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How socially inclusive are selective universities in Scotland and England?

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Background

- Expansion of participation in higher education since 1990s driven by both economic and social justice concerns with greater emphasis on '**non-traditional' students** particularly those from **lower socioeconomic backgrounds**
- Expansion of the higher education sector especially in 1990s – increasing **stratification** in the sector
- Increase in **monitoring** of the sector through the use of performance indicators (PIs) based on quantitative data
- Despite official rhetoric on widening participation, progress appears to be slow – particularly to the more 'elite' institutions

This presentation examines widening participation using the UK-wide PIs and their associated benchmarks

Performance Indicators (PIs)and widening participation – UK-wide

- PIs are published annually by HESA for every UK HEI
- The two UK-wide indicators for WP (until 2017) are:
  - **NS-SEC 4-7** shows the percentage of students from this group in an institution — NS-SEC 4-7 is often described as 'working class'.
  - NS-SEC classifies the occupational status of a student's highest earning parent/carer
  - Type of **school** attended (**state vs independent**) showing the percentage of students from a state school in an institution
- These PIs focus on young full-time students (below 21) in first year of higher education
- Includes students on foundation degrees and HN programmes in universities (not colleges)

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Comparing institutions: the role of benchmarks

HESA produces benchmarks alongside the widening participation PI. They:

- are based on sector averages of similar institutions
- take into account subject mix and entry level qualifications at an institution
- A **low** benchmark = selective, **higher** tariff institution
- A **high** benchmark = less selective **lower** tariff institution

An individual's tariff score is based on the numerical value given to qualifications (e.g. Highers/A-levels) that the person holds. Higher levels and better grades = higher tariff score

Scotland compared to the rest of the UK using PIs and benchmarks

Our focus was on Scottish institutions in relation to the rest of the UK using HESA WP PI Table 1b 2014-15 – therefore we selected:

- Scottish institutions with benchmarks at 31% or below which was below the UK average 33% (of students from NS-SEC 4-7)
- these were described as **higher tariff** institutions; institutions from the rest of the UK were then grouped according to the same criteria and by country
- the remaining institutions in each country were described as **lower tariff** institutions

Higher tariff institutions across the UK

The number of higher tariff institutions in each country:

- Scotland: 8 (out of 18);
- England: 39 (out of 123);
- Wales: 1 (out of 8);
- Northern Ireland 1 (out of 4)

Findings – there is:

- a higher proportion of higher tariff institutions in the Scottish sector than in the rest of the UK (especially Wales)
- a higher proportion NS-SEC 4-7 students in higher tariff institutions in Scotland than in England but lower in lower tariff institutions

