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Widening access and higher education in Europe and the UK

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Overview

- **Europe:**

- the Bologna Process
- widening access
- Sweden

- **UK and widening access**

- background and context
- the role of legislation and Performance Indicators
- differences between different parts of the UK

Terms used

- ISCED stands for International Standard Classification of Education:
 - 0-2 up to lower secondary education
 - 3-4 up upper secondary to post-secondary non-tertiary education
 - 5-8 short cycle tertiary education to doctoral or equivalent
- NS-SEC stands for National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification which ranks occupations
 - from Higher managerial and professional occupations (1) to Routine occupations (7)

Europe and the Bologna process

Intergovernmental cooperation between education ministers in European countries – the Bologna declaration (1998) aimed to:

- Develop comparable degrees based on 2 main cycles (undergraduate/graduate)
- Produce system of credits (ECTs)
- Promote mobility
- Promote European cooperation in quality assurance
- Emphasis on lifelong learning including the need to **promote equal opportunities – and led to the social dimension**

Widening participation goals: 2010-11 – vague?

- Most EHEA countries have general equal opportunities policies assumed also to address widening access for under-represented groups (e.g. relating to financial measures)
- Some have targeted policy measures, the most common is disability followed by low socio-economic status
- Some countries focus on specific groups based on ethnicity relevant to their particular country
- BUT lack of targets for increasing participation in most countries

(Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2012)

Most frequently captured student characteristics in 2014

- Qualification prior to entry (27 jurisdictions)
- Socioeconomic status (19 jurisdictions)
- Disability (17 jurisdictions)
- Labour market status prior to entry (13 jurisdictions)
- Labour market status during studies (12 jurisdictions)
- Ethnic/cultural/linguistic minority status (8 jurisdictions)
- Migrant status (13 jurisdictions)

However, very limited use of such data to monitor change:

‘... in some national contexts, issues related to diversity are of marginal national and public interest, ... data collected is not being analysed or not being published’ (Eurydice, 2014, p. 19)

The social dimension in the Bologna process: London 2007

Higher education should play a strong role in fostering social cohesion, reducing inequalities ... **the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations.** We reaffirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and **to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity.**

So to what extent had this goal been achieved? Using parental level of education as a proxy for social background – there is a lot of variation between countries and in many (most) countries the student population does not reflect the overall population!

