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# **Higher education in Scotland and the rest of the UK: The role of colleges and the structure of the university sector**

**Lucy Hunter Blackburn and Elisabet Weedon  
Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity,  
University of Edinburgh**

[www.creid.ed.ac.uk](http://www.creid.ed.ac.uk)



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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 from **college** to **‘elite’** universities
- Increase in **monitoring** of the sector through the use of performance indicators (PIs) and benchmarks as well as the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR)



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# Measures for monitoring access and participation



HEIPR measures entrance to all forms of HE (university or college provided) by age 30.

The Widening Access Performance Indicators, published annually by HESA (until 2017), are:

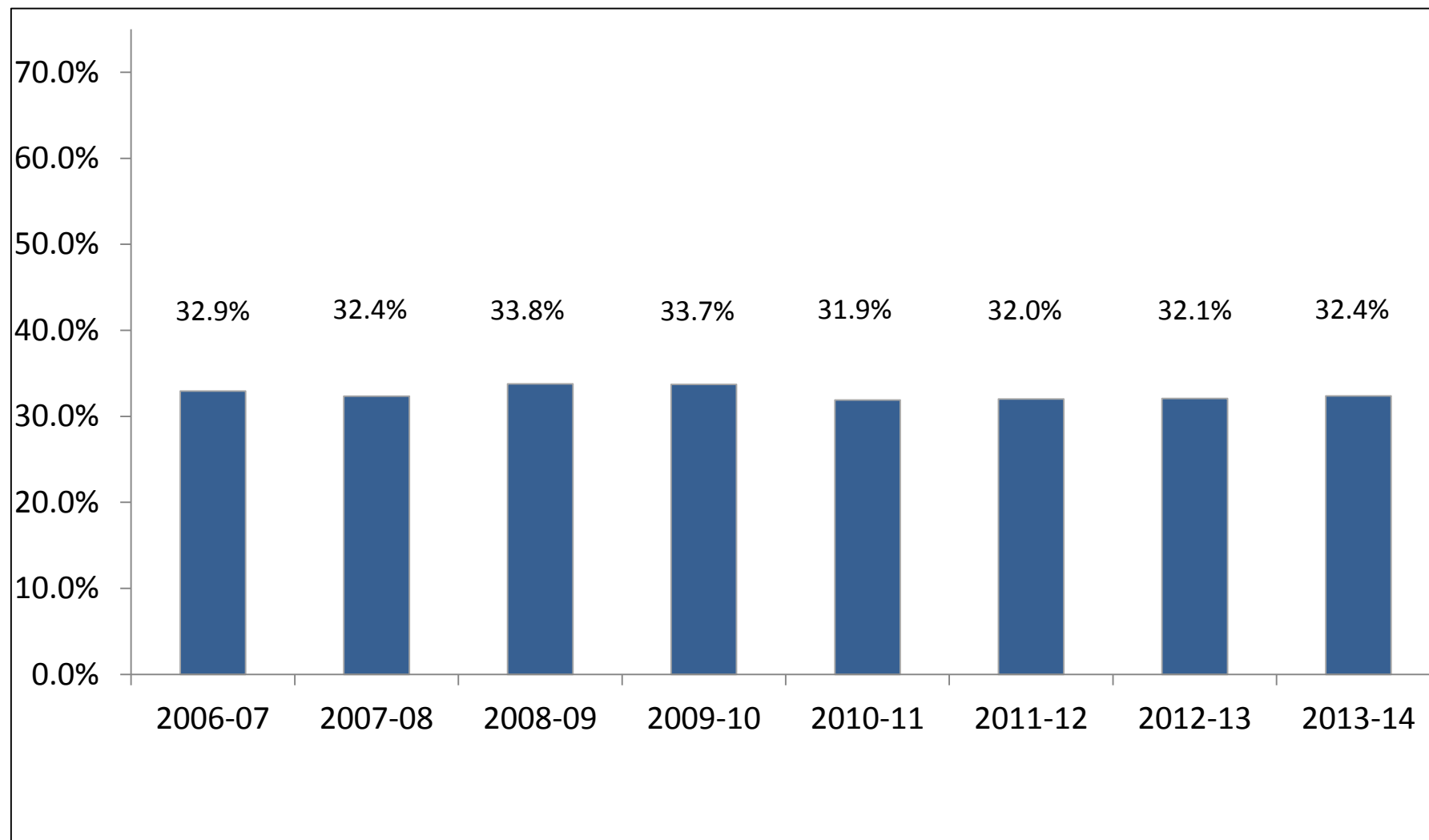
- **% NS-SEC 4-7 students** in an institution  $\approx$  'working class' based occupational status of a student's highest earning parent/carer
- **% state school students** in an institution These PIs focus on (below 21) in first year of higher education

In addition to PIs HESA also produces benchmarks based sector on an institutions subject mix and entry qualifications – these are used for comparing institutions that are similar (more to come)

# Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR)

