



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity



Widening Access to Higher Education in Scotland: Does Anyone Know What Works?

**Presentation to Interweaving Conference
Moray House School of Education
University of Edinburgh
2nd September 2015**

**Sheila Riddell,
Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and
Diversity,
University of Edinburgh
www.creid.ed.ac.uk**



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Structure of Presentation



- Widening access to higher education: the policy context
- Rates of participation in Scotland and the rest of the UK
- Student funding in Scotland and the rest of the UK: links to widening access
- The nature and effectiveness of widening access initiatives



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Widening access to higher education in the UK: an overview



- Since World War 2, strong belief in equality of educational opportunity – along with access to health services, seen as ‘bedrock’ of social democracy.
- In post-war years, only 4% of age group went to university – remained an elite system.
- Robbins Report (1963) – all those ‘qualified by education and ability’ entitled to university place – participation rate increased to 10% of age group.
- By 1990s, mass system created - 32% of 17-30 year olds had some experience of HE (but not necessarily a degree).
- By 2005, 42% of 17-30 year olds across UK had some form of HE.
- Problem for governments – how to pay for mass HE particularly post 2007 economic crisis.



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Higher education and devolution



- Between 1919 and 1989, all UK universities funded by University Grants Committee.
- Policy differences began to emerge following administrative devolution in 1992 – Funding Councils in each jurisdiction (England, Wales, N. Ireland & Scotland) adopted responsibility for resource distribution.
- Following political devolution in late 1990s, major differences emerged in student funding regimes (see next slide) – but all jurisdictions emphasised importance of widening access.



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Student support across the UK 1945 - 2013. Illustrates growing complexity & cross-UK divergence but also systemic inter-dependency.



1945 – 1947 First UK legislation empowering LAs & Ministers to support university students.
1961-62 Anderson Committee report – introduction of full payment of fees & means tested grants
– automatic entitlement in all parts of the UK.

1989-90 Means-tested fee payment of up to £1,000 introduced across the UK. Mortgage style repayments.

2000-01 Fee payments abolished for Scottish students studying in Scotland – £1,000 fee continues for students in rest of UK.

2001 – 02 Introduction of £2,000 'graduate endowment' in Scotland. Income contingent loan.

2006-07 Variable fees of up to £3,000 introduced in rest of UK –income contingent fee loan.

2007 – 08 Graduate endowment abolished in Scotland.

2012-13 In England & Wales variable fees of up to £9,000 introduced, with income-contingent loan.

Free tuition retained in Scotland for Scottish students studying in Scotland.

Scottish students studying in rUK & rUK students studying in Scotland pay £9,000 fees (supported by income contingent loan).



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Political salience of tuition fees



- **'Free' university tuition fee became flagship policy of SNP Government – particularly during referendum campaign of 2013/14.**
- **Independence White Paper argued that Scottish HE based on 'ability to learn, rather than ability to pay' – in contrast with English system.**
- **November 2014 - former First Minister Alex Salmond placed stone at Heriot Watt University engraved with the following words: 'The rocks will melt in the sun before I allow tuition fees to be imposed on Scotland's students'.**

Key questions:

- **Does 'free' tuition necessarily contribute to widening access for under-represented groups?**
- **Is the policy financially sustainable?**
- **What are the consequences for other education sectors?**



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

'Free' tuition has not led to increase in university participation in Scotland

Between 2010 & 2013, 18 y.o. entry rate **declined**
in Scotland but **increased** in rest of the UK



	2010	2011	2012	2013	2013 v 2010
England					
Acceptances	359,005	367,150	342,755	367,900	2.48%
18 year-old entry rate	27.4%	29.4%	28.7%	30.3%	
Scotland					
Acceptances	32,250	30,800	30,900	31,495	-2.34%
18 year-old entry rate	24%	22.9%	23.8%	24.2%	
Wales					
Acceptances	18,670	18,325	19,305	19,665	5.33%
18 year-old entry rate	24.8%	24.9%	26.2%	26.6%	
Northern Ireland					
Acceptances	13,505	13,790	13,285	14,555	7.77%
18 year-old entry rate	33.7%	34.1%	33.7%	36.2%	



