

## Educational attainment gap – Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce

### Universities Scotland Response

Universities in Scotland welcome the report from the Commission on Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce. While the report, and the subsequent Scottish Government Youth Employment Strategy focuses actions on the School and College sectors there are many parallels and implications for the University sector which the sector are eager to respond to.

Universities particularly welcome the emphasis on partnership, the recognition of the role of the education sector as a driver of economic growth and social mobility and the commitment to tackling inequality in all levels of education.

Scotland’s universities share an interest, and a responsibility, in raising the educational attainment of all of Scotland’s school pupils and in closing the attainment gap that is already evident between Scotland’s wealthiest and poorest children as young as five years of age.<sup>1</sup>

The Universities Scotland response to the Committee will cover the following areas:

- Employer engagement
- Equality of access to education
- Regional partnerships to support educational attainment
- Supporting flexible pathways through education to employment

### Employer Engagement

The recommendations in the Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce Report on greater engagement of employers in education are welcomed by universities. Universities have a long history of employer engagement in course and programme design and review, of working with industry and employer advisory boards and through provision of placement and work-based learning partnerships. The university sector believe Schools and Colleges would equally benefit from this input.

Heriot Watt University engages employers throughout all of the above aspects – and considers this to bring value to employers, students and the university. The University has active industry advisory boards with representatives from local, national and international businesses. In tune with Wood Commission Report themes, the board supports a mutual understanding of employers’ needs and graduate skills. This informs the development of the curriculum and encourages business to become involved in the delivery of the curricula.

Abertay University provides work-related learning opportunities for students on all degree programmes. These may involve work-based learning or work-simulated learning. Evidence from sector organisations such as Scot Grad suggests that students’ employability and skills are enhanced by placement experiences. Since 2010, over 800 graduates have undertaken a placement through ScotGrad and over 75% of these graduates have progressed to graduate-level employment<sup>2</sup> (this is higher than the Scottish-wide average of 69%.<sup>3</sup>) The universality of the approach taken by Abertay is

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation report found an attainment gap of 10-13 months is evident in children as young as five: [www.jrf.org.uk/publications/closing-attainment-gap-scottish-education](http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/closing-attainment-gap-scottish-education).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scotgrad.co.uk/graduates/overview>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/uploads/HESA%20DLHE%202014.pdf>

supportive of the drive to reduce inequality and broaden aspiration and ensures fair access to opportunities.

### Equality of access to education

The Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce Report challenges schools, colleges and employers to reduce inequality particularly focussing on gender, ethnicity, disability and care leavers.

Universities in Scotland are committed to widening access of opportunity and removing barriers to access to higher education. All universities signed up to a widening access statement in 2012 including the following statement:

“University should be equally open to any learner with the appropriate academic potential to benefit, regardless of their social or economic circumstances.”<sup>4</sup>

Universities Scotland research has identified a range of challenges to educational attainment which subsequently affects positive destinations for school leavers. Universities would encourage the Committee to resist the unhelpful streaming of young people at school age

As the Wood Commission identified, gender has an impact on educational attainment. One of the key issues of gender imbalance in access to higher education is the lower proportion of males staying in education and attaining qualification levels which prepare them for university entry, and the consequent female/male imbalance in the undergraduate population.<sup>5</sup> While universities undertake a great deal of action to reduce this imbalance, this cannot be resolved without cross-sector working and increased equality of attainment in schools.

The Wood Commission Report did not directly deal with socio-economic impact on educational attainment, however this is of significant importance to universities as universities are currently measured against the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Universities Scotland welcome the acknowledgement from the First Minister in November 2014 and from the Leader of the Scottish Labour Party in February 2015 that more must be done to improve school attainment in Scotland's most deprived communities to facilitate access to university.

The attainment gap starts young and continues through school. By the time university is a consideration the attainment gap between the wealthiest and the poorest presents a considerable challenge.

