

WIDER ACCESS IN SCOTLAND?

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INTRODUCTION

During 1997 the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) together with a range of other funders commissioned a research team to examine the extent to which UK higher education institutions (HEIs) were widening access to young entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹ It is widely acknowledged that HEIs throughout the UK have successfully expanded provision for mature students and opened up opportunities for those seeking to study part-time. As a result, the UK student population has changed considerably in the past 10-15 years. Taking the 1.39 million current undergraduates, 395,000 are part-time; 47% of first year undergraduates are mature entrants (91% of part-time students, 28% of full-time students). Expanding participation has also increased the representation of the ethnic minorities who now constitute 13% of home students. Disabled students are still substantially underrepresented amongst the student population.

Wide ranges of policies and initiatives have been undertaken to widen participation including: formal access programmes/courses; franchise and

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¹ *The other funders for the project were: SHEFC, HEFCE, COSHEP, CIHE and SCOP. Although the project was concerned with students from disadvantaged backgrounds the statistical data used here relies on the social class data derived from UCAS. UCAS rely on the information from applicants. Applicants aged up to 20 are asked the occupation of the 'parent, step-parent or guardian who has, or had (if retired) the highest income in the household in which the applicant was brought up. For those aged 21 or over the occupation of the person contributing the highest income to the household was requested.' The terms 'less-well off' 'disadvantaged' and 'lower social classes' are used interchangeably in this paper but all refer to the social class data.*

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validation arrangements; compacts with local schools and colleges; and community outreach initiatives funded through the Funding Councils.

Alongside this diversification of the student population the participation of those from disadvantaged backgrounds has also increased during the 1990s. The estimated Age Participation Index for those from unskilled backgrounds increased from 6% in 1991 to 14% in 1997. (The API is the percentage entering by age 21.) Crucially, however, this increase does not highlight the position of *young* entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is this group which was of prime concern to the research undertaken.

The research project consisted of two discrete elements. The first part sought to examine the statistical representation of young entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds to higher education while the second part developed a series of case studies drawn from throughout the UK of institutional initiatives to widen participation of this group (CVCP 1998). This paper reports one aspect of the statistical analysis that seems to challenge some of the orthodox views about participation in Scotland.

THE GARRICK REPORT

The Garrick Report, the special report on Scottish higher education prepared as part of the UK wide Dearing inquiry, **Higher Education in the Learning Society** provides the most recent authoritative commentary on Scottish higher education and offers a number of observations on participation in Scotland. In particular, Garrick compared participation and the socio-economic profile of students in Scotland with the rest of the UK. It is worth quoting these observations in some detail.

Garrick suggested:

Participation in higher education in Scotland is traditionally higher than in the rest of the UK - currently at about 10 per cent higher than the UK average as a whole - and Scotland has had more success than the rest of the UK at attracting students from social classes III, IV and V. We believe this is in some part due to the cultural factors outlined above but also as a result the strong role played by the further education sector in Scotland in providing access to a higher proportion of the total higher education student population than in the rest of the UK. Forty per cent of Scottish higher education provision is in sub-degree qualifications

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compared to a figure of 26 per cent for the rest of the country.
(para 2.8, p.12)

In discussing this general claim further the Garrick Report suggested:

We considered enrolment patterns of Scottish domiciled students by social class on a regional and institutional basis. Work commissioned in this area suggests that higher education students appear to be from better-off families, regardless of their region of origin. The data suggest that social class differences may be greatest for students in the West of Scotland with particularly poor participation rates in urban areas. The evidence also suggests that more higher education students from the least affluent families enrol in further education colleges ... Nevertheless, in Scotland, there appears to be a trend towards greater participation by students in social class III [sic], IV and V.
(paras 2.73 and 2.74, p.31)

Very few data were presented by Garrick to sustain these arguments and it is perhaps unfortunate that the commissioned research was not published². Strikingly, no comparative data were used to sustain the claims concerning better participation rates for students from less well off backgrounds in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK. It is also rather surprising that Garrick's rather general comments did not attempt to distinguish between young entrants from less well-off backgrounds and mature entrants from similar backgrounds.