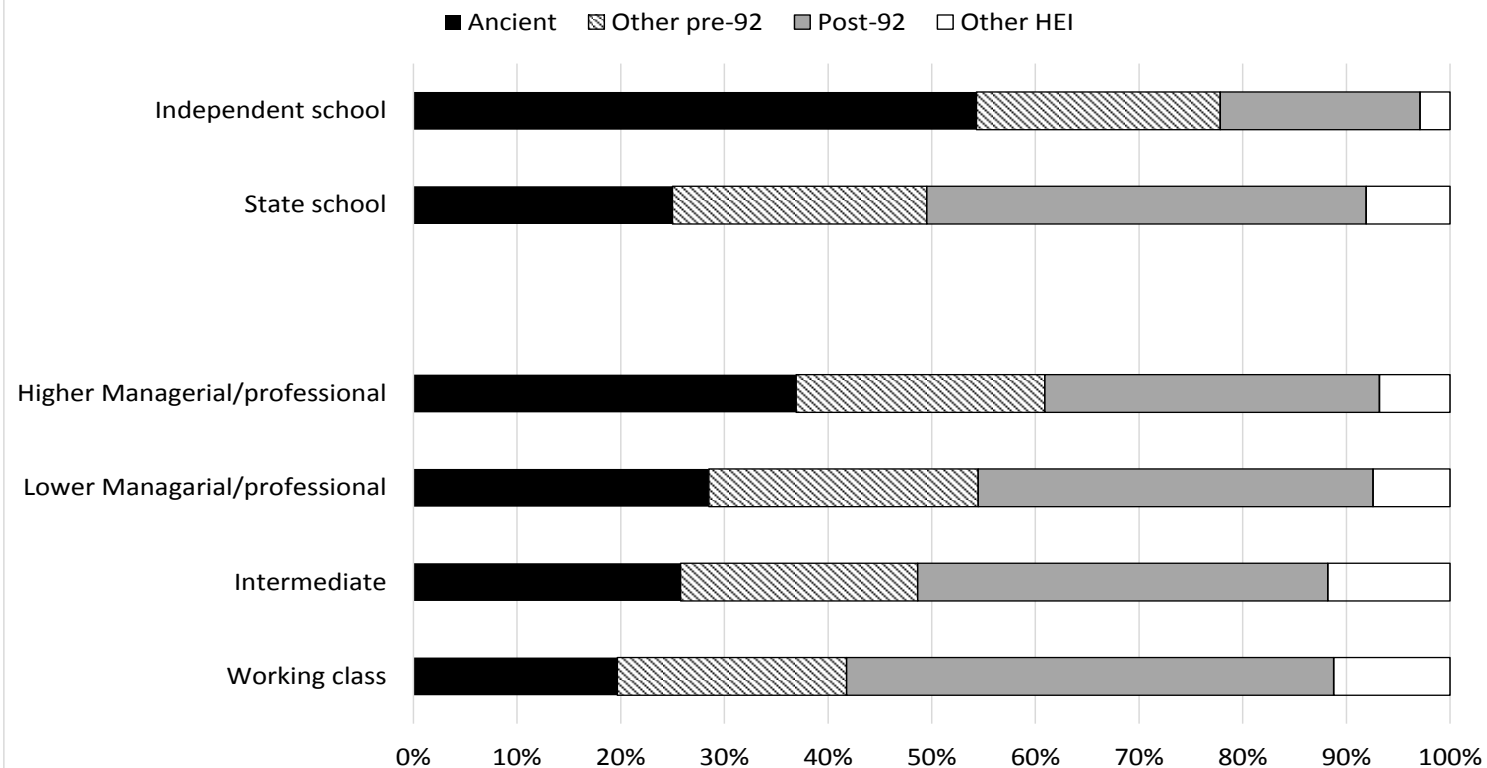
Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Scottish ancient universities just as socially selective as English Russell Group universities

55% of Scottish independent school HE entrants attend ancient university-more than double the proportion of entrants from state schools.