- Across Scotland, school pupils from the wealthiest 20 per cent of postcode areas are three times more likely to get the *minimum* entry requirements needed to go to university (three or four Highers at any grade) as their peers from the poorest 20 per cent of postcode regions (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)80 and SIMD20 compared).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/uploads/Widening%20Access%20recommendations.pdf> p4

<sup>5</sup> Data provided in Annex – table 1 demonstrating the greater retention of female students, table 2 and 3 showing greater educational attainment at SCQF Level 6 by female students

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government Attainment and Leaver Statistics 2012/13. 21% of SIMD20 school leavers got 3-4 SCQF level 6 qualifications compared to 63% from SIMD80.

- The attainment gap doubles again if you look at the difference between the numbers of pupils from SIMD20 postcodes achieving three or more 'A' grades at Higher and/or Advanced Higher compared with pupils from SIMD80 postcodes.<sup>7</sup> Only 4.3 per cent of pupils living in SIMD20 achieved the grades compared to 26.1 per cent of pupils living in SIMD80.

### Regional partnership to support educational attainment

The promotion of a regional approach and emphasis on partnership working are also key to the Wood Commission aims and to raising educational attainment. Many universities have seen demonstrable success in this area and can demonstrate success in supporting widening access through these partnerships.

There are various methods employed by universities to support educational attainment within their region.

Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen has a long established partnership Aberdeen City Council and, through this, has a number of 'partner schools' throughout the North East of Scotland. The aim of these partnerships is to support educational attainment and achievement of positive destinations. The model supports direct delivery by the University in local schools and a suite of on-campus programmes. This has led to 15.9% of Senior Phase pupils in partner schools becoming 'Associate Students' of the University.<sup>8</sup>

The University of the Highlands and Islands aims to develop and oversee the delivery of a partnership-wide strategy for increasing the range of the curriculum offered to and utilised by schools and school pupils in the region. Through the college structure of the institution, the University works with partner schools directly delivering courses, in person and online, at SCQF levels 4-7 to approximately 3000 students. This supports delivery of advanced-learning enabling study across a largely rural area which would otherwise not be available.

The Advanced Higher Hub at Glasgow Caledonian University provides Advanced Higher study in English; Mathematics; Biology; Chemistry; History; Business Management and Modern Studies to enable learners in the Glasgow area to undertake study which might not be available in their school and which may otherwise prevent them from reaching their educational attainment abilities. The Hub works in partnership with Schools who have lower-than-average progression to higher education<sup>9</sup> and students from an SIMD40 background. The Hub worked with 17 partner schools and 97 pupils in Year 1 (2013-14) and increased this to 21 partner schools and 155 pupils in Year 2 (2014-15). The Hub has achieved attendance rates of 94%<sup>10</sup> and a pass rate of 76%. Similar programmes are also run at the Dundee City Campus Model by Dundee University and Abertay University and the S6@Uni project run by Aberdeen University.

### Supporting flexible pathways through education to employment

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<sup>7</sup> SFC Learning for All – eight update report (2014) table 22c\_i

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.rgu.ac.uk/future-students/degree-link/associate-student-scheme>

<sup>9</sup> The partner school progression to HE rate is 19% compared to a Glasgow City Council average of 31% and a sector wide progression rate of 36%.

<sup>10</sup> The attendance rate across all pupils in Glasgow City Council schools is 91%.

The Wood Commission Report identifies the importance of establishing pathways for young people which aid transition from school to college to employment. Universities strongly support the Wood Commission recommendation to develop pathways “without splitting young people off into separate streams at school age.”

University is not always the first step for school-leavers, who may legitimately chose to study at College or progress to employment immediately following School but it is important to ensure that the pathways remain flexible to allow university to be a future step. Pathways should be flexible and should to be considered as stopping at college or employment. The Committee should consider routes into and through various levels of education as the norm rather than a fixed path.

Universities are responsive to this desired flexibility. Universities are increasingly establishing articulation agreements with Colleges to support students transitioning from College to University. In 2012-13 almost 8000 students entered university from college.<sup>11</sup>

To facilitate this, universities work in close partnership with Colleges to undertake extensive curriculum mapping to ease progress through all levels of the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF). The University of the Highlands and Island, itself a partnership of thirteen independent colleges and research institutions, is an excellent example; the University is currently aligning curriculum planning across all further education and higher education courses and have seamless curricula in Tourism and Hospitality, Creative Industries, and Engineering and Energy. This facilitates the development of coherent pathways in-line with, and exceeding, the ambition established in the Wood Commission report.