It is these general claims that can be investigated through the data set developed as part of the CVCP-sponsored project.

² *Garrick uses one table (table 13) to discuss social class. The table is used as evidence to show rising participation in higher education of those from lower social classes. The table, however, combines those for whom a class background is unknown with social class v (the unskilled). No indication is given by Garrick of the proportion for whom there is no known social class background. The data includes those proceeding to all forms of higher education both in and outside Scotland whereas the commentary implies the data relate to universities in Scotland. The table does not show the proportion such students represent of the total student population so even rising participation from these groups could result in a reduction in their representation if overall numbers were increasing at a faster rate.*

THE DATA SET

In order to investigate the representation of young entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds to higher education, a data set was developed utilising UCAS information on applications and accepts.³ The data set contained the applications made by UK domiciled applicants aged 17-21 to UK institutions from the lower social classes in 1996/97 and the accepts for 1997/98. Utilising UCAS data for these purposes has a number of advantages and weaknesses. The advantages include:

- It provides a UK wide data set for applications and acceptances.
- It contains key variables relevant to the research (social class, gender etc).
- It allows institutional characteristics to be linked to applications and acceptances.
- The sophisticated data handling developed by UCAS facilitates analysis.

These substantial strengths outweigh the limitations, which are:

- The limitations imposed by UCAS on the data in order to protect institutional identity.
- The non-response to the social class variable. The non-response rate for this data set is 12.4%.

The first major issue that can be addressed through the analysis of the data relates to how Scotland compares with other parts of the UK in terms of participation by those aged 17-21 from the lower social classes. In reviewing the data, it must be recalled that there is an important structural difference in the provision of higher education in Scotland compared with the rest of the UK. In Scotland, a higher proportion of sub-degree higher education is delivered through the further education sector than in the rest of the UK - approximately 40% compared with 26%. (Entrants to sub-degree higher education courses in further education colleges are not included in the UCAS data). This important difference will be commented on further below.

³ *The UCAS data set does not record registrations. UCAS records individual acceptances but individuals may not always register.*

APPLICATIONS - INDIVIDUALS

The analysis of the UCAS data in relation to applications to institutions in Scotland compared with the other regions of the UK reveals that the Scottish profile of applications from social classes IIIm, IV and V is at much lower levels than Northern Ireland (table 1). Moreover, the Scottish figures are also lower than Wales and are even slightly below the English figures. The Scottish figure for applications from social class V is very low and is, once again, lower than the other regions' low figures.

Table 1

Applications to UK institutions, 1997/98 (17-21, UK domiciled) by region* and manual classes (row %s)

	IIIm	IV	V	IIIm -V	N
UK	17.3	7.9	2.1	27.3	1488860
England	15.3	7.2	1.9	24.8	1245423
Scotland	16.6	7.2	1.6	25.4	139774
Wales	18.1	8.1	2.3	28.5	65278
Northern Ireland	25.3	8.2	3.5	37.0	38385

* region based on location of institution

ACCEPTS - INDIVIDUALS

These differences in applications from the manual social classes is reflected in the lower representation of these groups in those accepted into Scottish institutions compared with elsewhere in the UK. Table 2 shows that Scottish accepts from each of the three lower social classes is at a lower level than the other three regions of the UK. The contrast with Northern Ireland is striking.

Table 2

Accepts into UK institutions, 1997/98 (17-21, UK domiciled) by region* and manual classes (row %s)

	IIIm	IV	V	IIIm -V
England	14.8	7.0	1.8	23.5
Scotland	14.7	6.6	1.3	22.7
Wales	15.5	7.2	1.8	24.5
Northern Ireland	21.3	7.1	2.7	31.0

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* region based on location of institution

One of the major characteristics of Scottish higher education, and in particular the universities, is the high proportion of entrants from elsewhere in the UK. Almost a quarter of entrants come from the rest of the UK and in net terms Scotland gains approximately 16.7% from these inward flows compared with outward flows.⁴ However, when only Scottish domiciled entrants to HEIs in Scotland are considered in terms of social class, as can be seen in tables 3 and 4 where degree and HND accepts are examined separately, the overall picture is not greatly changed. Indeed, while Scottish domiciled accepts to degree programmes show a small increase in those from the manual classes compared with all UK accepts to Scottish institutions, Scottish domiciled accepts to HND programmes in Scottish HEIs show a decline in the representation of those from manual classes.