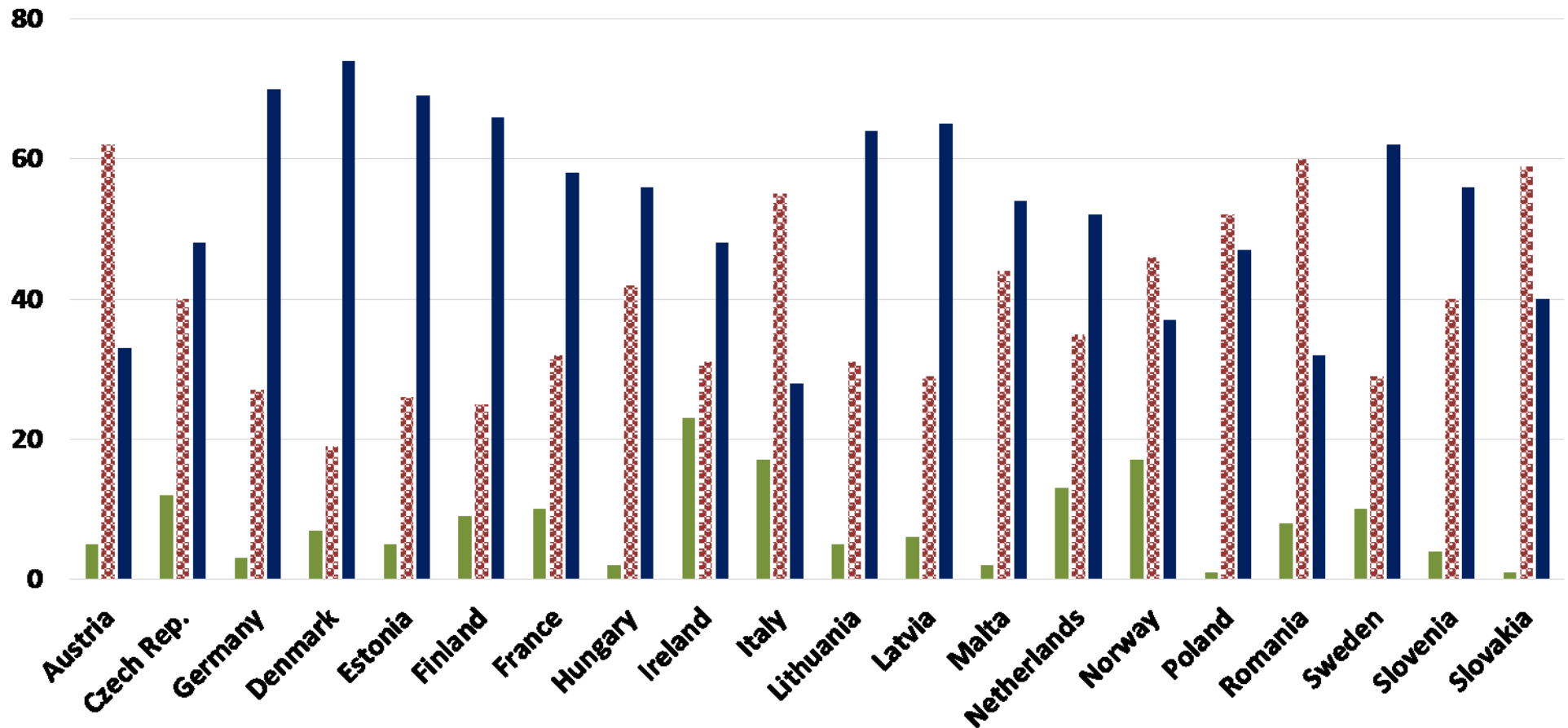


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Eurostudent V survey: parental level of education of current students (%)