The university sector is committed to lifelong learning and providing higher education to those who desire it and are capable at the appropriate time in their life. In 2013-14, there were over 80,000 mature students studying at Scottish universities.<sup>12</sup> This underlines the importance of supporting educational attainment and raising aspiration in schools to ensure that all pathways remain open to students regardless of how or when they may choose that path.

## **ENDS**

### **Further information**

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<sup>11</sup> Data provided in Annex – Table 4

<sup>12</sup> Data provided in Annex – Table 5

## **Educational attainment gap – role of the third and private sectors: Universities Scotland response**

- Universities Scotland welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence on the role of the third and private sectors in improving pupil attainment and closing the educational attainment gap.
- For the purposes of this submission we include universities as part of Scotland's third sector.
- We have followed the format of the questions posed, answering only where we have a relevant contribution to make.

### **1. The scale of the third and private sectors' involvement in schools, in terms of improving attainment and achievement and the appropriate dividing line between their role and the role of education authorities**

- Scotland's 19 higher education institutions (HEIs) have significant involvement in and relationships with schools across the country.
- As can be seen from the examples below, a close partnership between the University and the relevant local Council(s) is often integral to the establishment and success of a project. This reinforces Universities Scotland's call for Scotland to take a joined-up and system-wide approach to widening access which recognises the role of all players in improving attainment.

#### Engagement with schools

- The national programme for school and university relationships, called the Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP), operates in four regions across Scotland through Focus West, the Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS), Lift Off (Fife and Tayside) and Aspire North.<sup>1</sup>
- SHEP targets schools which have less than a 22 per cent rate of progression to higher education.
- SHEP has evolved into a national programme with Scottish Funding Council (SFC) involvement from regional partnerships that started over twenty years ago.
- Across the country SHEP works with over 100 schools with low progression to HE rates to provide additional support, guidance and encouragement for pupils from S3 upwards. Local Councils are also key partners in these regional initiatives.

#### Support for curriculum delivery

- Many higher education institutions now play a direct role in supplementing or supporting the provision at Higher and/or Advanced Higher level which is available to Senior Phase pupils within a certain area.
- The additional choice ensures that pupils can study subjects which directly relate to their post-school ambitions and also helps to improve their attainment. As this model involves delivery on university campuses it can serve as an intermediary step towards higher education.
- Glasgow Caledonian University's Advanced Higher Hub, in partnership with Glasgow City Council and the SFC, enhances provision for around 120-200 Senior Phase pupils each year by offering Advanced Higher subjects that could not be accommodated within school timetables. 60 per cent of the first year's intake of pupils were from SIMD20.<sup>2</sup>
- Dundee University runs the Dundee City Campus project with Dundee City Council and local schools to address a Council challenge of falling demand for some subjects at Higher level by delivering them at the University. Around one-fifth of Dundee city's S6 roll engages with the Dundee City

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<sup>1</sup> Universities Scotland (2013) Access All Areas (<http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/uploads/ACCESS%20ALL%20AREAS%20final.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> Glasgow Caledonian University Outcome Agreement 2014-15

Campus at any one time. If some schools had lost the capacity to offer pupils Maths and English at Higher level then this would have limited the progression opportunities of their students.

- The University of Aberdeen runs S6@Uni across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire schools to complement or supplement choices in S6 and lead to UCAS accreditation that can help with progression to HE.
- The Queen Margaret University Edinburgh Academy Model, the University of the Highlands and Islands and the Open University in Scotland's Young Applicants in School Scheme (YASS) are additional examples of HEIs delivering supplementary provision at S5/S6 level.