Higher Education Institutions attended by student background: young Scottish-domiciled students entering HEIs in Scotland (Source: HESA record 2012/13)



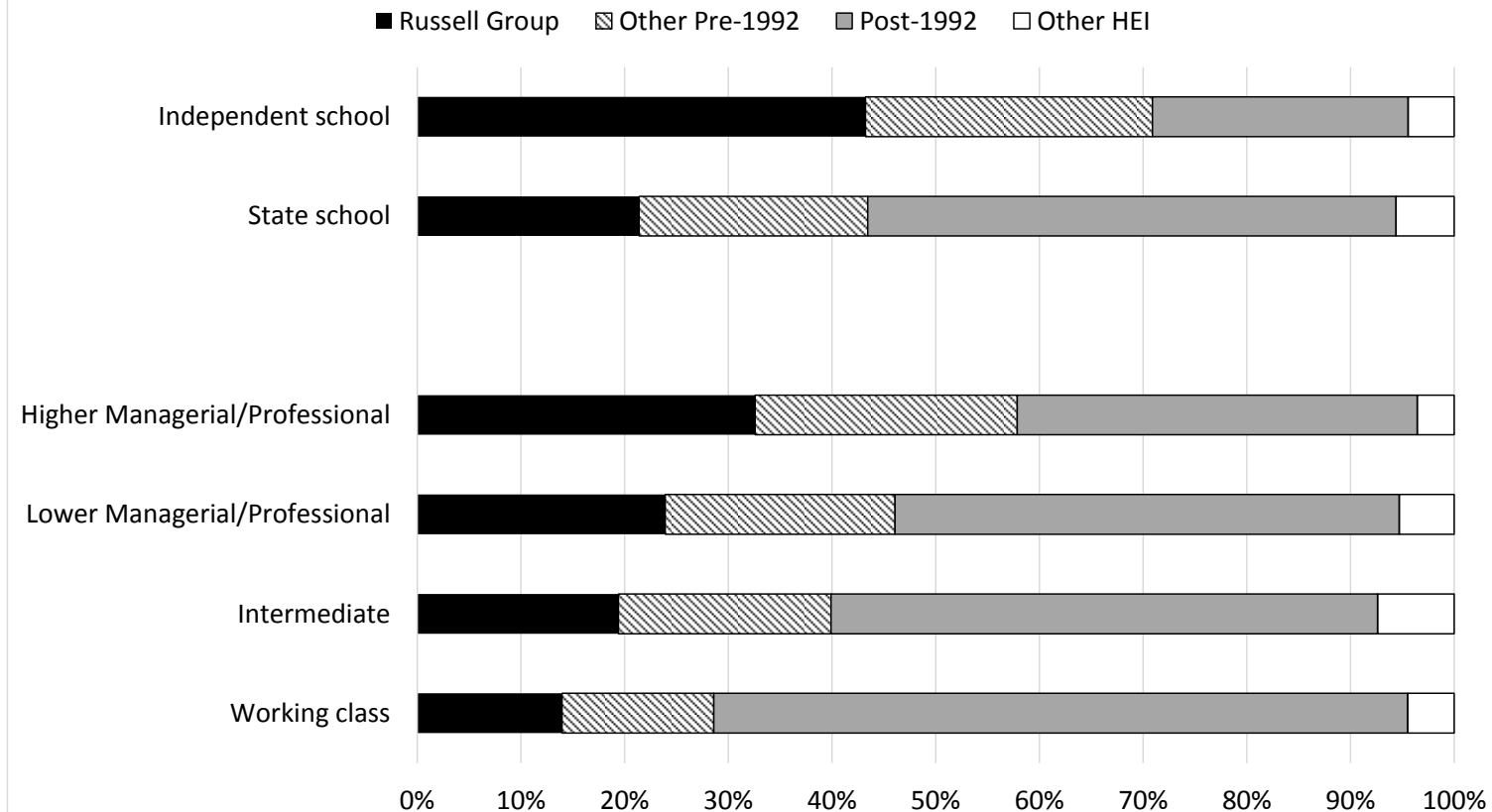


Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

45% of English independent school entrants attend Russell Group universities – twice proportion of state school entrants.