Table 3

Accepts into UK institutions (17-21, UK domiciled) by region* and manual social classes (degree) (row %s)

	IIIIm	IV	V	IIIIm -V
England	14.8	7.0	1.8	23.6
Scotland	16.1	7.4	1.5	25.0
Wales	19.7	8.3	3.0	31.0
Northern Ireland	21.4	7.1	2.7	31.2

* region based on location of institution and domicile of accepts (eg Scottish students into Scottish institutions).

Table 4

Accepts into UK institutions (17-21, UK domiciled) by region* and manual social classes (HND) (row %s)

	IIIIm	IV	V	IIIIm -V
England	19.9	9.7	2.9	32.5
Scotland	20.0	9.1	1.6	30.7
Wales	23.1	9.7	2.0	34.8

⁴ see R Hazell and L Paterson 'Devolution and regional government in the UK: the implications for higher education' Discussion Paper prepared for the CVCP, September 1998

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Northern Ireland 31.2 7.7 4.0 42.9

*** region defined based on location of institution and domicile of accepts (eg Scottish domiciled accepts into Scottish institutions).*

We can place these patterns between the four nations/regions in the UK in a population context. It might be the case that these regional differences are primarily the product of a different population structure. The relevant data drawn from the 1991 population censuses are shown in table 5 together with the proportions of accepts from the manual classes for students domiciled in each region (i.e. Scottish students accepted into Scottish institutions). Northern Ireland records the highest proportion of its population in the manual classes (48.4%) followed by Wales (46.6%) with Scotland at 44.9% and England 42%. In part, these structural differences in population might be said to underlie some of the differences between the regions that have been identified but the regional differences are not precisely paralleled in the profile of accepts. For example, the scale of the population differences between Scotland and Wales are smaller than the differences in the profiles of accepts from the manual classes for indigenous domiciled students - a difference in favour of Wales. Similarly, the different population profiles of England and Scotland (a higher proportion of the Scottish population is in the manual classes) do not produce the same scale of difference in manual accepts in the two regions. Indeed, the Scottish profile of accepts is much closer to the English profile than could be expected given the population differences. When Scotland is compared with Northern Ireland, the population structure differences are substantially exceeded by the student class profile - once again in favour of Northern Ireland. So, locating the regional profile of accepts in the population structures of the regions does not provide the full explanation of the differences between regions. Other matters require consideration and these are considered below.

Table 5

The manual proportions of the population, UK regions 1991, and manual representation of higher education entrants

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Population*				
III _m	20.9	21.8	22.4	23.2
IV	15.5	15.7	17.4	17.3
V	5.6	7.4	6.8	7.9
Total Manual	42.0	44.9	46.6	48.4

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<i>%accepts**</i>				
III _m	15.3	16.3	20.2	21.9
IV	7.3	7.5	8.4	7.1
V	1.9	1.5	2.9	2.8
Total Manual	24.5	25.3	31.5	31.8

Source: UCAS

** based on 1991 population censuses: 10% samples for England, Scotland and Wales; 100% sample for Northern Ireland.*

*** based on accepts for degree and HNDs, locally domiciled students 17-21 into institutions in region.*

APPLICATIONS: THE INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Thus far the analysis has concentrated on the characteristics of individual applications/applicants. It is possible, however, to place these patterns in the institutional context. Specifically, we can examine the pattern of applications and accepts to individual institutions in Scotland and place them in the context of the rest of the UK.

Broadly, the pattern of applications to institutions in England parallels that for the UK as a whole with a large number of institutions recording substantial numbers of applications from social classes IV and V. In contrast the Scottish profile is such that no institution records more than 750 applications from social classes IV and V. Many English institutions have more applications from these classes than would be expected if the national pattern of applications from these classes was replicated within the institution (although also many have lower-than-expected applications from these classes). In Scotland, most institutions have a pattern of applications from classes IV and V that is exactly what would happen if the national pattern of applications from these classes was replicated within the institution. The Welsh profile is closer to that for England than Scotland.