### Raising aspiration as well as achievement and attainment

- The ECC inquiry understandably places its emphasis on improving attainment and achievement. However, raising the levels of aspiration amongst Scotland's young people is also an important part of widening access to university.
- The motivational influence of this can have a major impact on the young people involved, and on their families. An important strand of universities' outreach work is to build confidence, expand horizons and break down self-imposed barriers with the goal of motivating and supporting pupils and their parents to develop and achieve higher ambitions. Various evaluative studies have also shown that of all the work universities do to widen access and raise aspiration and attainment, this outreach work may be particularly effective.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Whether their approaches have been particularly successful in improving achievement and attainment for school pupils and, if so, whether their methods could be more embedded in the curriculum**

- There is a lot of evidence to suggest that universities' widening access programmes are successful in improving achievement and attainment for the school pupils they are able to reach. As the goal of university outreach is most typically to widen access to HE, universities most commonly use progression to HE as the metric by which to judge success. However, there will be other positive impacts resulting from university activity that are captured less easily, like improved exam performance, achievement of a greater number of (or more relevant) Highers/Advanced Highers.
- We know that the attainment gap between Scotland's most and least deprived pupils remains stark and is evident as young as five years of age. This is why Scotland needs a concerted and coordinated effort involving all partners in education.

### Success with SHEP

- SFC tracks progress of SHEP at a national level. Last year over 1,400 entrants to undergraduate studies in Scotland's 19 HEIs were from SHEP schools, which equates to 4.5 per cent of all Scotland-domiciled entrants, up from 4.3 per cent the previous year.<sup>4</sup>
- The impact felt at a regional level is more interesting. Focus West has increased the progression rate to HE across its seven core schools by an average of seven per cent, which is all the more significant when many secondary schools started with progression rates below 10 per cent. Similarly, Lift Off has seen an average of 39 per cent of its pupils progress to HE over the last three years compared to an average 17 per cent progression rate across the 13 schools it works with.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/uploads/WideningAccessToHE-CREID.pdf> and <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2013/wplitreview/> (e.g. p19)

<sup>4</sup> SFC (2014) Learning for All, Eighth Update Report, p.8  
(<http://www.sfc.ac.uk/communications/Statisticalpublications/2014/SFCST062014.aspx>)

Each of the regional SHEP initiatives provide detailed analysis of their impact on an annual basis, which can be found on their respective websites and in SFC reports.

#### Improvements in achievement and attainment

- Evaluations of university-run summer schools and similar initiatives have proven to be highly effective at improving achievement in that there are high progression rates into higher education for pupils who successfully complete these activities.
- Evaluations of the University of Glasgow's taster weeks, a spin-off from the summer school, found them highly successful in positively influencing the attitudes of participants. 84 per cent of participants in the 2013 programme said they were more likely to apply to university and around one third of applicants actually did go on to enter the University.
- The University of Edinburgh's Pathways to the Professions programme offers structured support and insight into highly selective courses such as medicine, law and architecture. Of the 2012 cohort of participants 96 per cent of Pathways Plus participants that applied for a Pathways subject entered university, with 72 per cent starting one of the professional courses.
- However, analysts have questioned whether the success of this type of intervention is simply easier to measure as it has a more immediate outcome than longer-term interventions.<sup>5</sup>

#### Determining success – the importance of evaluation

- Universities are now much more effective at monitoring and evaluating the success of their widening access initiatives than they were ten or twenty years ago.
- Universities Scotland's evidence-based assessment of what works in widening access recommended that HEIs should ensure that all widening access initiatives have appropriate and sufficiently rigorous processes of evaluation built into their design. This is important for performance monitoring purposes, but also for improving the possibility of objectively determining what actually works in widening access. Where appropriate, suitable elements of these evaluations should be published, at intervals, as a matter of public interest.<sup>6</sup>

#### Evaluating success longitudinally

- Where university initiatives engage with pupils at a young age it is difficult to identify causal links between the project and post-16 destinations because of the generational time factor and because of the amount of variables that shape a young person during this time.
- Glasgow Caledonian University has established a longitudinal survey to track the journey of young people through the Caledonian Club to 2030; evaluating numeracy, literacy and communication skills as well as levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. Numbers are small at the current time but intermediate indicators suggest that young people are not only more likely to go on to higher education having been in the Club, but also more likely to stay on their courses.<sup>7</sup>
- Determining what constitutes 'success' should be an important consideration. A widening access initiative run by one university may have been a success for an individual student if it encouraged them to post-16 learning in an FE college or at a different university rather than the institution

