

Consortium on Inequality in Access to Education: Scotland

Dubai, 16-18 January 2018

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Background

- Population: 5.3million
- Primary and Secondary school – compulsory to age 16
- Mainly state funded – private education is limited to a very small proportion of the population but is politically important. Aside re Catholic schools
- Devolved government
- Education is a devolved matter and has historically been separate – different exams at various points; 4 year degree system; broader system, specialise much later.
- University system is still connected and students from any region can attend in any region – mapping of entry qualifications
- Distinction between HE and FE
- Pre and post 92 institutions

Funding

Scotland:

- Tuition fees paid by Scottish Government for those who attend university in Scotland
- Low cost loans for maintenance
 - Interest rate increased recently
 - Only paid once you are earning a certain amount
 - Written off after 30 years
- P11 SAAS report, 2017
- P9 Key findings
- P16 FT students by age and gender

Policy context

- The focus of the UK debate on the inequality in access to education is primarily on inequality in access to higher education.
- However, indirectly the causes for this inequality draw in other aspects of the education, such as inequality in the outcomes of students at earlier stages of the education system - attainment
- Working class students over-represented in FE and underrepresented in HE
- Funding from government has gone in the other direction over the past period
- There have been, and continue to be, a plethora of policy initiatives which seek to promote participation in HE among working class children with the aim of increasing social mobility, alleviating poverty, increasing the skills base of the economy, increasing productivity, and other positive outcomes (for an overview see Gorard & Smith 2007, Moore et al, 2013, Torgersson et al, 2014).
- Despite this intensive academic and policy interest, the proportion of young people who go on to HE has increased only very slightly in that time.

Access to HE is stratified by socio-economic status/class

- The proportion of HE students who come from the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods (the measure used by the Scottish Government) has gone from 14.9% in 2004-5 to 15.9% in 2013-14.
- In England, the measure used, which is based on Free School Meals (FSM), has shown a small decrease in the gap between the proportions receiving and not receiving FSM aged 15 who are in full-time HE by aged 19, from 19% in 2005-6 to 17% in 2012-13 (BIS, 2015, Table 1, p. 4). The most recent figures (2012-13) show that the proportion of those who were receiving FSM aged 15 who go on to HE by aged 19 was 23% (BIS, 2015, Table 1, p. 4).

- Furthermore, those students from a working-class background that do attend HE are disadvantaged on average vis-à-vis their middle-class counterparts through disproportionately attending less prestigious institutions and courses

- A range of economic and social barriers to the entry of young people into HE have been identified (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003). For example, it has been suggested that students are financially constrained (Ross & Lloyd, 2013) or that they incorrectly anticipate the benefits of HE (McGuigan et al, 2012).
- Recent work has emphasised prior learning as a bottleneck based on US and UK work showing a strong correlation between prior attainment and HE participation (Carneiro & Heckman, 2002, 2004, Chowdry et al, 2013).
- Ongoing work by the present authors suggests costs and expected benefits are also a significant barrier. I.e. although students working class backgrounds receive more formal support, they have less informal financial support from their families and can expect a weaker pay-off in the labour market.
- That is to say, as a range of recent empirical work has pointed out, there is significant socioeconomic variation in the economic benefits of HE (Crawford & Vignoles 2014, Britton et al 2016, Hersbein & Bartik 2016, Laurieson & Friedman 2016).

Successful initiatives

- Given the lack of progress on this issue it is difficult to say that any policy or practice has been successful although many seem, on their own merits, likely to be beneficial. It may be that they are but that other barriers are offsetting their effects
 - Examples of widening access activities
 - Make reference to geographical/SEC issues and entry qualifications
 - Poverty – school attendance – gender issues
- Tuition fees is a politically very sensitive issue but the evidence from England is that tuition fees (now raised to £9250 per year) have raised access to HE slightly more than in Scotland – explanation?

Gap in knowledge

- Lacking sufficiently detailed longitudinal data
- The lack of data about/access to/previous studies of those suitably-qualified young people who chose not to go into higher education