■ ISCED 0-2 ■ ISCED 3-4 ■ ISCED 5-8



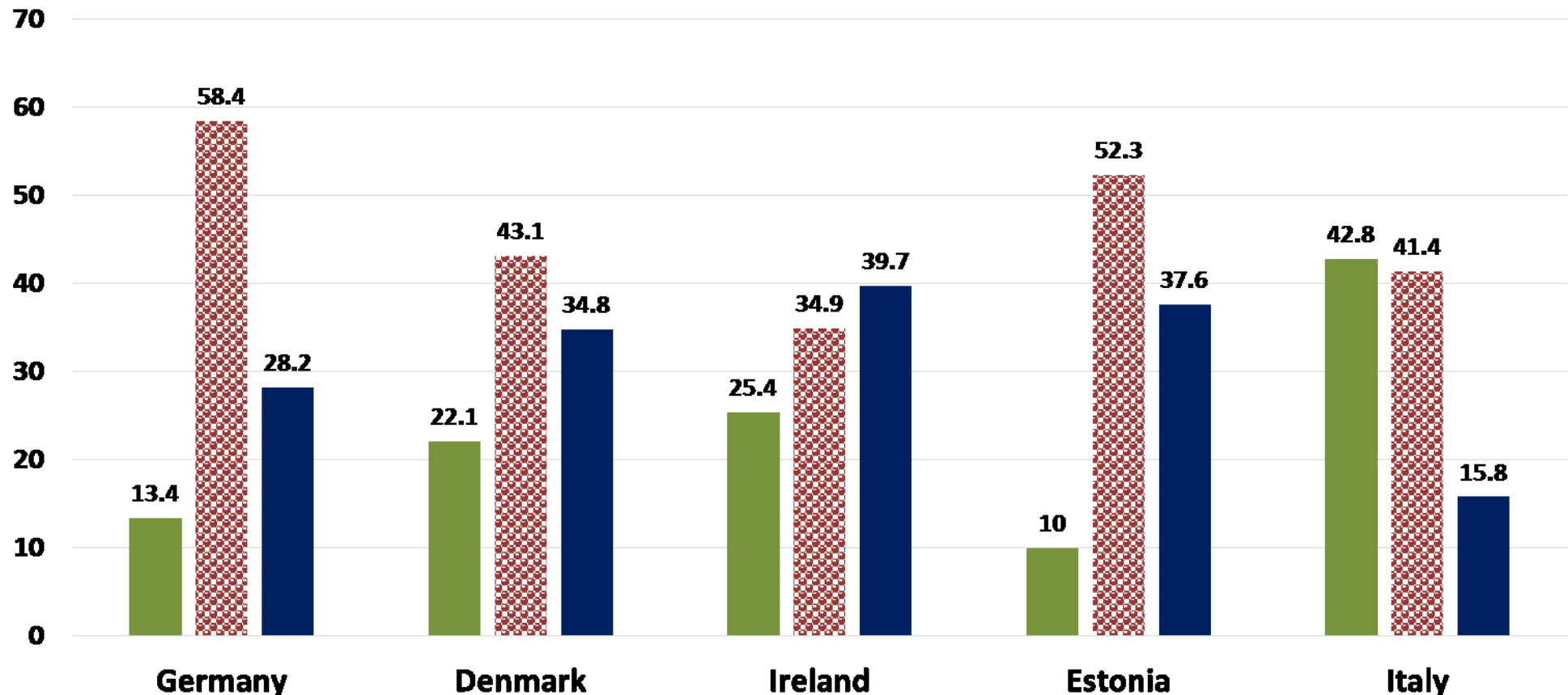


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But Variation has to be treated with caution as there are different levels of education in adult population, 2012 (%)



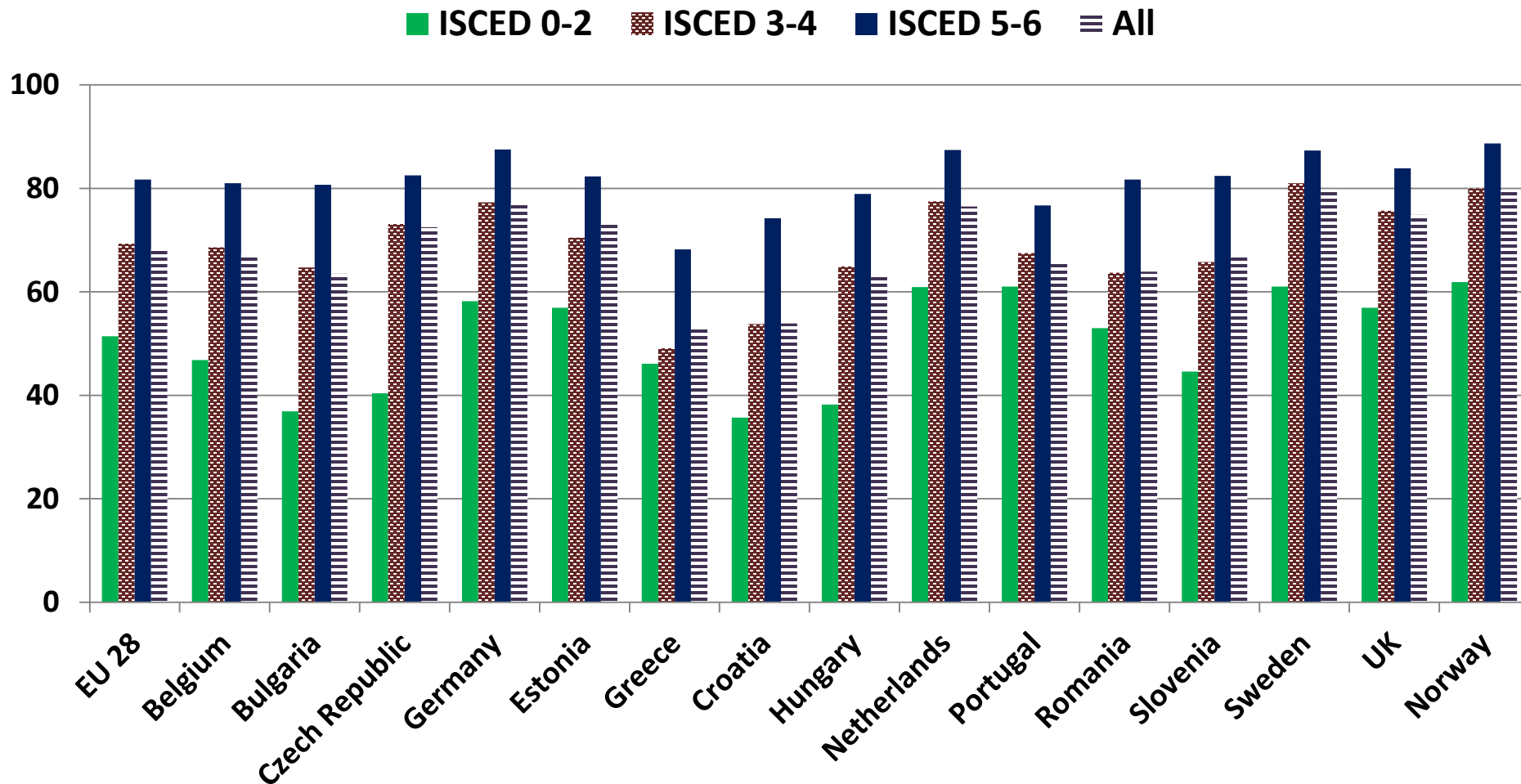
■ ISCED 0-2 ■ ISCED 3-4 ■ ISCED 5-8





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Why widening access matters – employment rates by educational level, 2013, (%)



