



News release: **For immediate use**

**For attention of:** Education correspondents and news desks

## **Advances on access to university for students of all backgrounds shows that taking a wide approach to widening access pays off**

Figures released today by the Scottish Funding Council [Wednesday 25 March] in its ninth *Learning for All* report show increases in the number of students starting university from across a wide range of under-represented groups including:

- students living in Scotland's most deprived 20 and 40 per cent of neighbourhoods - up 10.1 per cent and 8 per cent respectively on last year (table 1).
- pupils from low participation schools – up 11.7 per cent on last year (table 2)
- students who enter university direct from college with full recognition of their Higher National qualification – up 9.2 per cent on last year (table 3)

University efforts over the last year, building on what is a long-term priority of widening access within the higher education sector, have delivered further change to the profile of entrants to university with 14.0 per cent of all Scottish domiciled entrants now drawn from the most deprived 20 per cent of neighbourhoods (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, SIMD) and 30 per cent now drawn from the 40 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods.

In recent years, universities have been encouraged to make the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation the focus of their widening access programmes when it comes to targeting students and tracking progress. Universities have long argued that Scotland should take a wider approach to widening access, not least due to limitations inherent in SIMD as a measure and because using only the SIMD would mean other students not fitting this criteria, but with the potential to benefit from a higher education, would be overlooked.

Commenting on the progress shown in today's figures, Professor Pete Downes, Convener of Universities Scotland and Principal of the University of Dundee, said:

*"Universities are deeply committed to widening access to as many people that have the potential to benefit as possible. We have been working for decades to support people from all backgrounds into higher education. The progress made on widening access, demonstrated in today's figures, builds on steady improvement over the last few years. We are moving in the right direction and we are making a difference to people's lives."*

*"The goal is to widen access and it is a goal that everyone is committed to within higher education, throughout all levels of education and across all parties in our parliament. We want to see that commitment extend to policymakers taking a wide and inclusive approach to widening access because the people with the potential to benefit from a higher education, the people universities are reaching out to, are individuals with diverse sets of circumstances."*

*"SFC's report highlights the continuing attainment gap between school leavers from deprived and privileged backgrounds. We welcome action to address this and look forward to making a full"*

*contribution to the widening access commission. Universities are committed to further progress to ensure that learners from every community can realise their full potential.”*

### **Extra places ring-fenced for access**

This year’s data captures the beginning of the impact of new additional university places that were ring-fenced by the Scottish Government for students starting university in 2013/14 from the most deprived 40 per cent of neighbourhoods (SIMD40). The extra places were given to nine higher education institutions to enable them to make offers to a greater number of underrepresented students without increasing the pressure on places available to all students.

Today’s figures show the first year of this initiative has been successful. The group of nine higher education institutions which received additional widening access places increased the number of entrants from the poorest 20 per cent of neighbourhoods by 22 per cent in one year. Overall, the increase in entrants from the poorest 40 per cent of neighbourhoods increased by 19 per cent, meaning that very close to half of the additional places went to students from neighbourhoods affected by the worst levels of deprivation (table 1).

Commenting on the additional places, Professor Downes said:

*“The extra places recognised that widening access at university level is more challenging when the competition for places is fierce because of high demand. With a 22 per cent increase in entrants from the poorest neighbourhoods to these institutions, the data show it has been successful and has helped many universities deliver a higher rate of progress this year than might otherwise have been possible.*

*“We’re right at the start of this new approach and we’d expect it to keep delivering in the years to come especially as the places were awarded mid-year and universities didn’t have much time to get to promote the new places to the right audience or link-up to their partnerships with schools. More people could benefit from the idea behind the extra places if the criteria were widened beyond a narrow measure of deprivation to include other aspects of underrepresentation.”*

Despite continued progress, universities are not complacent about the need to do more to open up opportunities to students from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible. The new ring-fenced access places, introduced in 2013, were given to institutions mid-way through the admissions process which meant there was limited time to raise awareness and encourage people to apply. The initiative has been rolled on for subsequent years and this will allow universities to make better connections between the additional places and their outreach programmes and links with schools.

### **Retention**

The data show the boost to widening access is matched by further increases in university retention rates with another year-on-year improvement to 91.3 per cent of full-time Scottish domiciled undergraduate students.

The statistics also show good progress in improving in the retention rates of students from the poorest 20 per cent and 40 per cent of neighbourhoods according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

(SIMD20 and SIMD40). The retention rate for students from SIMD20 neighbourhoods now sits at 87.3 per cent, up from 85.5 per cent last year and 84 per cent four years ago.

### Performance Indicators also published

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) also released performance indicators today showing access and retention figures for universities across the UK. This set of data also show Scotland's higher education institutions making progress on measures of access and retention although differences in the methodological approach taken by the Scottish Funding Council and HESA, with the SFC primarily focusing on the progress amongst Scottish-domiciled students at Scottish higher education institutions, mean the data do not necessarily correspond across the datasets. The HESA performance indicators can be found here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis>

### Further information:

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### NOTES:

- The SFC's ninth *Learning for All* report can be found here: <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/communications/Statisticalpublications/2015/SFCST062015.aspx>
- The data in the tables below is taken from that available in the SFC report and in additional tables made available online by the SFC.

**Table 1: Scottish domiciled undergraduate entrants shown by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation in 2012/13 and 2013/14 for the sector as a whole and the group of institutions that received additional access places.**

	2012/13		2013/14		Annual increase, 2012/13 to 2013/14	
	Number of entrants from 20% most deprived	Number of entrants from 40% most deprived	Number of entrants from 20% most deprived	Number of entrants from 40% most deprived	Annual rate of progress at SIMD20 (%)	Annual rate of progress at SIMD40 (%)
<b>Figures for all HEIs (excluding SRUC*)</b>	4,261	9,304	4,692	10,046	10.1	8
<b>Figures for 9 HEIs that received additional access places</b>	1,404	3,262	1,709	3,884	21.72	19.07

Analysis Universities Scotland's own using SFC data from table 7 in *Learning for All* and additional data supplied to US by SFC.

\* SRUC is not included in this table because the institution went through a merger between 2012/13 and 2013/14 meaning its figures, which show a significant annual increase, are not comparable year to year.

**Table 2: Progression rates to HE for students from SHEP schools in 2012/13 and 2013/14**

	2012-13	2013-14	Increase on previous year (%)
<b>Number of entrants to HE from a school participating in the Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) which traditionally have low rates of progression to HE</b>	1,464	1,635	11.7

Analysis Universities Scotland's own using SFC data from table 12 in *Learning for All* and additional data supplied to US by SFC.

HE in this context means higher education delivered by a higher education institution or a further education college.

**Table 3: Students articulating from college direct into university with advanced standing in 2012/13 and 2013/14**

	2012-13	2013-14
<b>Number of students articulating into university with advanced standing (full credit for HNC/HND)</b>	3,469	3,788
<b>Increase on previous year (%)</b>		9.2

Analysis Universities Scotland's own using SFC data from table 18 in *Learning for All* and additional data supplied to US by SFC.