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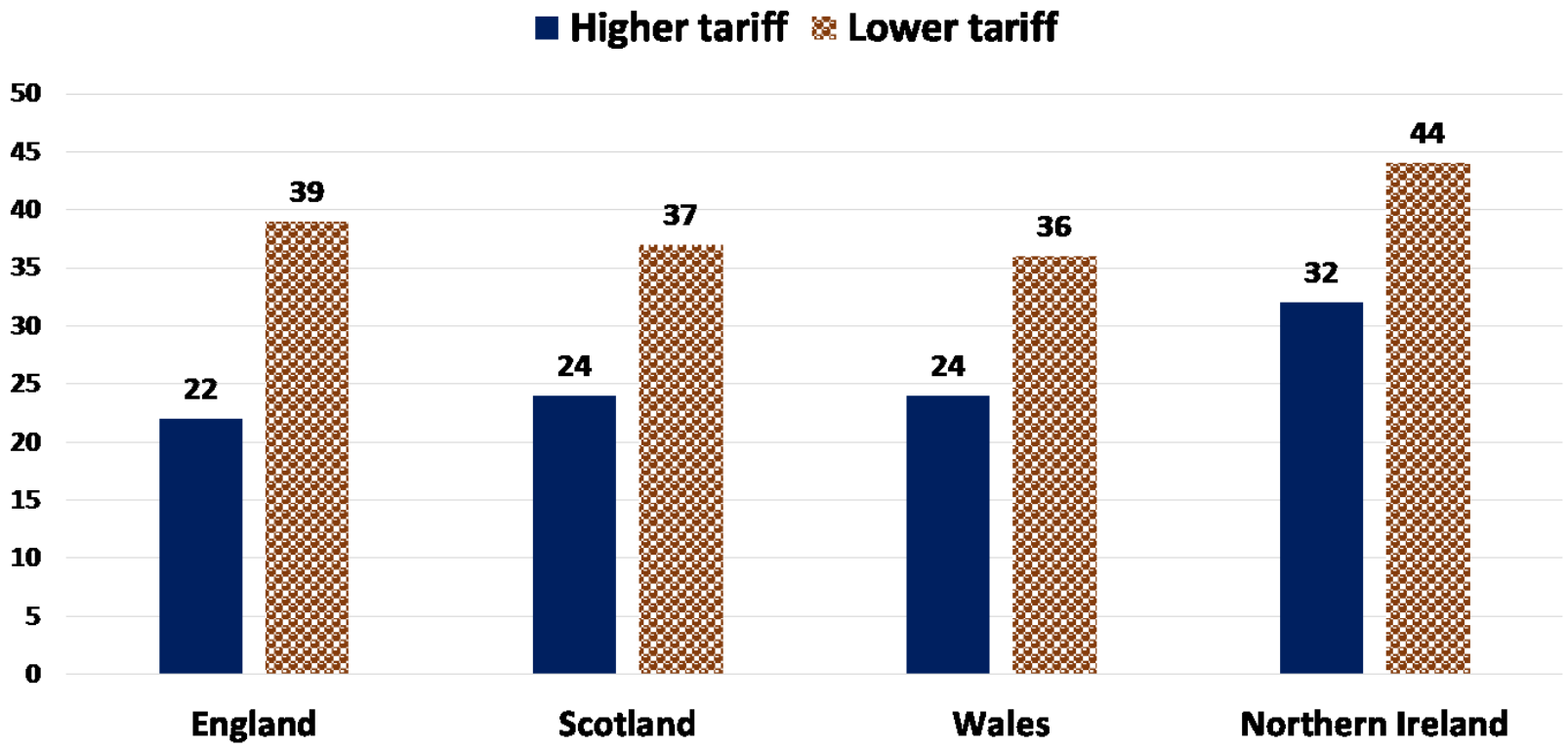
NS-SEC 4-7 students in higher/lower tariff institution across the UK, percentages



