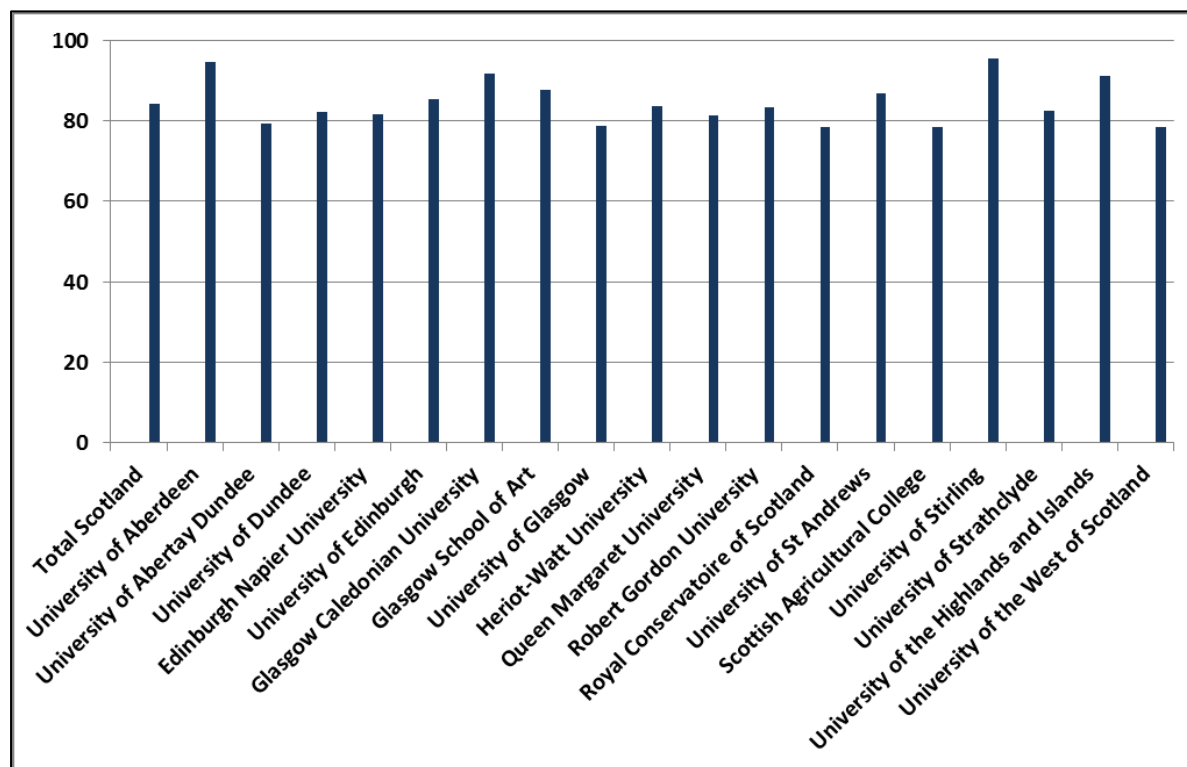**Figure A13: SIMD decile graph distribution, Highland region**

Source: Scottish Government, SIMD website

Figure A14: SIMD decile graph distribution, Renfrewshire

Source: Scottish Government, SIMD website

Figure A15: Percentage of students for whom NS-SEC is known by institution, 2010-11

Source: HESA

Appendix 2:   Glossary

ACES	Access to Creative Education in Scotland
	HE partners: University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, Glasgow School of Art, Robert Gordon University
ASPIRENorth	The North Forum's major schools outreach project (SHEP)
	HE partners: UHI, Open University in Scotland, Robert Gordon University, University of Aberdeen
EEC	European Economic Community
ELRAH	Edinburgh and Lothian Regional Articulation Hub
	HE partners: University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, Heriot-Watt University, Queen Margaret University, University of Stirling
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
ETTCI	Entry to the Creative Industries
FE	Further Education
FEC	Further Education College
FOCUS West	Focus on College and University Study in the West of Scotland (SHEP)
	HE partners: University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow School of Art, University of the West of Scotland, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, University of Strathclyde, Open University in Scotland.
FTE	full time equivalent
GTC	General Teaching Council
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
LEAPS	Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools (SHEP)
	HE partners: University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, Heriot-Watt University, Queen Margaret University, SRUC

LIFT OFF	SHEP for Fife and Tayside
	HE partners: University of Abertay Dundee, University of Dundee, University of St Andrews
MD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
NESTA	National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NS-SEC	National Statistics – Socio-Economic Classification
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PGCE	Professional Graduate Certificate in Education
PI	Performance Indicator
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
REACH Scotland	Project to increase access to high demand professional areas
	Partners: Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
SHEP	Schools for Higher Education Programme
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SPA	Supporting Professionalism in Admissions
SRUC	Scotland's Rural University College
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification
SWAP	Scottish Wider Access
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UHI	University of the Highlands and Islands
UUK	Universities UK
UWS	University of the West of Scotland
WARF	Wider Access Regional Forums