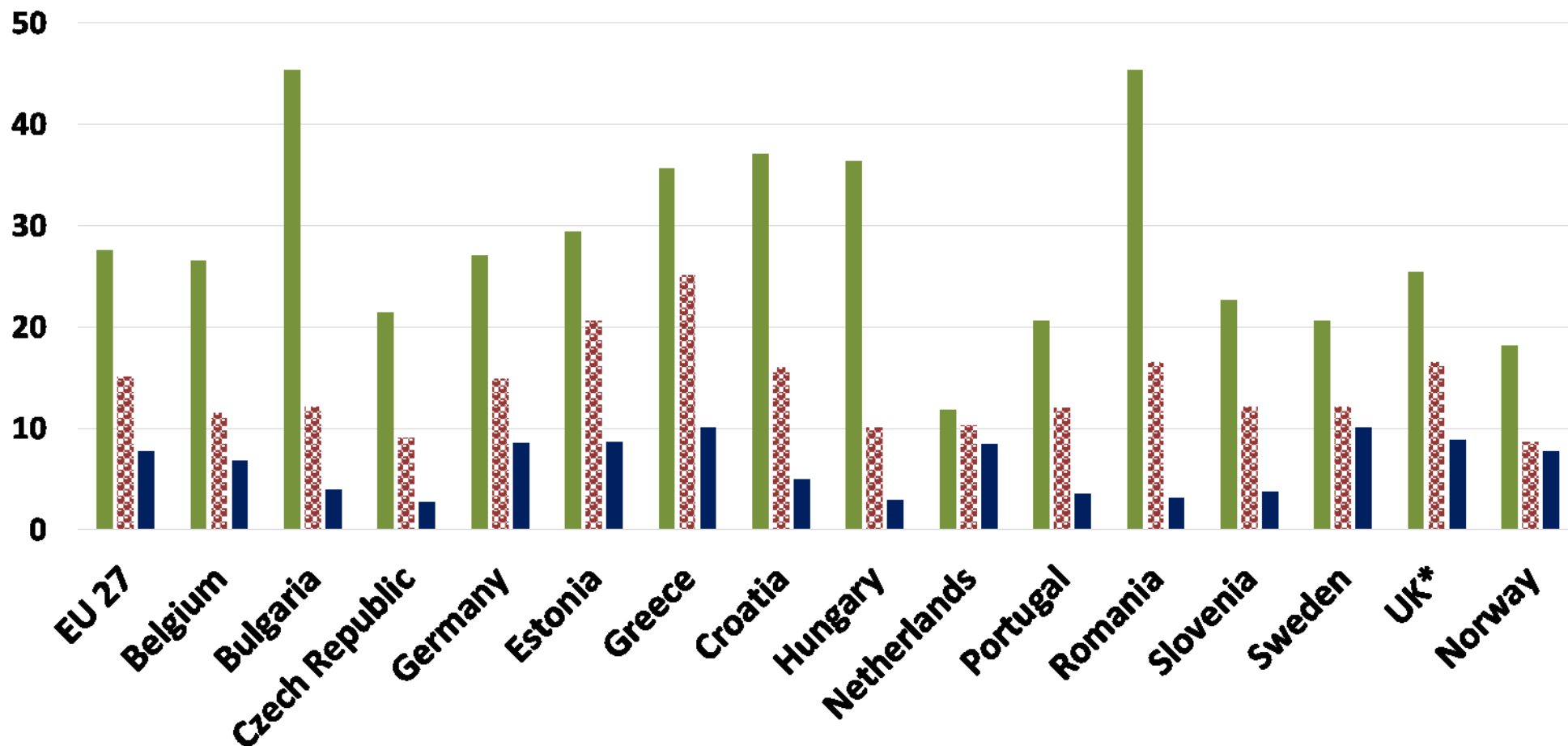


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At risk of poverty by educational level, 2012 (%)



■ ISCED 0-2 ■ ISCED 3-4 ■ ISCED 5-6



Measures to increase in participation – second chance routes: Bologna countries

- Traditional route: achievement of upper secondary qualification
- Second chance routes include:
 - recognition of knowledge and skills outside formal learning contexts (APEL);
 - Preparatory/bridging programmes – mainly for those who did not complete upper secondary qualification (e.g. Access to HE in UK)
- In 2012, 22 Bologna countries offered alternatives (out of 47) – mainly western and northern Europe (~same in 2014)
- Influenced by school system: comprehensive vs stratified
- Stratified systems in the past – low levels of participation among those not in academic stream