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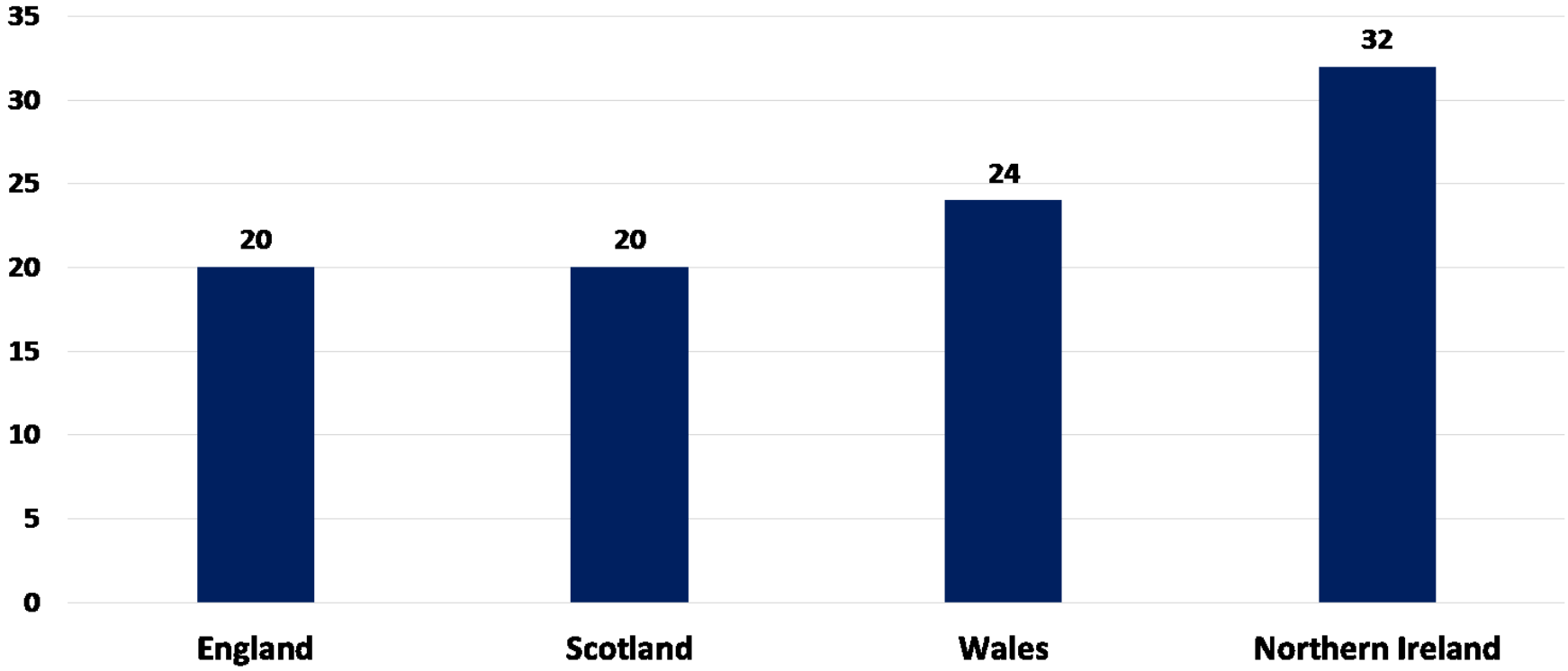
However, if we focus on the most elite institutions comparing Scottish ancients with Russell group institutions across the UK we find no difference between Scotland and England ….

NS-SEC 4-7 in the most selective institutions: Russell Group in rUK and Scottish ancient institutions, percentages



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If we use the Sutton Trust 30 institutions in the rest of the UK and compare these to the Scottish ancients we find virtually no difference between Scotland and England ….