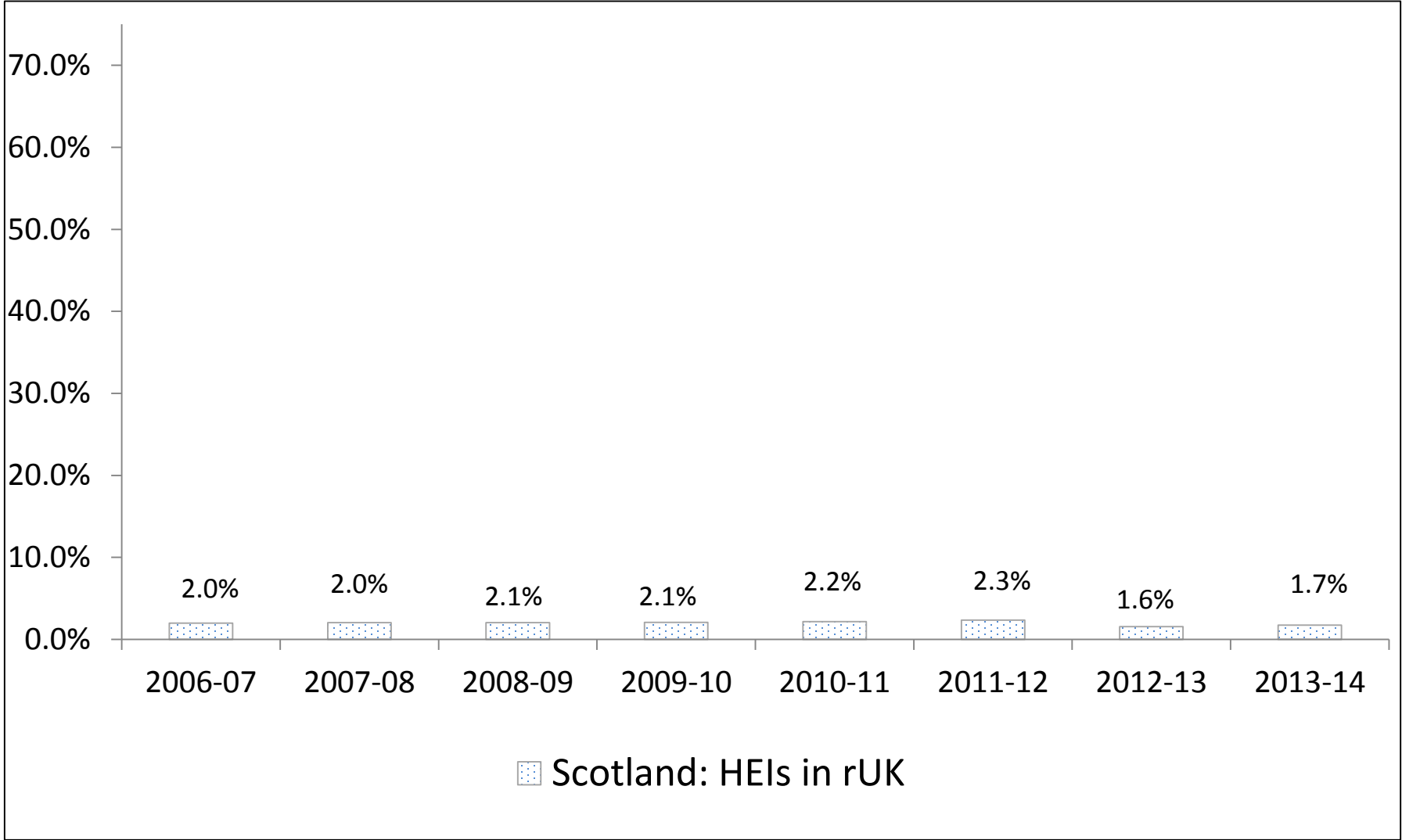
Source	UK government (BIS) and Scottish Government (SFC)
Countries	England and Scotland
Age	Sum of the entry rate at each age up to 30 (17 – 30 in Scotland, 18 - 30 in England).
Institutions	All providers
Includes	Initial entrants on HE courses at any level. Full-time and part-time, lasting at least 6 months, who attend for at least 6 months.
Excludes	Re-entrants, who have already been counted in previous years.

