



MEDIA RELEASE: for immediate use

29 March 2012

Universities Scotland welcomes steady progress on widening access

- Universities in Scotland made greater progress in the last year on widening access measures than anywhere else in the UK.

Universities Scotland responded to today's (Thursday, 29th March) performance indicators for universities as published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) welcoming steady progress in the right direction.

The statistics released today show the proportion of students studying at university from state schools and from poorer backgrounds (measured by the lowest four socio-economic classes NS-SEC 4,5,6 and 7). On both measures, Scottish universities have made the most significant progress of anywhere in the UK, compared to last year:

- Scottish universities have increased the number of students from state schools by 1.5 per cent to 88.3 per cent (compared to 86.8% in 2009/10). The UK average decreased by 0.1%.
- Universities in Scotland admitted a higher proportion of entrants from state schools than universities in England (88.3 per cent compared to 88.2 per cent).
- Scottish universities have also increased the proportion of entrants from the poorest backgrounds by 1.4 per cent compared to last year. The average UK increase was 0.6 per cent.

Commenting on the figures released today, Simon Jennings, Deputy Director at Universities Scotland, said:

"Universities are committed to widening access and today's welcome figures show steady progress. It's particularly encouraging that universities in Scotland have shown a greater rate of improvement over the last twelve months than anywhere else in the UK."

"Universities will not rest on these results. We will be striving to achieve more over the coming years as every university enters into an outcome agreement on access with the Scottish Funding Council."

Widening access to university is a complex challenge and real progress will come from a strategic and coordinated effort right across Scotland's education system including schools and universities. The link between poverty and under-achievement starts early in a child's education. This was reinforced by the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy, which was published only two days ago

and showed that in S2, children from the wealthiest backgrounds were performing twice as well as children from the poorest backgrounds.

Commenting on the need to take a long-term and systemic approach to widening access at university, Simon Jennings comments:

"Widening access to university is a complex and long-term challenge but there is a strong negative correlation between deprivation and attainment from the early years of a child's life. There's much that universities can do to play their part, including their existing engagement with primary and secondary schools, but the greatest progress will come from interventions in the early years of a child's life and many, many years before they start considering university."

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Notes:

- HESA's Performance Indicators can be found here:
http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2072&Itemid=141
- Extract from HESA table 1a. Proportion of young, full time entrants from state schools:

	2009/10	2010/11	difference
UK	88.8%	88.7%	-0.1%
England	88.4%	88.2%	-0.2%
Wales	93.2%	93.2%	-1%
Scotland	86.8%	88.3%	+1.5%
Northern Ireland	99.2%	98.9%	-0.3%

- Extract from HESA table 1a. Proportion of young, full-time entrants from NS-SEC 4,5,6 & 7:

	2009/10	2010/11	difference
UK	30.0%	30.6%	+0.6%
England	30.1%	30.7%	+0.6%
Wales	30.2%	31.0%	+0.8%
Scotland	25.8%	27.2%	+1.4%
Northern Ireland	39.1%	39.4%	+0.3%

- The Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy, published on 28th march 2012 found S2 pupils living in areas with lower levels of deprivation were twice as likely to be performing well or very well as pupils living in areas with higher levels of deprivation. The survey can be found here:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/03/5285/downloads#res390565>.