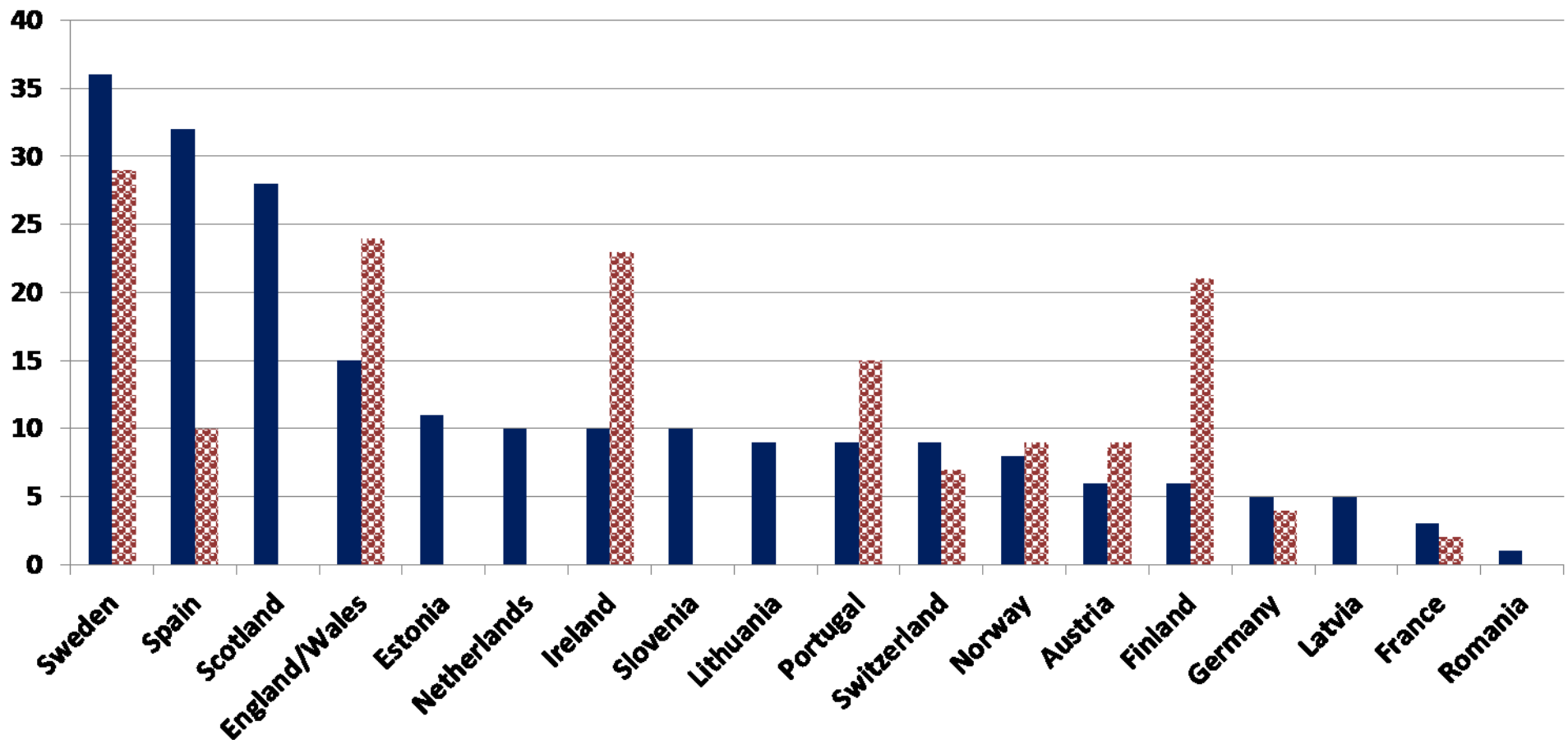


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Non-traditional routes into higher education, Eurostudent surveys III/IV, (%)



■ 2005-08 ■ 2008-11





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Summary of the social dimension in Europe



- There is considerable variation between countries – both in terms of opportunities in access to higher education and the general level of educational attainment in the adult population
- Higher education attainment leads to better job prospects and less likelihood of poverty
- Monitoring of widening access is very variable across Europe
- There is some evidence that the situation is worsening in some countries such as Sweden which had many opportunities through non-traditional routes – but there is now a renewed emphasis on widening access (breddad rekrytering) in this country



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Higher education in the UK – growth



- Massive growth in HE student numbers since the 1950s – UK-wide participation increased from:
 - 3.4% in 1950, to 8.4% in 1970, to 19.3% in 1990 to 33% in 2000
- Growth in the number of universities in Scotland in the 1960s and then 1990s: from 4 to 8 (1960s) to 19 (from 1990s on) – similar growth in England.
- Increasing **stratification** in the university sector with elite – higher tariff institutions requiring high entry qualifications; and less competitive institutions – lower tariff institutions requiring lower entry qualifications.