# Higher Education Initial Participation Rate Scotland – HEIs in Scotland



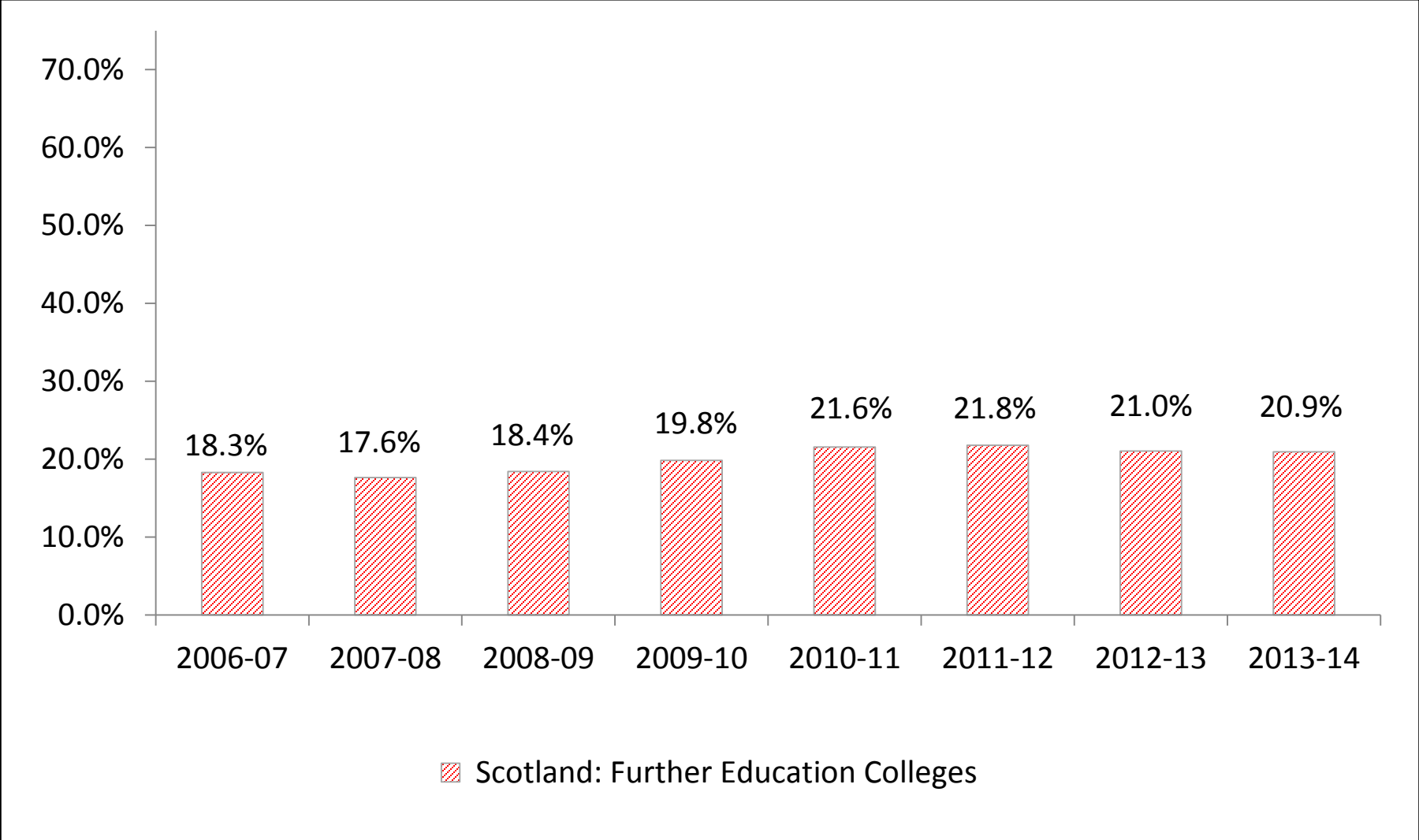
Source: SFC

# Higher Education Initial Participation Rate Scotland – HEIs elsewhere in UK



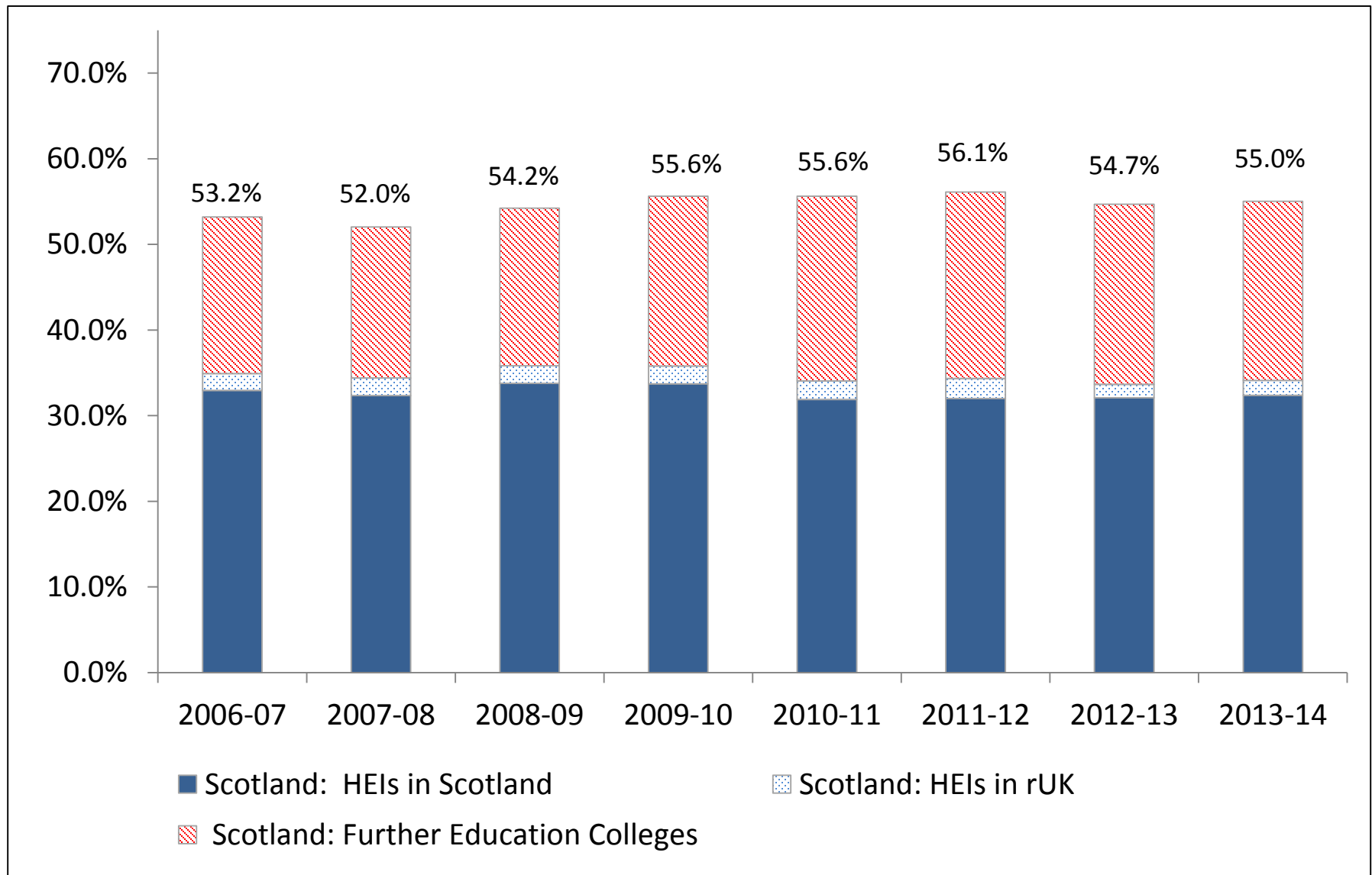