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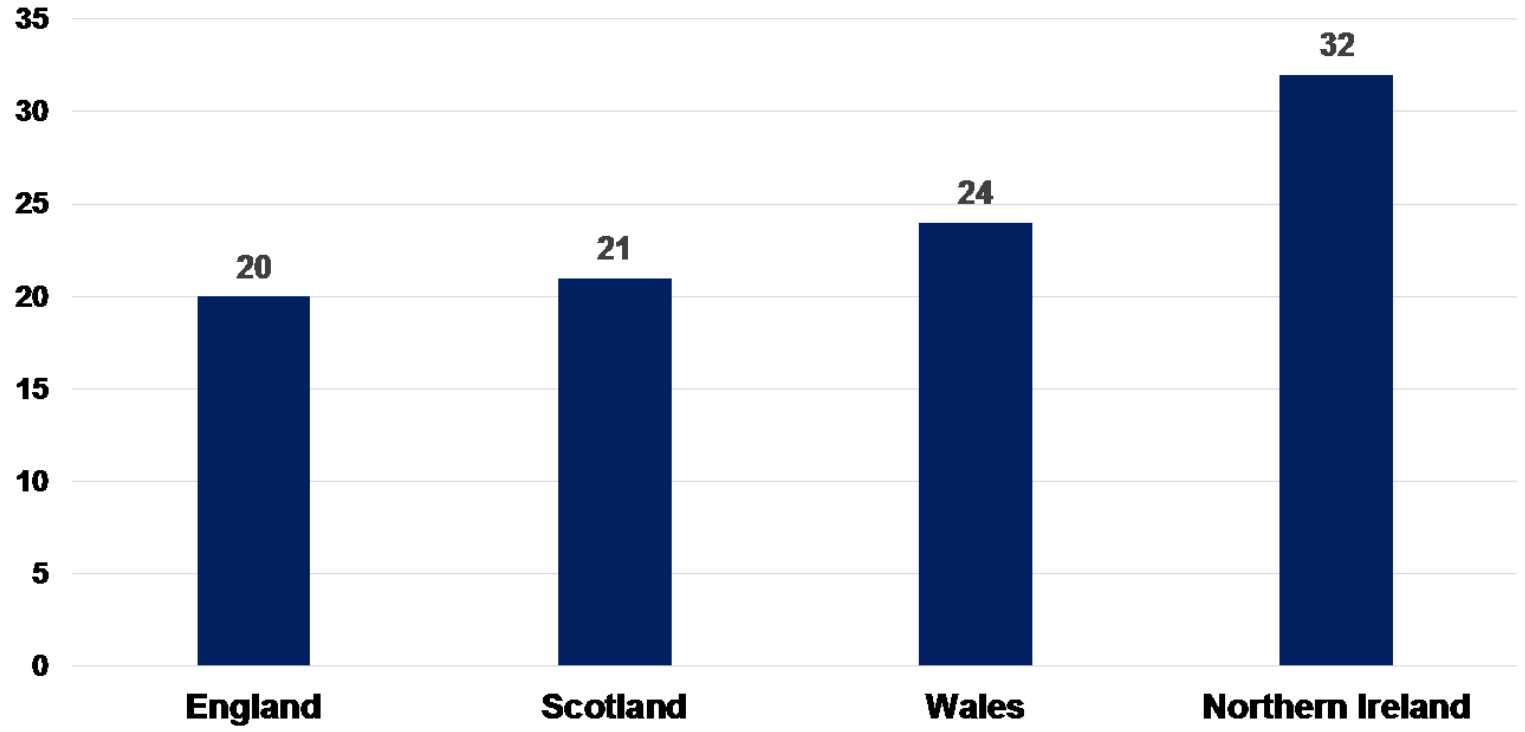
NS-SEC 4-7 in the Sutton Trust 30 and Scottish ancient institutions, percentages



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Summary at this point

- There is a higher proportion of NS-SEC 4-7 students in higher tariff (more selective) institutions in Scotland than in England but a lower proportion in lower tariff institutions than in England
- There is no/virtually difference between Scottish ancient institutions and English Russell group or ST group institutions (the most selective institutions) in the proportion of NS-SEC 4-7 students; in Wales and especially in Northern Ireland the proportion is much higher in selective institutions

So which higher tariff Scottish institutions account for the overall higher proportion of NS-SEC 4-7 in these institutions

The contribution of Scottish 'old' institutions to widening access: NS-SEC 4-7 in higher tariff Scottish institutions, percentages

