



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity



Getting into higher education: young people's views of fairness

Sarah Minty

ESRC Ph.D student

University of Edinburgh



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Introduction



Research questions:

- What are young people's views on equality of access to higher education, and how is this informed by ideas of fairness?

Overview

- Different concepts of fairness and equality
- Methods
- Young people's views on equal access to HE
- Views of admissions processes and contextual admissions policies
- Conclusion and implications



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Notions of equality and fairness and the Scottish context



Tripartite view of equality:

- Opportunity;
- Procedure;
- Outcome

A child born today in one of our most deprived communities will, by the time he or she leaves school, have the same chance of going to university as a child born in one of our least deprived communities.

(First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, 18 August 2015)

Equal access is fundamentally about fairness.

(Commission on Widening Access interim report, November 2015)



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Methods



Part of the ESRC study: 'HE in Scotland, the devolution settlement and the referendum on independence'

Aimed to explore young people's views of HE funding and access

In total, 148 young people aged 14 to 19 were interviewed during the two stages to the research:

- 89 young people in Scotland were interviewed for the film, 'Our Future: young people's views of HE in Scotland'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Alc1XzblgpE>
- A further 59 young people in Scotland and the north of England took part in more in-depth interviews

This paper: 121 young people in Scotland from 11 state schools, 1 independent school and 1 FE college



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity



**Does everyone have equal
access to higher education
regardless of or their
background or school
attended?**



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Free tuition ensures access



I think so [access is equal] because of the free higher education. I think that it does play a big part in it and allowing everybody no matter what their background to go in. So that's how I think if the fees were reintroduced that would be totally different.

(Isla, SIMD quintile 2, South Lanarkshire)



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Importance of individual ability and hard work



I think it's up to the individual themselves as well. I think it doesn't matter what area you come from, if you want it you can get it. So if you are at a state school and you want to go to uni, you can go to uni if you just work hard. The same as private school students if they want to go to uni they'll just work as hard. I think it's up to an individual as well, it doesn't matter what area you come from. I think as an individual if that's your dream you can do it.

(James, SIMD quintile 2, South Lanarkshire)



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Individual choices



If you know that you are in a bad school, that it's not going to get you anywhere, it's up to you to change it in my opinion. If you want to do good in life, you've got to make your own choices and go for it.

(Jane, SIMD quintile 3, Aberdeenshire)



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

School influence on attainment



Well I mean people from more affluent areas and better schools are more likely to get the exam results. So people from less well-off areas are gonna have to work harder to get there. And it's to get to the same place really. So it would be more difficult. So people from affluent areas would have an easier time getting there, I think.

(Neil, SIMD quintile 1, Glasgow)



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Where you come from matters



Sometimes I think [access is equal] but I think they're like quite prejudiced towards people with bad backgrounds. They're not as wealthy as what they could be. And if their parents don't have good jobs, if they've not got a good education or anything. And if they came from schools like this, like this is just a public school, so there's always gonna be like a separation between public and private schools.

(Gill, SIMD quintile 1, Glasgow)



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

The role of finance



Not necessarily [access isn't equal]. I think people that live in better-standard-of-living-areas have got more of a chance of going to university 'cause I feel like they've got the financial ability to go on and further their studies. For example, in England if they've got more money they can just pay the tuition fees and get in straight away with good qualifications. So it's harder for people that live in deprived areas.

(Steven, SIMD quintile 1, Glasgow)



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity



Young people's views of the admissions process and contextual admissions policies



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Understanding the rationale behind contextual admissions policies



Personally I think a non-private school's actually better cause in a private school you're like, they've got that structure there for you. You have to, they make you learn, like have extra sessions to learn. But then at uni nobody's there to push you. You have to do it yourself. Then if you've been at a normal school you've already had to push yourself, so that's natural to you.

(Abdul, SIMD quintile 2, Fife)



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

...but is it fair?



I think there is good points and bad points against. I think the good point is that it does give these kids a chance to further their education but then I think maybe what happens if there is somebody that's from an affluent area that has just worked just as hard as them, but they're maybe missing out on that place because someone's got lower grades than them but they're getting put in. I know that I would be annoyed if I missed out on my place in uni because someone from a not-good-area got in over me. And that might sound quite horrible but I feel that I've worked so hard and I think if they're getting in over me I think that wouldn't be fair.

(James, SIMD quintile 2, South Lanarkshire)



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Conclusions



- Free tuition was seen as a key factor in access to higher education for all – despite concerns about student debt
- Perceived importance of hard work and determination in accessing HE
- Structural factors affecting higher education access appreciated mainly by those with direct experience of economic hardship or privilege
- Support for rationale behind contextual admissions policies, but suspicious of this in practice
- In conceptualising equal access and fairness, most young people thought in terms of procedural fairness and equality of opportunity



Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion
and Diversity

Implications



- Young people's views reflect the Scottish tradition of balancing conflicting ideals of equal opportunities with individual competitive achievement
- But, focusing so much on individual deficit ignores the power of social and economic barriers and how structural factors influence social outcomes
- Need for better communication of the rationale behind contextual admissions and greater discussion of social justice issues in schools
- How might these findings differ had we interviewed those who had already decided against HE?