Source: SFC

# Higher Education Initial Participation Rate Scotland – FE colleges



Source: SFC

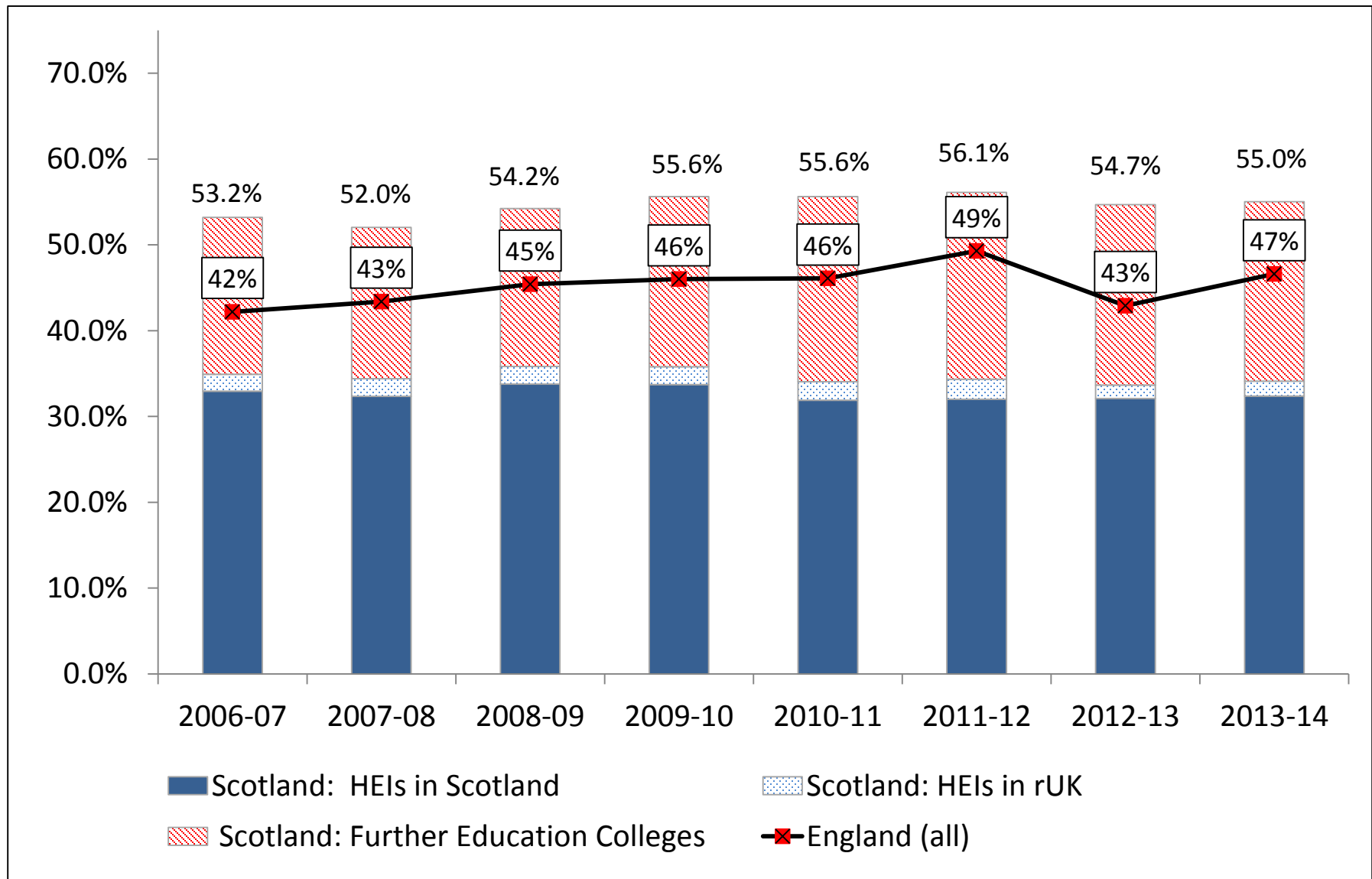
# Higher Education Initial Participation Rate Scotland – all