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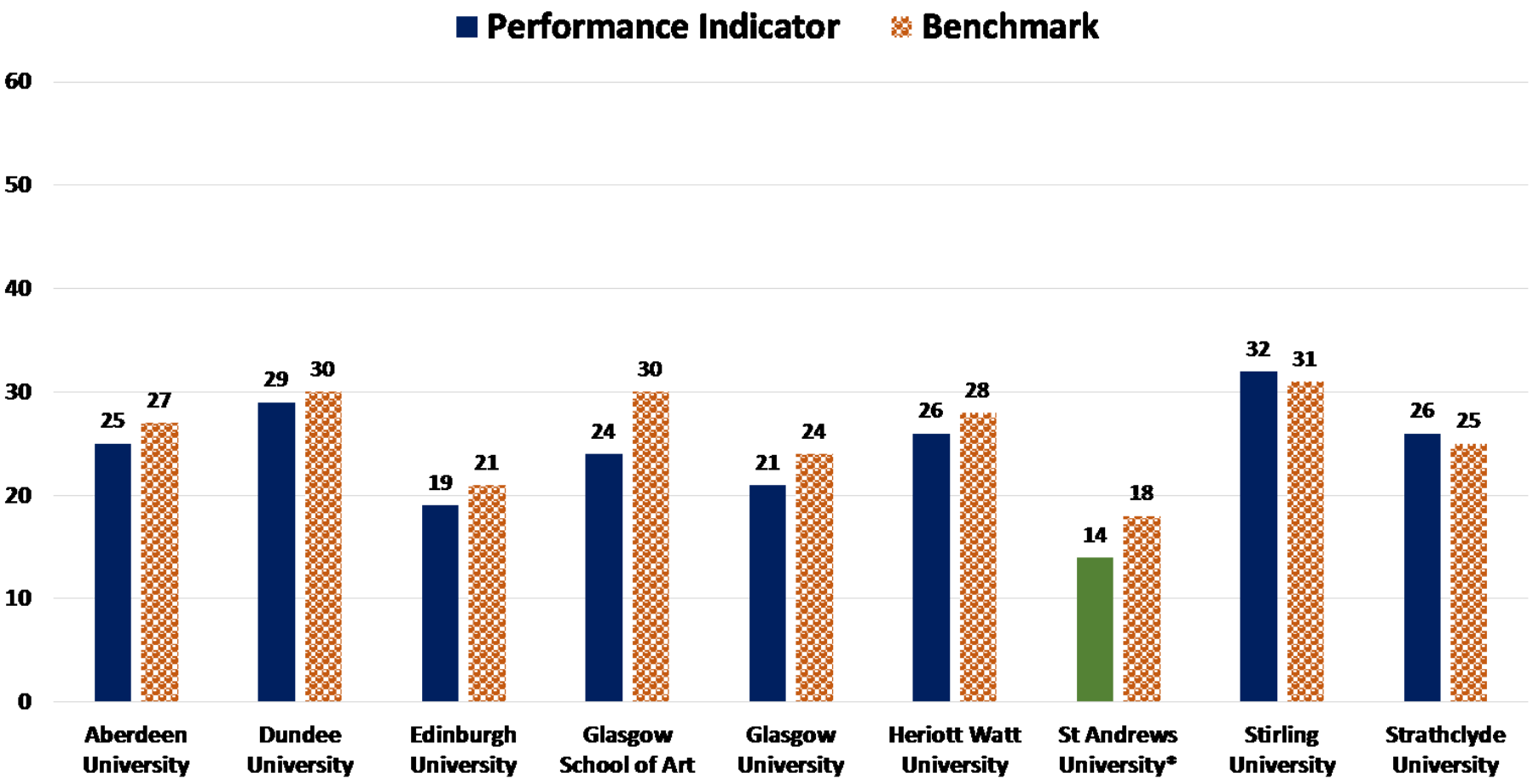

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If we examine the NS-SEC 4-7 first year students at the ancients over the last three years ..

Percentage of NS-SEC 4-7 students 2012-2015: the impact of ring-fenced funding?