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<sup>5</sup> OFFA (2013) <http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Literature-review-of-research-into-WP-to-HE.pdf> p.iii

<sup>6</sup> Universities Scotland (2014) Action on Access  
(<http://www.sfc.ac.uk/communications/Statisticalpublications/2014/SFCST062014.aspx>)

<sup>7</sup> Glasgow Caledonian University Outcome Agreement 2012-13.

which ran the initiative. This is why tackling attainment and widening access at an all-Scotland level is important rather than pitting institutions against each other to compete on performance.

### **3. Whether the full potential of the third and private sectors in helping to improve children's attainment and achievement is being realised**

- Looking at the higher education sector we see a well-established track record of partnerships with schools and local authorities focussed on increasing achievement, with the measure of achievement being progression into higher education. LEAPs and other programmes which form part of the SHEP programme have been in existence for 20 years.
- We also note a recent increase in innovative and collaborative initiatives between universities, colleges, schools and local councils to address challenges in attainment and achievement (many of which are listed above) including the Academies model at Queen Margaret University and the Advanced Higher Hub at Glasgow Caledonian. This would indicate that the potential is there and is being realised in many cases.
- Projects to raise attainment and achievement work best when they are borne out of a clear need and have been developed to address the specific context in which they operate. It is not always possible or desirable to transplant a successful initiative in one place to a different school or university to try and replicate that success. Scotland should look to learn from best practice but should avoid a one-size-fits all approach to this highly complex challenge.
- It is worth saying that the establishment and subsequent success of innovative initiatives to raise attainment and achievement can often rest in the strong motivation of particular individuals as the driving force and the openness and enthusiasm of certain local councils. This is not always found uniformly across Scotland.

### **4. How successful schools have been in reporting on pupils' wider achievements (i.e. not just examination results) such as those the third sector helps to deliver. Whether such achievements are valued by parents, employers and learning providers as much as formal qualifications**

This answer focuses on the latter half of the question and does so from the perspective of universities as learning providers.

#### Wider achievements

- At present, UCAS personal statements are the main way in which pupils report their wider achievements to universities. Universities consider the content of these statements alongside academic qualifications, references, portfolios, auditions or interviews, contextual data and, in some cases, information gleaned from admissions tests (such as the UK Clinical Aptitude Test) and interviews, so that they can consider applications in an holistic way.
- Whilst prior attainment is by far the most important single factor determining academic potential and success, universities do not admit students on the basis of grades alone. The personal statement, therefore, provides an important opportunity for applicants to demonstrate their individual suitability for admission.
- There is an important equality issue with regards to the opportunity to acquire a wider set of experiences and achievements and also in the presentation of that information in a UCAS personal statement. Evidence by Jones for the Sutton Trust found "carefully crafted" statements packed with "high status, relevant activities" from independent school pupils compared to statements from pupils at state schools, who "appear to receive less help composing their statement, often



struggling to draw on suitable work and life experience” and contain three times as many writing errors.<sup>8</sup>

- This is why information, advice and guidance forms a major part of universities outreach activity to students in the Senior Phase. Significant levels of pre-application support and guidance are made available to pupils (and sometimes their parents) from underrepresented groups, including help with applications and mock-interview preparation.
- The Senior Phase of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) puts a stronger emphasis on extra-curricular activity and skills development, and whilst this is positive it is important to recognise that not all pupils have an equal opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities. Universities Scotland addressed this issue to some extent in 2012<sup>9</sup> when looking ahead to CfE Senior Phase implementation and suggested that in order to report on pupils’ wider achievements fairly a school-level record of achievement might be useful to universities. It could help institutions to understand the particular Senior Phase models implemented by different schools; it could capture pupils’ achievements more broadly than the grades they obtain (and in a more objective way than personal statements); *and* provide additional contextual information that could assist universities in fair decision-making.