# Higher Education Initial Participation Rate

## Scotland – all, England - all





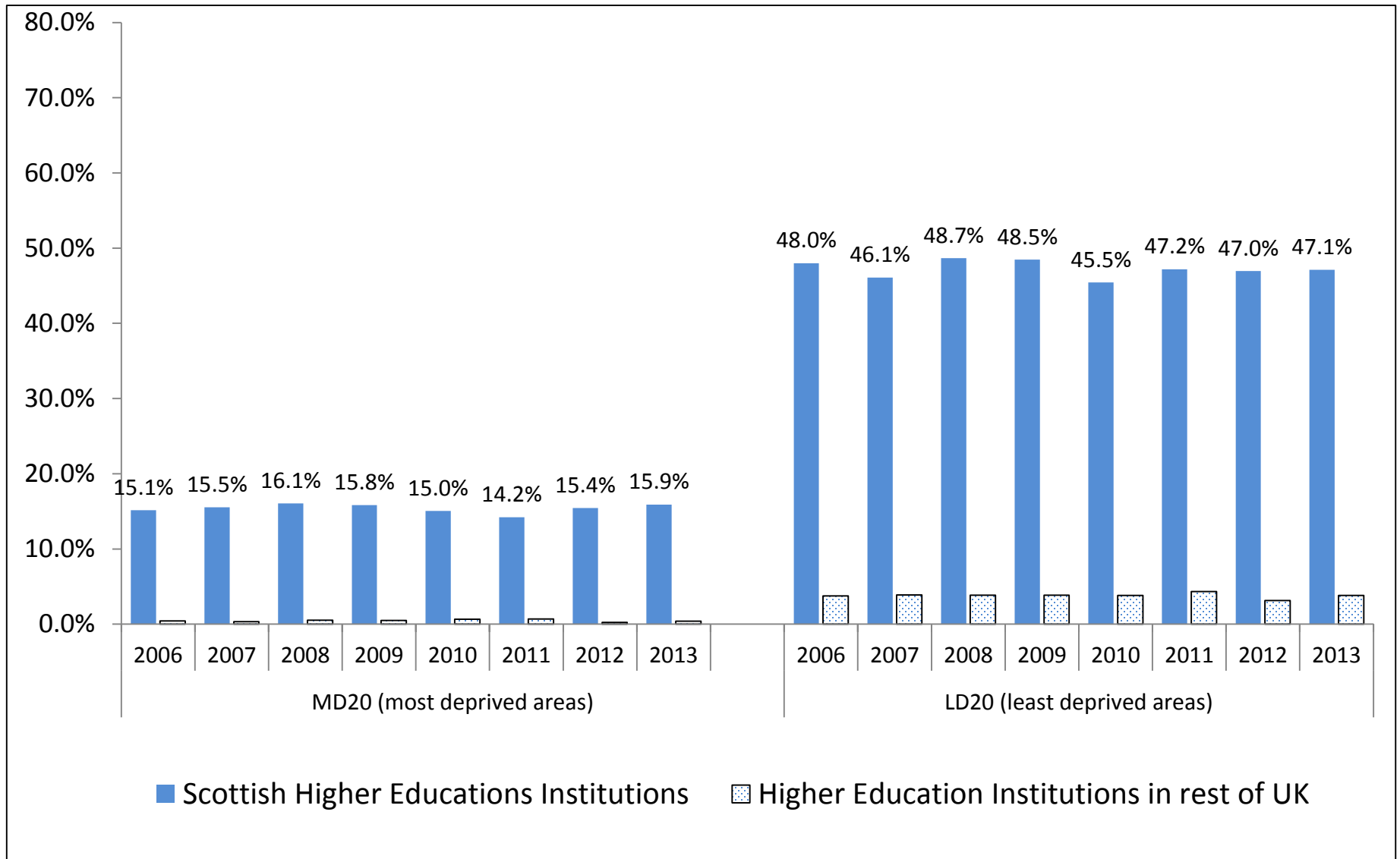
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# Entry to HE through FE colleges: equity issues?



- HN-level qualifications alone: lower earnings gains, access not enabled to the same range of occupations, particularly the professions.
- For the remainder who transfer to university:
  - Around 50% of these will obtain no credit or only partial credit, requiring repeat years (particularly if moving onto one of the older universities), leading to higher direct and opportunity costs.
  - For those obtaining full credit, more limited subject and institutional choice.
  - Potential transitional challenges: social/cultural/pedagogical.
- Published data: what % those starting in college by 30 move to HEI?
- Social distribution of entry routes matters