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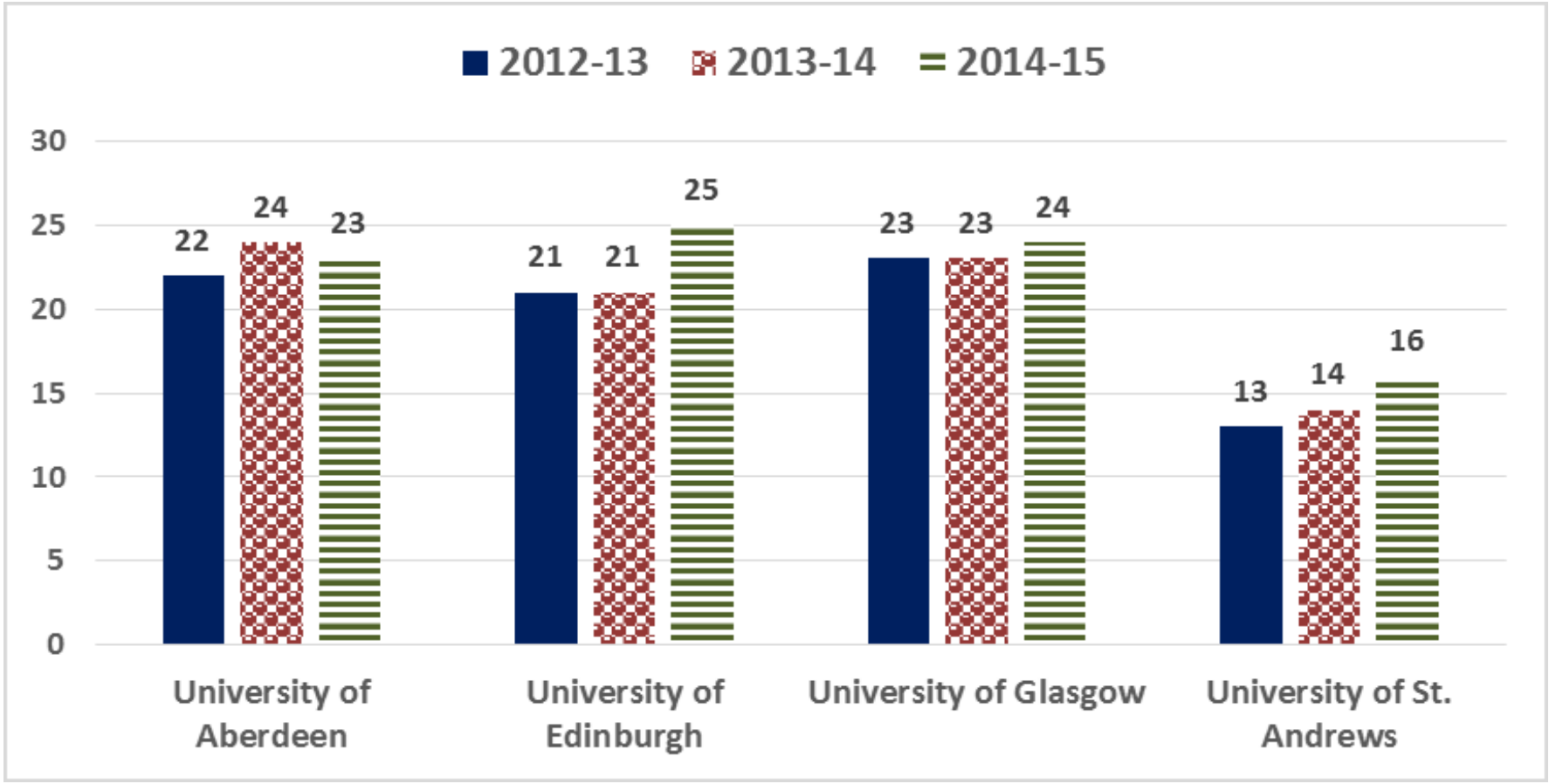

Conclusion of analysis using UK-wide PIs and benchmarks

- There are important differences between the overall characteristics of the Scottish and English university sectors:
  - Scotland has a greater proportion of higher tariff, or more academically selective, institutions; England has a higher proportion of lower tariff, or less selective institutions …
- Therefore the profile of the Scottish university sector is likely to work against the inclusion of students from less advantaged backgrounds in comparison with other parts of the UK because there are fewer lower tariff institutions that can offer opportunities to those with lower grades
- Ring-fenced funding seems to have had an impact especially on the two institutions which had the lowest NS-SEC 4-7 proportion
- How socially inclusive are selective universities in Scotland and England? …. Not very!

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What's missing?

- Mature FT students: slightly higher proportion from low participation neighbourhoods (11.5% cf 12.7%) England;
- Part-time students – very few! But also more likely to come from a low participation neighbourhood (14.5% in England) and none in the most prestigious HEIs
- Gender, disability and subject studied
- Retention, outcomes and entry to the labour market for WP students
- Analysis by region in England .. And?