#### Diverse routes

- All 19 higher education institutions recognise and welcome the increased diversity of pathways through learning provided by the Senior Phase of CfE. This can involve the achievement of Highers over two years instead of one as well as the acquisition of a broader range of achievements in addition to academic qualifications.
- Every HEI has published a statement on the senior phase on its website.
- Universities also have policies and practices to recognise prior learning. This is where applicants can get credit for their prior learning when that learning may not have come with a formal qualification – e.g. it might be experiential learning. This is part of universities’ life-cycle approach to widening access – it provides second chances for mature entrants who were perhaps did not achieve the grades necessary to go to university (for whatever reason) when they were at school.

#### Contextualised admissions

- Universities do not just consider wider achievements in addition to exam results, they also use contextual information as part of their admissions processes to consider the context in which applicants have achieved. In doing so they help to level the playing field for applicants, recognising that not everyone has an equal opportunity to demonstrate their potential because of circumstance.
- 17 of the 19 higher education institutions in Scotland now operate systems of contextualised admissions.<sup>10</sup> Data used to help contextualise achievement in admissions decisions can include geodemographic data, deprivation levels of the postcode area in which a person lives or attends school, progression rates of the person’s school, care leaver or looked-after status, whether

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<sup>8</sup> Jones, S. for Sutton Trust (2012) The Personal Statement: A Fair Way to Assess University Applications? URL: <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/the-personal-statement/>

<sup>9</sup> Universities Scotland (2012) Beyond the Senior Phase. P.17. A record of achievement in schools would complement the Higher Education Attainment Record (HEAR) in universities which documents students’ co-curricula and extra-curricula activities as well as academic attainment.

<sup>10</sup> The Open University in Scotland has an open admissions policy, so the use of contextual data and information in the admissions process is unnecessary. The other university which does not make direct reference to contextual admissions already has the most diverse student body in terms of SIMD. Different institutions are at different stages of contextualised admissions use.

someone has participated in a widening access programme and/or summer school. In some cases it enables institutions to make adjustments in the selection and/or offer-making parts of the admissions process for applicants whose individually strong performances are achieved in challenging circumstances, which may include (for example) differential offers at lower rate (though applicants will still have to meet minimum entry requirements).

**5. Given the strong policy focus on the early years , whether the third and private sectors have been able to work equally effectively with pupils of all ages**

- Historically, the emphasis of university widening access activity has been concentrated on the later years of secondary school, typically S3 onwards.
- More recently, Scotland has seen the development of a number of university-run initiatives that look to engage with younger pupils, even including pre-school age children. Examples of this include Glasgow Caledonian University's Caledonian Club, which works with pupils from nursery right up to S6, and the Children's University run by Queen Margaret University.
- The University of Strathclyde also offers a Children's University aimed at promoting social mobility and raising aspirations by giving children the opportunity to visit university, attend special lectures and engage in other educational activities. It involves children aged 7 to 14 (and 5 and 6 year olds with their families), who gain credits for taking part in activities such as after-school clubs, drama groups, sports teams or learning experiences at museums, parks and community centres. Strathclyde's Children's University Glasgow now has 19 member schools with over 900 pupils participating upwards.
- The University of Strathclyde Students Association's StrathGuides – winner of NUS Scotland's Community Relations Award – also encourages and trains University students to offer one-to-one mentoring to schoolchildren

**ENDS**

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## **Educational attainment gap – involvement of parents and guardians. Universities Scotland response**

Universities Scotland shares the Scottish Government’s ambition that every person in Scotland is able and supported to achieve their full potential in a fair and just society. Universities Scotland believes that an open, joined-up and system-wide approach to raising attainment is required. One which recognises the role of all players in catalysing improvement. Critical to this is the role of families.

Underpinning attainment is aspiration and nurturing a love of life-long learning. Universities Scotland research shows parental and grandparental aspiration for children and grandchildren is very high regardless of socio-economic background; A survey commissioned by Universities Scotland in 2014 using the Scottish Public Opinion Monitor showed that 87% of respondents from the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland (SIMD20) wanted their children and/or grandchildren to go to University, compared to 86% of respondents from all backgrounds. University education is universally valued.