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Higher education context: changing student population and PIs



- An increasing emphasis on access for ‘non-traditional’ students (e.g. low **socio-economic background**, disabled, ethnic minorities) – Dearing and Garrick reports – **1997**
- A strong emphasis on Performance Indicators (PIs) measuring performance in universities in a range of areas – including widening access. These are underpinned by legislation – unlike most (all?) European countries

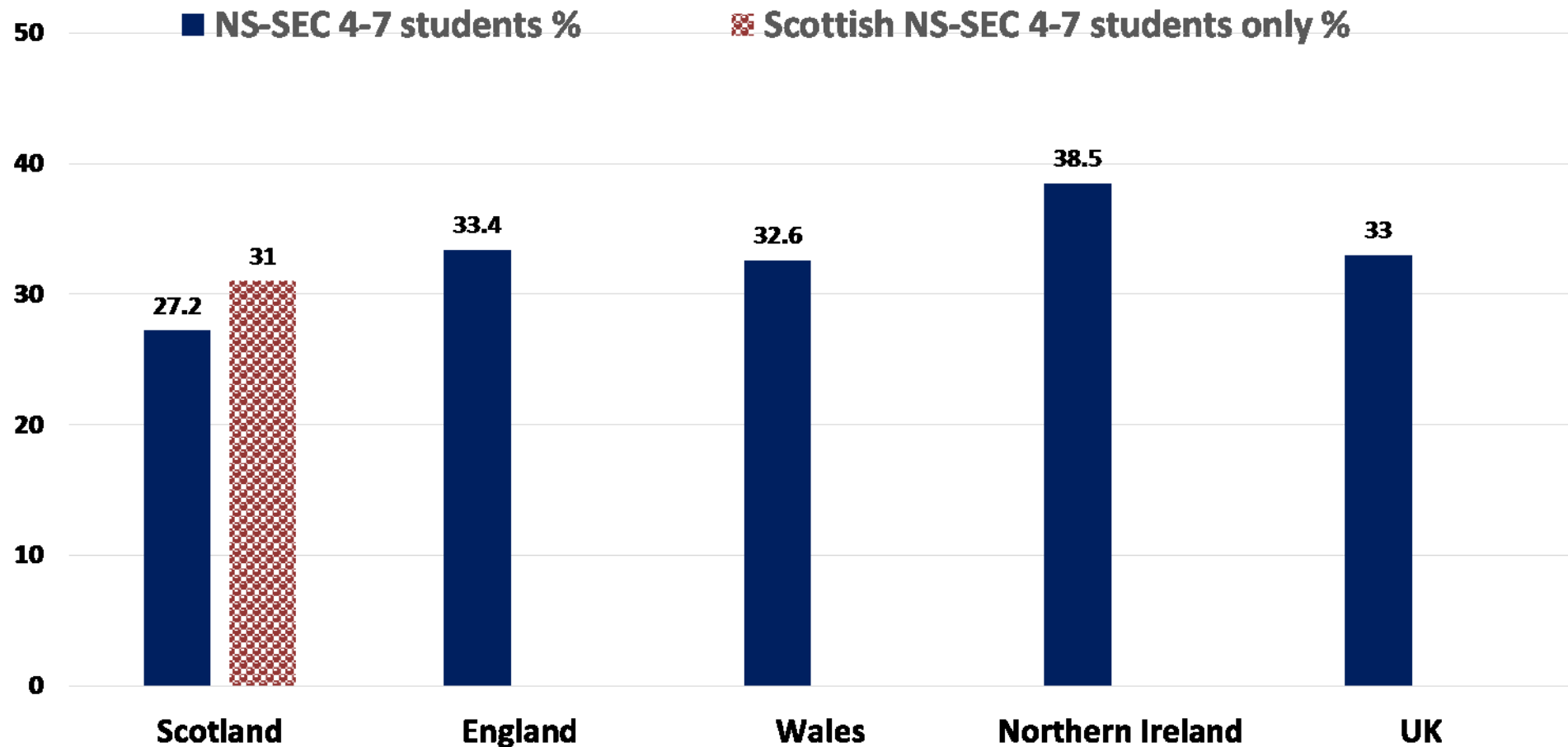
Widening access in the UK – PIs

- 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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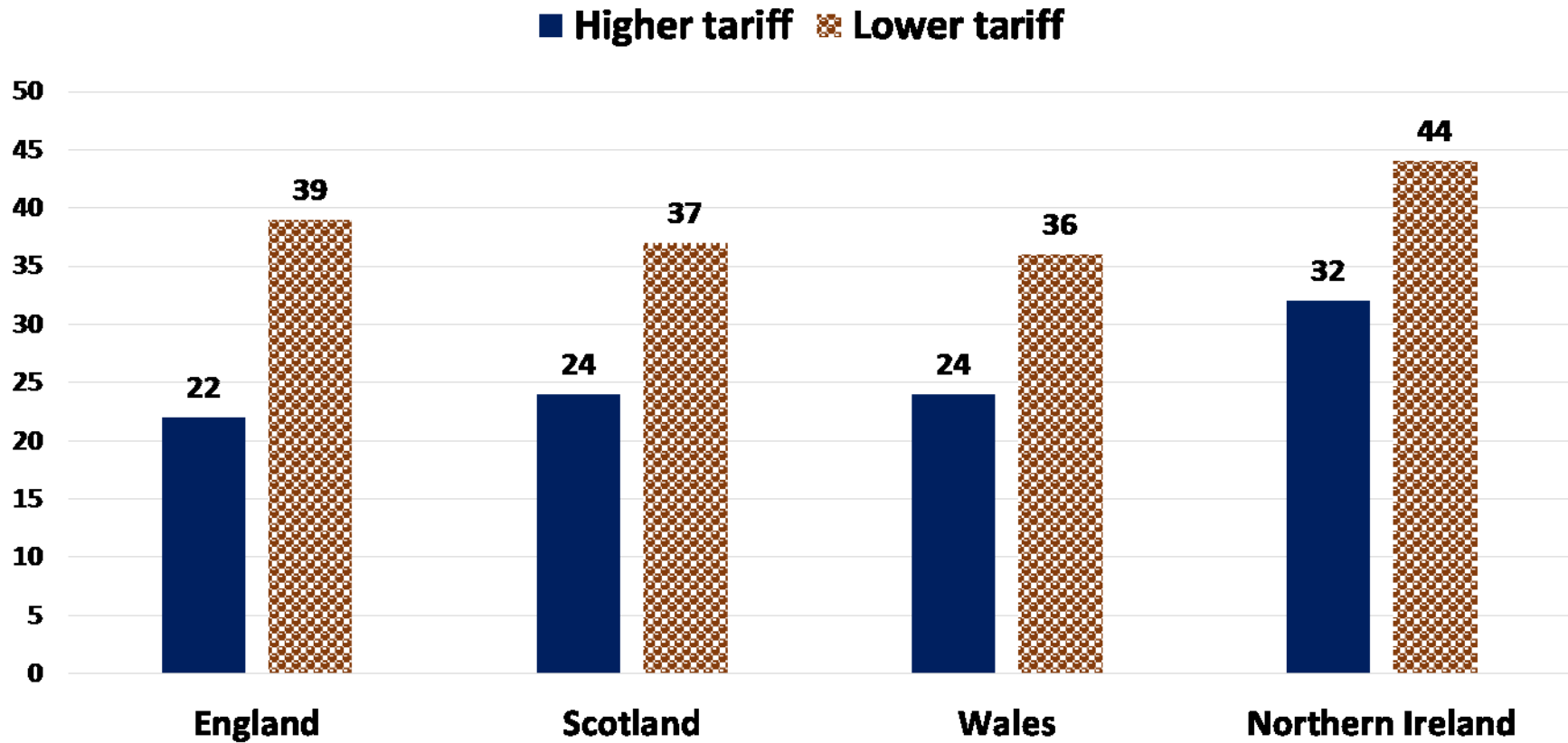
What do we know about widening access in the UK from PIs?