Higher Education Institution attended by student background: young English-domiciled students entering HEIs in England (Source: HESA Student record 2012/13)

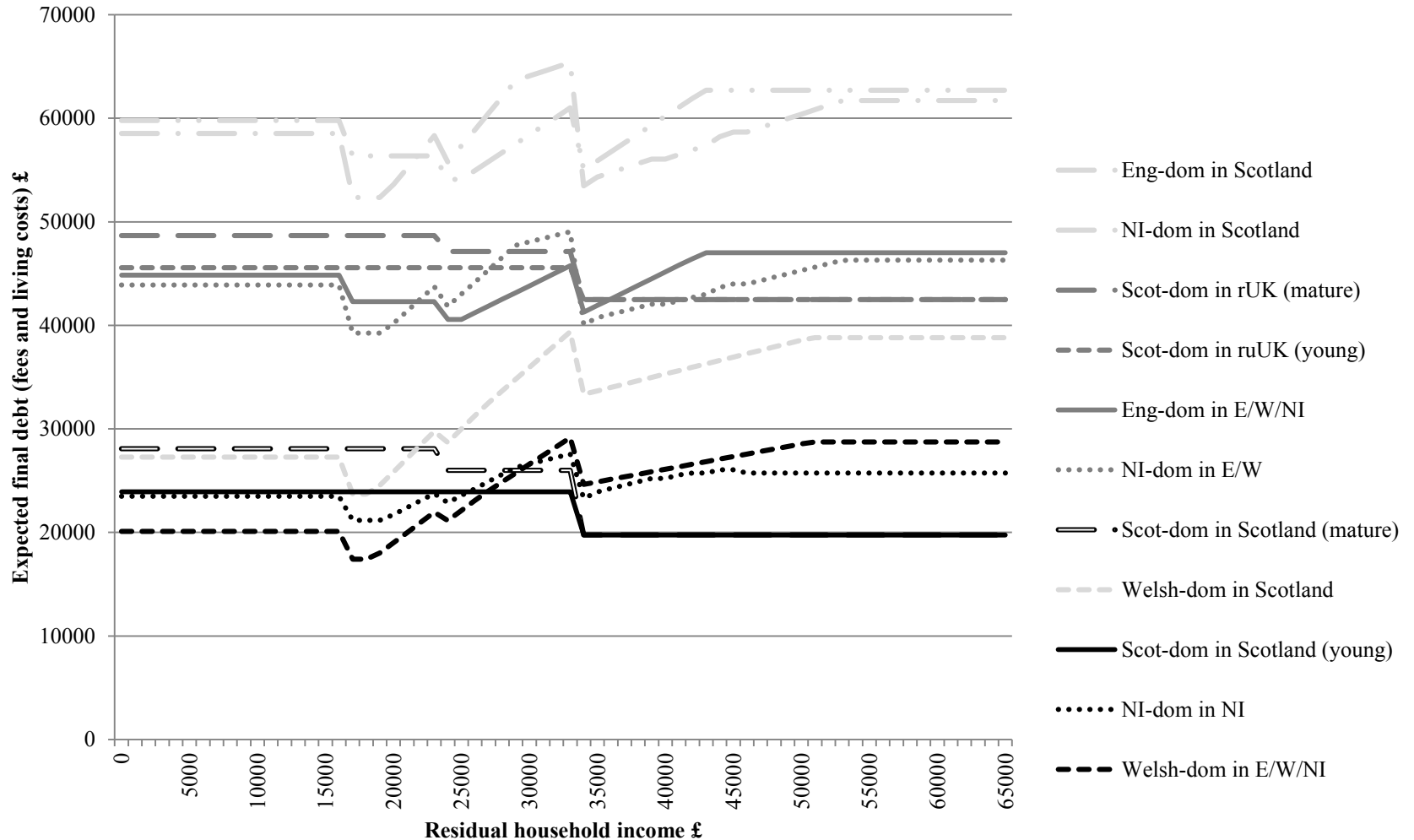




Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Debt incurred for commonest length degree.

Higher income Scots studying in Scotland incur **least** debt compared with all UK students. In other jurisdictions, those from poorer backgrounds incur less debt than those from more affluent backgrounds - but overall debt highest for English students wherever they study.





Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Widening access policies, initiatives and impact



- Office for Fair Access established under terms of the Higher Education Act 2004 to regulate widening access in England. Original aims were to ensure that:
 - The introduction of higher tuition fees in 2006-07 did not deter people from entering higher education for financial reasons
 - Universities and colleges were explicitly committed to increasing participation in higher education among under-represented groups.
- Scotland slower to introduce widening access measures – possibly because of belief that absence of tuition fees would automatically lead to greater participation by under-represented groups.
- From 2012 – 2013, Scottish universities produced widening access agreements for approval by the Scottish Funding Council.
- The Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 provided statutory regulatory framework – institutions could be financially penalised for failing to meet widening access outcome agreement targets.



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Government involvement in widening access: ongoing issues



- Universities support principles of widening access, but question detail of government policy in two broad areas :
 - (1) Statutory enforcement of widening access seen as erosion of university autonomy - http://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/education/creid/Projects/34ii_f_ESRCF_WP5.pdf
 - (2) Ongoing controversy over how social disadvantage should be measured.
 - Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation seen as flawed - relates to the neighbourhood rather than individual – not all individuals living in deprived areas are themselves disadvantaged and many disadvantaged individuals live in more advantaged neighbourhoods.
 - SIMD does not capture rural poverty.
 - May lead to universities competing with each other for limited group of qualified students from socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods.
- Government argues that universities must be accountable for public funds.
- Common measure (SIMD) allows comparisons between different universities and over time. Universities may use other measures too – e.g. based on household income, occupation, ethnicity, care status etc.



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Effectiveness of widening access measures

May be divided into four categories (1) getting ready; (2) getting in; (3) staying in and (4) getting on.



- Greatest focus on **getting ready** – outreach activity which universities undertake to improve attainment and aspiration, and to help potential students make the ‘right’ choices.
Interventions with school pupils multi-faceted & focused on low progression schools.
Activities targeted at younger pupils aim to raise aspiration and provide information on subject choice in early years of secondary school.
Activities targeted at older pupils include campus visits, advice on Highers/Advanced Highers.
- **Limitations**
Interventions tend to ignore the social structuring of choice –decision-making seen as individualised process
Initiatives small-scale and lack rigorous evaluation
Little is known about why pupils with appropriate qualifications choose not to go to university.



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Getting in – admission processes & criteria



- Admissions processes & criteria controlled by individual universities.
- Contextualised admissions policies recognise that pupils from low participation schools may obtain better degree outcomes than similarly qualified pupils from high participation schools (Lasselle et al, 2014, 'School grades, school context and university performance' *Oxford Review of Education*).
- All Scottish universities say they use contextualised admissions – but some universities more flexible than others.
- Example – Edinburgh University stipulates that all students must obtain minimum entrance requirements for specific degrees, but typical entry requirements are higher.
- MA Primary Education with Scottish Studies: Minimum entry requirements – SQA Highers ABBB by end of S5 or ABBBB/AABB from S4 – S6. Typical entry requirements – SQA Highers AABB



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Staying in – work of university services & bursaries in improving retention rates



- Retention measures less developed than recruitment measures. Institutional strategies may include mentoring, regular contact with staff, monitoring of progress through academic tutor scheme, extension of counselling/mental health services, effective learning services etc.
- Dilemmas – should such strategies be targeted at ‘widening access student’ or available to all students?
- Little research on staff attitudes, institutional ethos and impact of bursaries & other forms of financial support.



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Getting on – steps taken by universities to help students succeed in their chosen careers



- Initiatives include mentoring, placement opportunities, developing employability skills, careers advice & availability of finance for postgraduate study.
- No major social class differences in chances of obtaining graduate level employment.
- But little is known about labour market implications of specific degrees from different universities and for different groups of students.
- Universities need better systems for tracking career outcomes of widening access students.



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Conclusion



- Policy of 'free' university education in Scotland has not increased participation rates compared with other UK countries, or narrowed social class differences in access to more selective institutions.
- Student debt is lower in Scotland compared with other UK jurisdictions.
- However, in contrast to other jurisdictions, poorest students in Scotland take on highest levels of debt.
- Scottish students from more affluent backgrounds living at home leave university with less debt than any other group across the UK.
- Social class differences in school attainment most salient factor influencing social class differences in university participation.
- Nonetheless, widening access initiatives are important and we need to know more about their effectiveness.