



Brief for the Scottish Government debate on Delivering a World-Class Education System on Tuesday, 12 January

In summary:

1. Scotland's higher education institutions, both old and new, perform exceptionally well on the world stage in their teaching and research.
2. We have pioneered new approaches to teaching in HE, such as students as partners at the centre of enhancement-led reviews, which have been copied around the world. We are judged to be 'world-leading' and 'internationally excellent' in our research.
3. Scottish HE is committed to continuous improvement in all that we do. Our commitment to embed and deepen entrepreneurship education in *Making it Happen*, launched late in 2015, is a good example of this enhancement approach as is our hard work to widen access.
4. We believe in working proactively with the other partners in Scottish education – schools and colleges – to be mutually supportive of one another. We each have an important role to play.
5. Scottish higher education does need to be funded at a level that will keep it world class. Higher education funding was cut by 3.3 per cent in the Scottish Government's December draft budget. The sector recognised this as a good outcome at a time when the Scottish Government faces severe financial challenges. However, this settlement is not sustainable beyond the one year horizon. Scotland must work towards realising the long-term goal, agreed with Scottish Government in [New Horizons](#) in 2008, that HE should be funded at levels that would see it reach the OECD's top quartile for investment in higher education.

Scotland's higher education institutions deliver world class teaching and research

Five Scottish universities are amongst the top one per cent of the world's universities.

Five Scottish universities are ranked in the world's top 200 according to the 2015 Times Higher Education World University Rankings. This means Scotland has more top universities per head of population than any other nation.

Scotland is also home to many of the world's best modern universities. Heriot-Watt University, the University of Stirling and Strathclyde all featured in the world's top 100 universities under 50 years old.

Teaching is at the heart of what our universities do and we have led the UK on quality enhancement over the last decade.

Scotland's universities were amongst the very first to put students right at the centre of the quality assurance of our education. Students have been a partner in our enhancement-led approach to learning for the last ten years.

Scotland comes top in the UK for student satisfaction with the quality of their course. Eight out of nine international students would recommend Scotland as a place to study and more than nine out of 10 say their lecturers are experts in their fields.

Graduate employability is a key priority for Scotland's universities and we are very successful at delivering highly sought-after graduates. The latest HESA figures on graduate employability, published in June 2015, show that graduates from Scottish

universities had the highest rate of positive destinations in the UK (work and or further study) at 89.9 per cent compared to a UK average of 88.8 per cent and they command the highest average starting salaries in the UK. The proportion of graduates from Scottish universities in graduate-level jobs was four per cent higher than peers in the rest of the UK at 73 per cent in 2013/14.

Scotland's universities do research of world-leading quality and outstanding impact.

Scotland excels when it comes to the impact of university research. 86 per cent of Scottish research submitted to the Research Excellence Framework for 2014 (REF2014) was judged to have "outstanding" or "very considerable" impact. This compares to the UK average of 83.9 per cent. This means of assessment was new to the REF2014.

The quality of "pure" research – that without practical application – is also exceptional within Scotland. The REF2014 found 77 per cent of Scottish research submitted to the REF2014 was judged to be "world-leading" or "internationally excellent" on the overall profile. This is just ahead of the UK average (76.1 per cent). Research of this calibre is an important attraction factor for business' looking to partner with institutions who are leading the field and can help encourage inward investment.

The sector is also very effective at knowledge exchange:

- Our universities work with around 20,000 Scottish businesses every year and another 10,000 from outside of Scotland. Of these, around 13,000 are Scottish small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).
- Scottish universities produce more spin-outs than any other region of the UK, including London, with 28 per cent of all university spin-outs created between 2008 and 2012.

Scottish HE is a committed partner to schools and colleges

Universities work closely with schools and colleges in a mutually supportive way for the benefit of our students.

Work to support schools:

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:

- Glasgow Caledonian University's Advanced Higher Hub, a partnership with Glasgow City Council, offers sixth year school students a unique opportunity to complete their studies on campus and provides a bridge between their school and university studies. Pupils studying at the Hub in 2015 achieved a pass rate of more than 90%.
- 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 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.

Work to support colleges:

- Scotland's universities work collaboratively with each other and with college partners to deliver six regional articulation hubs to help support learners moving from college to university and to expand the number of opportunities for them to do so. Since the hubs were introduced in 2007, the number of students articulating has increased by 85%.
- The number of students articulating from college into a degree course at university with full credit for their HN qualification increased by 9.2 per cent between 2012/13 and 2013/14 to 3,788.
- There are a number of examples of universities and colleges sharing facilities to improve the offer we can both make to our students. Examples include: the Scottish Borders Campus in Galashiels where Borders College and Heriot-Watt University have created a centre of educational excellence which enables both college and university students to benefit from excellent shared facilities; and the University of Stirling and Forth Valley College have collaborated to deliver innovative Integrated Degrees across a range of subjects. The Integrated Degrees are jointly designed and developed and learners have dual student status, which means they have full access to Stirling University facilities, including the careers development centre and student learning services, throughout the four-year course.

The Scottish higher education believes in always delivering more

We drive continuous enhancements to the education we offer to students.

Universities are committed to continuously improving their education offer for learners (and through our learners, the offer we make to employers). Most recently, this is evident in the shared commitment of all 19 institutions to take further actions to embed enterprise and entrepreneurship in higher education in Scotland, in [Making it Happen](#).

Cross-sector actions for entrepreneurship, in [Making it Happen](#), include further embedding enterprise and entrepreneurship in the curricula in 2016-17; delivering a 25 per cent increase in the number of student start-ups over the next three years; and offer every student an opportunity for work-related experience during their degree programme.

Principals share the Commission on Widening Access's commitment to further improvement in access to higher education from underrepresented groups.

Scottish higher education is working hard to widen access as all institutions believe that higher education should offer opportunities to everyone with the potential to benefit.

Universities have made progress in widening access. Last year there was a 10 per cent increase in the number of Scottish-domiciled entrants to university from the 20 per cent most deprived areas of Scotland (SIMD20).

Universities Scotland welcomed the interim report from the Commission on Widening Access, chaired by Dame Ruth Silver, as published in November 2015. We support the Commission's creative and joined up approach to a challenge that spans all parts of our education system and society.

We expect to be challenged by the Commission over the coming months as it reaches its final recommendations. However, we are encouraged that the interim report recognises that there is lots of good practice in the sector and progress on widening access is already being made. Our publication, [Access All Areas](#), showcases a range of projects to widen access across all 19 higher education institutions.

A need to be funded at levels that keep Scottish HE world-class

Sustainable and competitive levels of public investment in HE is necessary to maintain Scotland's status as having one of the world's best higher education sectors.

Scotland's universities welcomed the commitments expressed by the Scottish Government to continuing support for an excellent, internationally competitive and widely accessible university sector when it published its Draft Budget for 2015/16.

The HE sector is set to face a cash cut of 3.3% per cent in 2016/17 based on a £1,062.5 baseline figure from 2015/16. The sector has recognised this as a good outcome given the severe financial challenges facing the Scottish Government. However, this is not sustainable beyond the current one-year horizon.

We ask MSPs from all parties to ensure that the Scottish Government follows through on these commitments to an internationally competitive HE sector in their entirety. In 2008 the Scottish Government agreed with Universities Scotland, in [New Horizons](#), that HE should be funded at levels that would see it reach the OECD's top quartile for investment in higher education. We remain far from achieving that goal.

Universities need the confidence that comes from being funded at competitive levels to make their fullest contribution to the nation.

ENDS

Further information:

James Wilson, Public Affairs Executive, on 0131 225 0714 or james@universities-scotland.ac.uk