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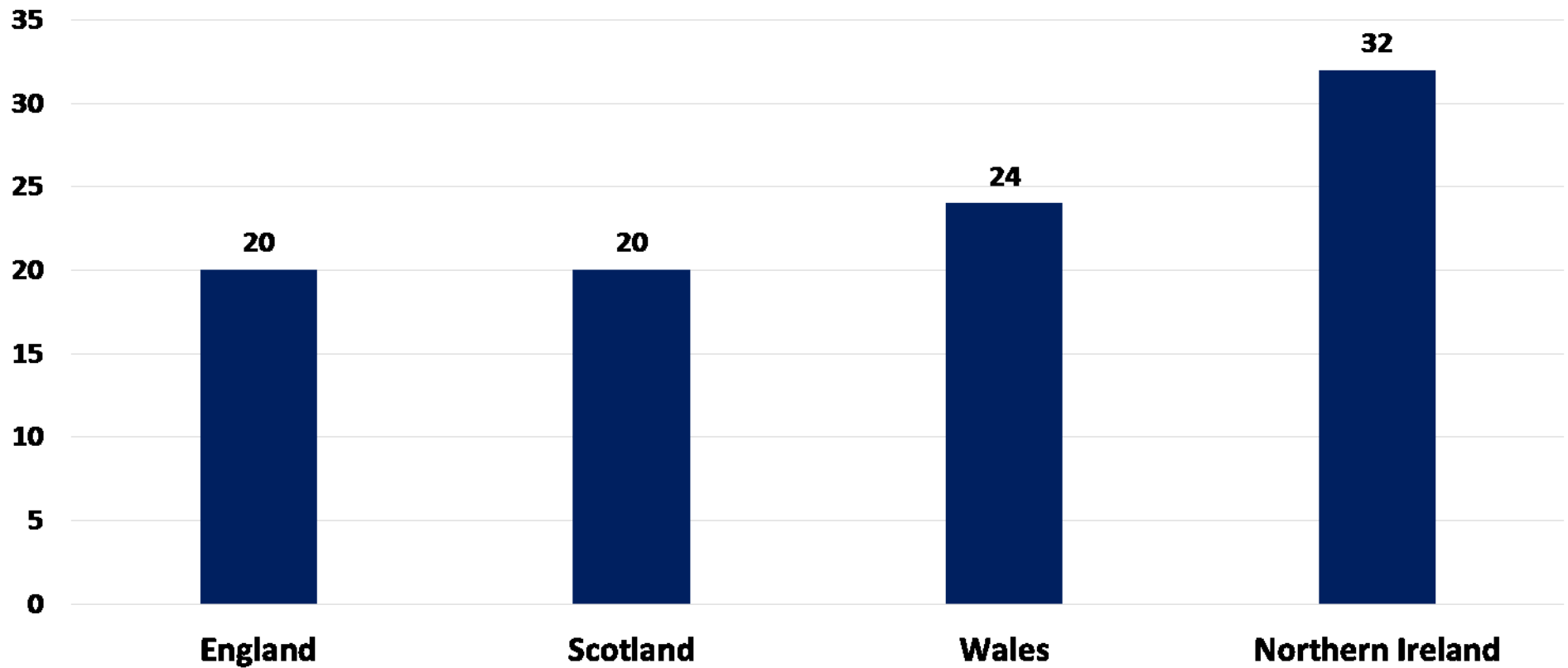
NS-SEC 4-7 students in higher/lower tariff institution across the UK, percentages





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





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Stratification in Europe: Austria

Weedon & Riddell, 2012)



Type of institution	Low socio-economic status	Middle socio-economic status	Upper socio-economic status	High socio-economic status
Scientific Universities	18.1%	30.2%	33.1%	18.6%
Universities of Fine Arts	15.1%	25.1%	39.8%	19.8%
Universities of Applied Sciences	23.4%	34.8%	31.9%	9.9%
Teacher Training Academies	20.9%	34.4%	35.6%	9.1%



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Stratification in Europe: Flanders, 1976 cohort, (see Weedon & Riddell, 2012)



Type of institution	Low socio-economic status	Middle socio-economic status	High socio-economic status	Total
University	2.1	6.8	23.3	9.8
4-year college	1.7	3.8	8.8	4.5
2-year college	13.7	28.2	27.7	24.4
No tertiary education	82.4	61.3	40.1	61.3
Total	100	100	100	100



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Summary UK

- 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

Conclusion

- There has been some progress in widening access across Europe and the UK but wide variation between countries in measures to increase access and monitoring of progress.
- There are signs of increasing stratification in the university sector in many European countries including the UK.
- Widening access matters in terms of social justice as those with higher education have better job prospects and are less likely to be at risk of poverty.

Selected bibliography

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Eurostat: Data in tables on slides 9, 10, 11 and 16 are publicly available from:

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