However, we also know that the attainment gap between Scotland’s most and least deprived pupils remains stark and is evident as young as five years of age<sup>1</sup>. Family is known to be one of the key determinants of future attainment:

*‘Parents and families play a key role; there is clear alignment between what the parents say they want for the young people and what the young people aspire to themselves. For policy, supporting aspirations then means working with parents as well as young people, particularly where parents face disadvantages themselves’.*<sup>2</sup>

Family experience of higher education, alongside their involvement in, and understanding of, transitions through the education system are critical to growing the ambition of young people. A major study<sup>3</sup> supported by the Nuffield Foundation in 2012 tracking over 36,000 young people in four English-speaking countries (USA, Australia, England and Canada) found that:

*‘young people with university-educated parents are significantly more likely to go on to higher education and attend an elite institution -- even after prior attainment has been taken into consideration’.*

Research by Office for Fair Access reflects the importance of access to higher education experience and demystifying the routes to higher education.

*‘The most successful programmes of Information, Advice and Guidance interventions for under-represented groups appear to be those which start early, are personalised, integrated into outreach and other support, and address priority information needs, including HE finance, HE applications processes and requirements and employment opportunities.’*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation report found an attainment gap of 10-13 months is evident in children as young as five: [www.jrf.org.uk/publications/closing-attainment-gap-scottish-education](http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/closing-attainment-gap-scottish-education).

<sup>2</sup> Kintrea, K. et al The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/young-people-education-attitudes-full.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/sharp-social-class-divide-university-entry-rates-also-found-state-schools>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Literature-review-of-research-into-WP-to-HE.pdf>

The onus is therefore on a concerted and coordinated effort involving all partners, including families, to build aspiration from an early age, including awareness of the pathways through education and help young people realise these aspirations.

We have structured our response to highlight the ways the higher education sector currently works towards raising attainment through supporting parents, and through close interaction with the education of their children at all levels and to set out the measures which we believe would lead to further success.

### **A Partnership Approach to Ensure Access and Inclusivity in Support**

Scottish Universities have built an extensive network of partnerships with schools, colleges, local communities, researchers and employers to encourage a love of learning and accessible lifelong skills development for everyone, regardless of age, family circumstances or background.

The examples given below set out how universities actively engage parents and/or guardians in the activities alongside the young people and in separate parent-specific events. These are intended to encourage parents to see university as a path for their child (when it may not have been their experience), to support learning as a family, to dispel myths about university and to support parents support children through transitions e.g. applications to university:

- Scotland already has two well-established *Children's Universities*<sup>5</sup> (CU) run by the University of Strathclyde and Queen Margaret Universities respectively, and two newer centres in Dundee and Aberdeen, which offer pupils aged 7 to 14 (and 5 and 6 year olds with their families) the opportunity to learn with their families beyond the classroom - everything from child-friendly lectures about anatomy to city treasure hunts to street dance workshops, delivered by accredited partners such as museums, sports clubs, universities, community partners and after-school clubs.

In 2013-14 CU Scotland recorded over 2500 hours of learning.

- The national programme for school and university relationships, the Schools for Higher Education Programme, operates in four regions across Scotland through Focus West, the Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS), Lift Off (Fife and Tayside) and Aspire North<sup>6</sup>. The Programme works with over 100 schools and local councils to provide additional support, guidance and encouragement for pupils and their families from S3 upwards in schools with low progression rates to higher education. For example, Focus West employed a Families and Schools Partnership Officer to support parents to foster and develop their children's learning in turn. Parents are supported via seminars, workshops, one-to-one consultations and telecommunications to engage with their child's homework and future planning. Between January and June 2010, 165 parents from eight FOCUS West schools were fully engaged in the new FOCUS on Families pilot. FOCUS West delivered 12 interactive workshops, gave six FE/HE presentations at school information evenings, attended four parent evenings, and contributed to several parent council meetings during that time.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.childrensuniversity.co.uk/local-cus/children%27s-university-scotland/about-cu-scotland/>

<sup>6</sup> Universities Scotland (2013) Access All Areas (<http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/uploads/ACCESS%20ALL%20AREAS%20final.pdf>)

- The University of Edinburgh's *Educated Pass*<sup>7</sup> initiative aims to reach some of the groups least likely to apply to university, to raise aspirations and attainment, and to encourage early awareness of employability. 13-16 year old boys are targeted through their local football clubs, and their football coaches.