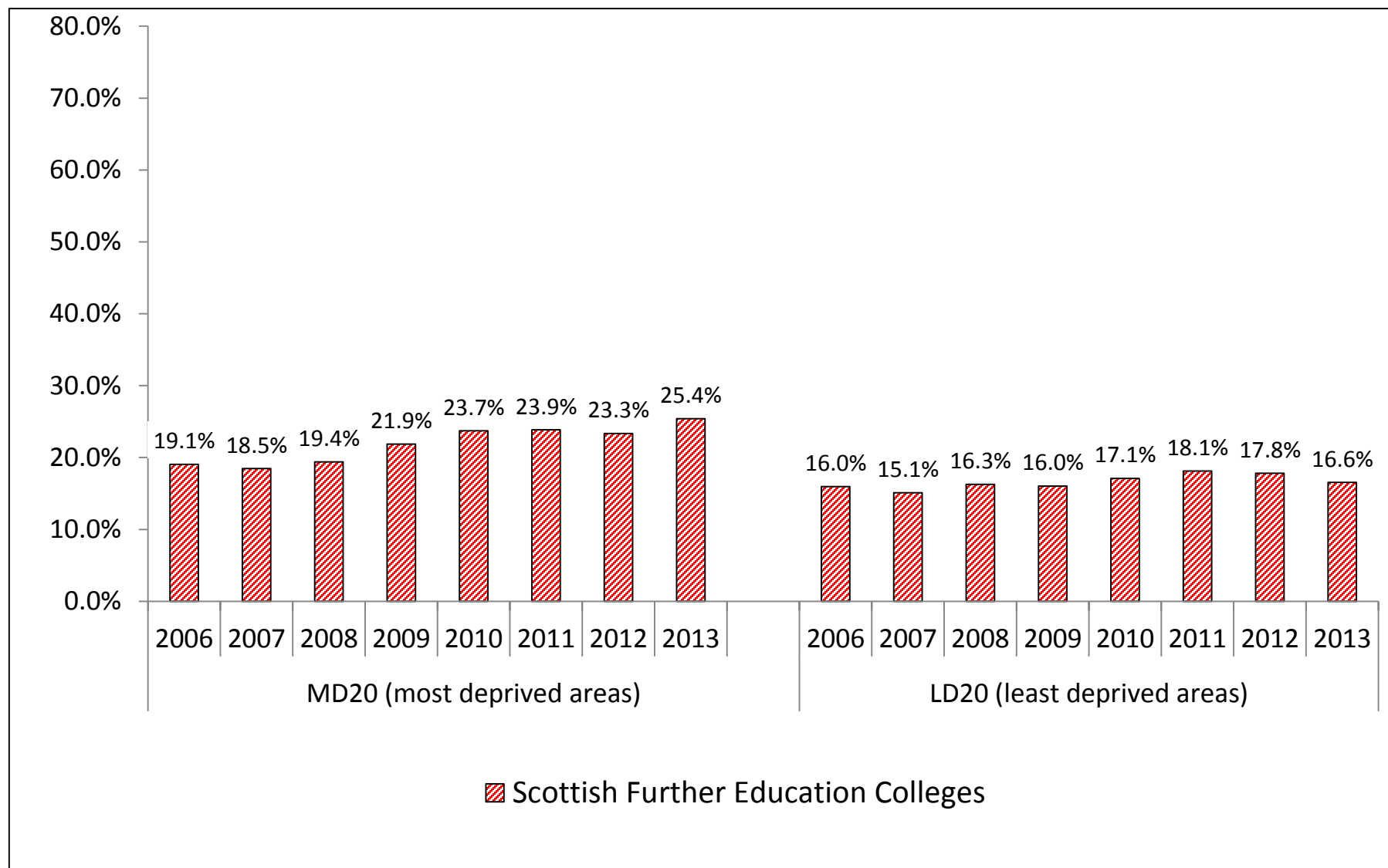
## Higher Education Initial Participation Rate Scotland – by most and least deprived 20% by SIMD: HEIs



Source: SFC

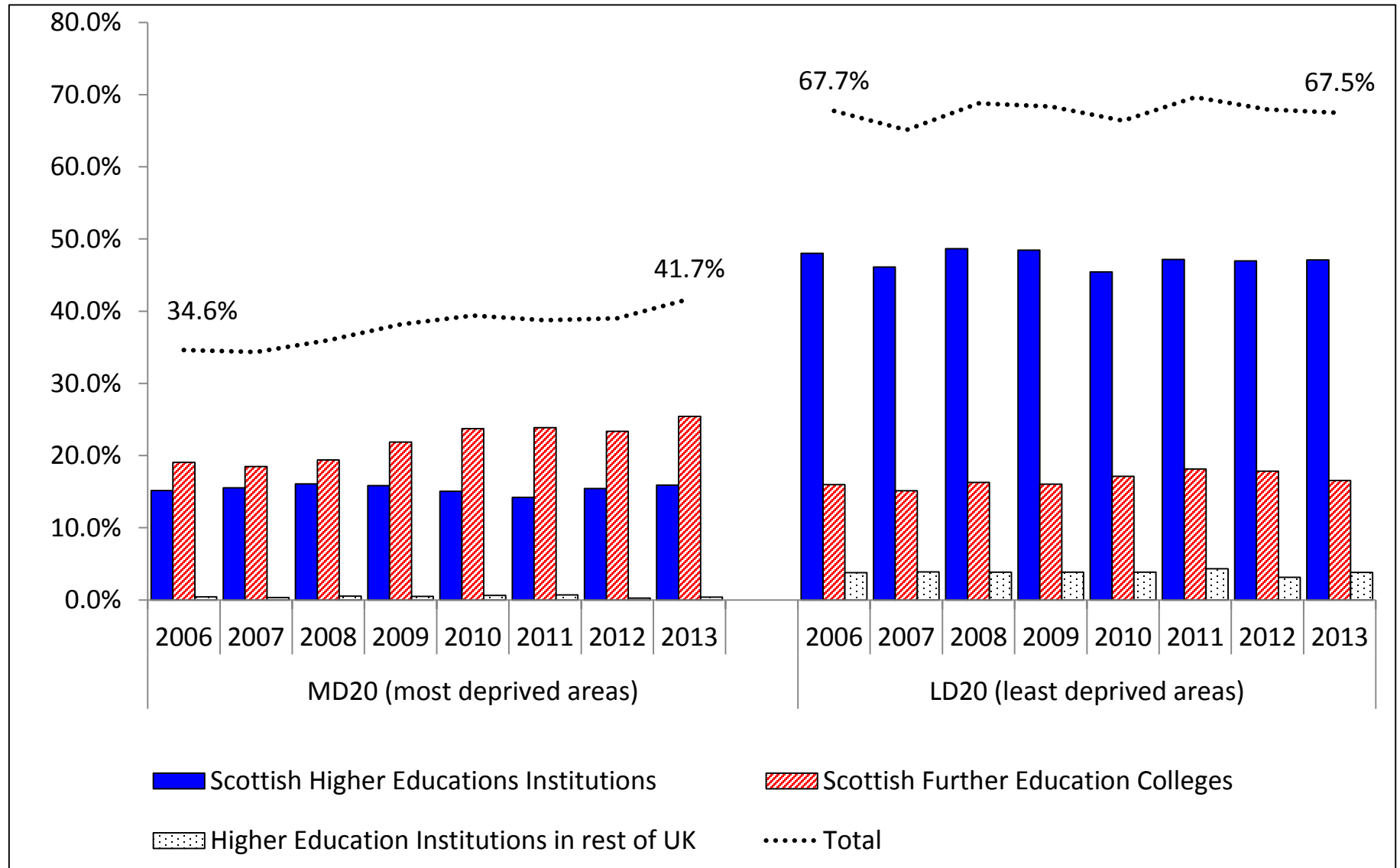
# Higher Education Initial Participation Rate

