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Mike Russell hits back over fee scrapping



Mike Russell has rejected claims that free tuition fails to encourage those from poorer backgrounds to apply for a place at university. Picture: PA

EDUCATION secretary Mike Russell has rejected claims that free tuition fails to encourage those from poorer backgrounds to apply for a place at university.

Writing in The Scotsman yesterday, Professor Sheila Riddell, of Edinburgh University's School of Education, said scrapping fees had not "markedly altered" the number of working class students in higher education.

Mr Russell said: "I think Professor Riddell raises some good issues about what we're trying to do, but I don't agree with her thesis that being free of fees is not beneficial for widening access.

"We had a comprehensive debate over fees and came to the conclusion that this was the right thing to do."

The minister said "one or two" universities had failed to show "enthusiasm" for widening access, but said the Post-16 Education ([Scotland](#)) Bill and outcome agreements would help encourage institutions to recruit higher numbers of students from deprived backgrounds.

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