Parents are engaged early on, with a session aimed specifically at parents discussing typical academic progression from S2 to S6 and learner pathways. This allows both parents and coaches to reinforce the ethos of Educated Pass, and introduces the scheme as a reliable future source of guidance.

The programme is succeeding in its goals. Of the first cohort of boys to participate in the initiative in 2006-7:

- 67% progressed to higher education compared to the national average of 36%
  - Five members of the original cohort went onto study at the University of Edinburgh, and one joined a professional football team in Scotland.
- Glasgow Caledonian University established the *Caledonian Club* in 2008 which works with children from nursery age upwards, their teachers and their families to raise educational aspirations through tailored activities and projects such as drama for nursery pupils with follow up sessions for parents, to 'a day at university' shadowing experience for S5 and S6 pupils and a pupil and parents evening covering university applications and support.

The Open University works alongside Glasgow Caledonian in supporting the *Caledonian Club*, specifically to raise the educational aspirations of parents in areas with low progression rates to university. In the first instance, parents with a child at one of two schools in Glasgow are offered a free five-week course based around the OU open educational resource, the Reflection Toolkit<sup>8</sup>. This is facilitated by Caledonian Club staff and student mentors, and includes IT support and in situ childcare. Parents can then elect to take a 20 week 'Openings' short course, which offer a gentle introduction to study at higher education level. Parents who register on OU courses are supported by staff to meet in study buddy groups to build the confidence of participating parents, through offering peer support in an informal setting. The Open University is currently developing a new resource and website which will guide parents from informal to formal learning, starting with free, on-line OU material and moving to Open Courses.

- Aim4Uni at the University of Aberdeen supports parents within low progression target schools to ensure that pupils with the potential to study at university are encouraged and supported to do so. The University offers support both through in-school events such as parents evenings and Careers information sessions and through bespoke parents' events throughout Scotland. These cover the application and offer process, finance planners and funding information, and current student guides covering accommodation, student life and support. For parents who cannot attend in person, the University also holds online events covering the same information at times that parents may find it easier to attend.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/SRA/WP/Educated\\_Pass\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2013.pdf](http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/SRA/WP/Educated_Pass_Annual_Report_2013.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/pages/docdetail/docs/paper/in-the-club---a-collaborative-cross-institutional-approach-to-supporting-transition-from-informal-to-formal-learning>

- Scottish Universities undertake world-class research in the field of education, shaping national and international policy and practice in early years education, teacher training and parental support. For example, recent research by the University of Edinburgh<sup>9</sup> identified some parental difficulties in successfully resolving disputes around additional support needs for pupils in school. *'Qualitative case studies revealed that young people and parents, particularly those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, lacked access to advocacy services charged with helping them to realise their rights'*. The university-led project aimed to raise awareness of parent's and children's rights in relation to additional support needs and methods of avoiding and resolving disputes with schools and local authorities and support parents involvement in their child's education.

The research directly informed legislation - the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 - relating to school and local authority duties on data gathering and access to information for parents and young people with additional support needs, and has resulted in an increased take-up of mediation services.

### **New Measures for Success in helping Parents, Teachers and Children Raise Attainment**

The Scottish HEI sector actively supports lifelong learning and development through direct provision and partnership activities (linking schools, colleges, local communities, employers and parents/guardians) from pre-school age upwards.

Scotland's HEIs are eager to continue to build on this success. Universities Scotland would ask that:

- Recognition of parental aspiration and awareness of opportunities (alongside their own attainment) as key determinants in a young person's aspirations
- That current activities undertaken by universities to break down barriers and engage young people and their parents in university are recognised (and financially supported to continue and expand these)

### **Further information**

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<sup>9</sup> <http://results.ref.ac.uk/DownloadFile/ImpactCaseStudy/pdf?caseStudyId=23997>