## Scotland – by most and least deprived 20% by SIMD: FE colleges



Source: SFC

# Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (to age 30) Scotland – by most and least deprived 20%: all entrance routes





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# Summary



- Growth in HEIPR in Scotland since 2006-07 has been driven by increased entry to college-level HE courses: little change in proportion directly entering university by age 30.
- Compared to England, Scottish HEIPR remains higher for HE in total (gap has marginally narrowed): Scotland is lower for direct university entry, entry to/via college plays critical role.
- Entry to/via college is not identical to direct entry to university, in terms of long-term benefits/short-term costs.
- Strong social stratification in entry routes to HE: over period, importance of college entry has grown much faster for MD20 than LD20, and accounts for most improvement in MD20.



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# Comparing institutions using HESA benchmarks



We split institutions between higher and lower tariff institutions to compare the university sectors across the UK as well as their performance in relation to widening access (more on methodology in the report)

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

# The structure of the university sector in Scotland and the rest of the UK

The number of higher tariff institutions in each country:

- Scotland: 8 (out of 18);
- England: 39 (out of 123 – 32%);
- Wales: 1 (out of 8);
- Northern Ireland 1 (out of 4)

## **Findings – there is:**

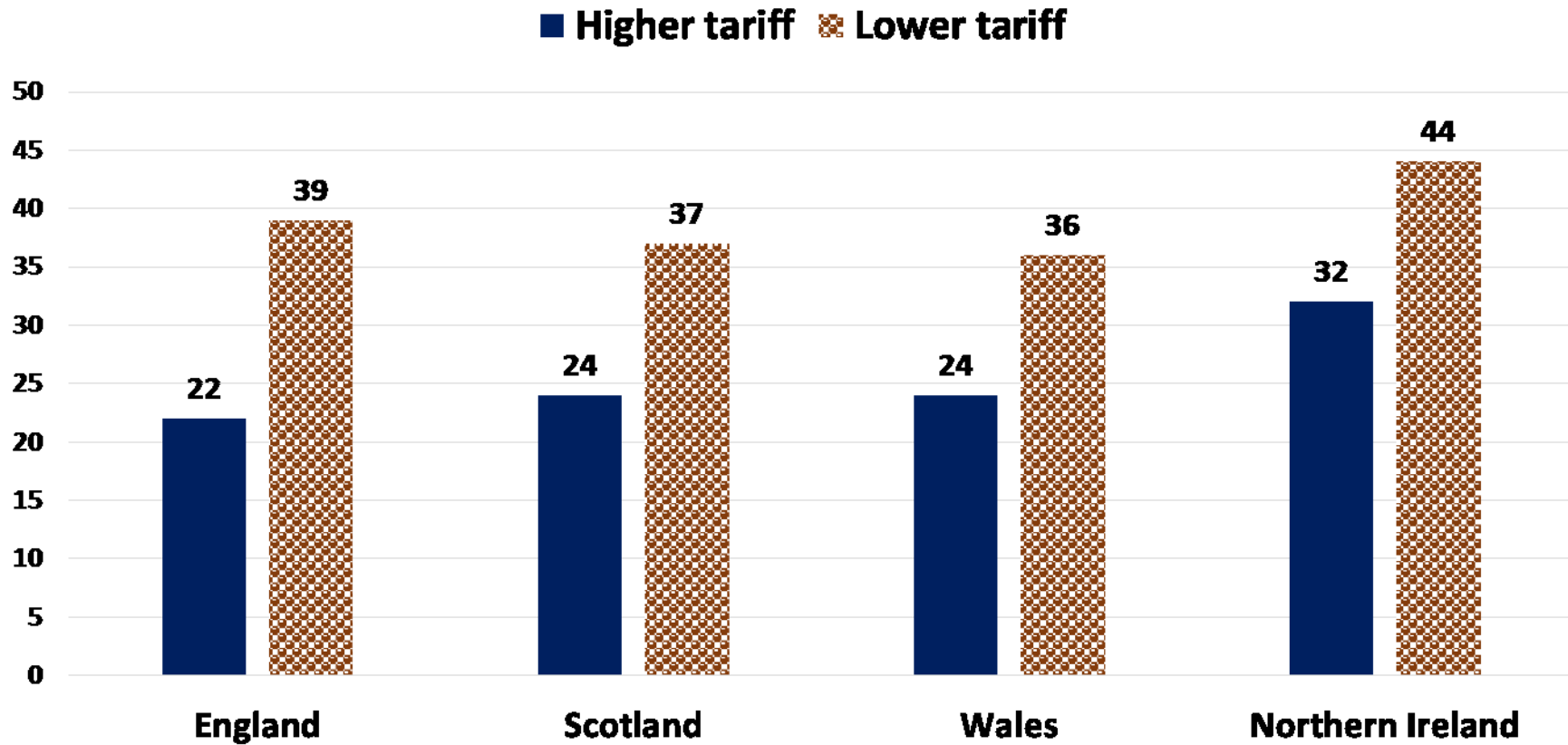
- a higher proportion of higher tariff institutions in the Scottish sector than in the rest of the UK (especially Wales)
- a higher proportion NS-SEC 4-7 students in higher tariff institutions in Scotland than in England but lower in lower tariff institutions





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





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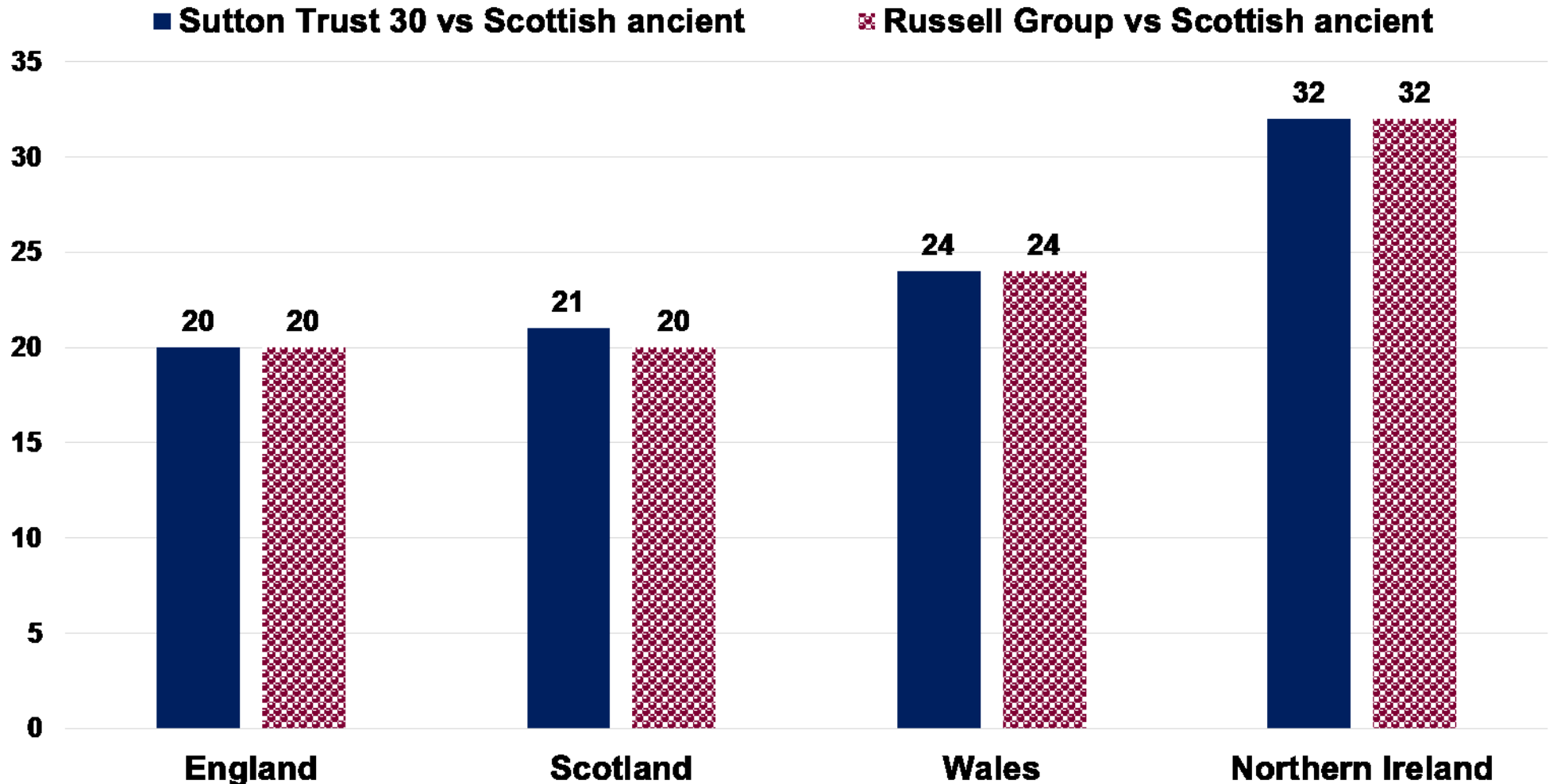


However, if we focus on the most elite institutions by comparing Scottish ancients with Russell group or Sutton Trust 30 across the UK we find no difference between Scotland and England ....



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# NS-SEC 4-7 in elite institutions: across UK comparison





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# Conclusion

- 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
- How socially inclusive are selective universities in Scotland and England?  
.... Not very!



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Data from:

## ACCESS IN SCOTLAND

Access to higher education for people from  
less advantaged backgrounds in Scotland

<http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/access-in-scotland/>