The analysis is similar for 'accepts', although here Wales and Scotland are similar. The post-1992 institutions accept a higher proportion from classes IV and V than either the pre-1992 institutions or the Colleges.

The UCAS data, while limited to only one year, seem to provide evidence that the Scottish HEIs are less likely to attract applications or to record accepts from the manual social classes than institutions in other parts of the UK. Notably, Scottish HEIs do less well than those in Northern Ireland but

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also many institutions in England and Wales record much higher percentages of accepts from this group. Population structure differences between the regions might be said to account for some of this difference, but clearly not all.

In adopting a broad overview of the characteristics of Scottish higher education, Garrick neglected to examine the characteristics of the different institutional components. Given the comparative profile of Scottish institutions, both in terms of all UK applications and accepts as well as those domiciled in Scotland, should Garrick not have focused on the specific role of different parts of the system and the future role they might play? It is striking, for example, that Garrick had nothing to say about the special schemes and programmes run by a number of HEIs, some of which feature as case studies in a recent research report examining these issues (CVCP 1998). These schemes are designed to increase the participation of those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Some of the schemes have been running for many years and have achieved considerable success. It can be suggested that a degree of complacency permeates the Garrick report in its consideration of participation and the representation of those from less well-off backgrounds - a complacency that seems to flow from the assertions about Scotland's position compared to the rest of the UK.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN FURTHER EDUCATION

One of the distinctive and positive features of Scottish education is the effort made to provide 'articulation' between further education and higher education institutions. Ideally, the model conceives of a single tertiary sector encompassing the two components and with the transition between the sectors being easily accomplished. Garrick called for increased efforts to be made to enhance articulation.

We can now turn to the issue of further education. As quoted above, Garrick believed that this sector, which is a major provider of higher education courses in Scotland (c40%), provided more opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The evidence was based on statistics relating to those in receipt of means tested awards at further education colleges receiving higher awards than those in HEIs. We are not in a position to judge this question conclusively since detailed social class data for students studying on higher education courses in further education are not available

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for Scotland or the other regions of the UK⁵ Some Scottish data are available, however, which enables us to take this issue further. The question that can be posed, therefore, asks whether - since the HEIs in Scotland do not stand out as a group when compared with HEIs elsewhere in the UK - in the recruitment of young entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds, does the further education sector provide the alternative route?⁶

Two sets of data can be assessed. The first, and most important, relates to the on-going work funded by the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department by Gallacher and colleagues at Glasgow Caledonian University who have been examining further education and higher education links in detail. The most recent phase of this research involves a follow-up survey of initial entrants to HND programmes in the further education sector.⁷ Overall, it is known that entrants to these courses are older than those at HEIs. This is confirmed in Gallacher et al's survey where 60% of entrants were aged over 21. A higher representation amongst entrants of those from the manual social classes (III_m, IV and V) was evident than entrants to HEIs. But, crucially, the study identified 'a higher proportion of working class students within the older group (50%) than in the younger group (41%)' (p.9).⁸ Moreover, they further note that the younger group of HND entrants from manual social classes was less likely to progress to degree studies than the older group. Overall, this survey is quite small and, arguably, the differences are not substantial. Nevertheless, there is no clear-cut evidence that the further education route provides a path into higher education for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds which compensates for the comparatively lower levels of such students at Scottish universities.

⁵ *Data are available from a Northern Ireland longitudinal survey of all full-time HND entrants in further education colleges in 1991. A valid response of 68.3 % was achieved (N= 992). Most entrants were under 21 (85%) and a majority were from non-manual background (54%). The representation of those from social class III_m was higher than for degree entrants (35.1%) but social classes IV and V were underrepresented. Contact author for further details.*

⁶ *It may be that students from poorer backgrounds chose this route over seeking entry to the university sector.*

⁷ *The survey was of 500 entrants who were tracked over a number of years. The initial response was 70% .*

⁸ *Nevertheless, it is clear that further education colleges in Scotland are markedly better at attracting students from less-well off backgrounds than universities*

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The second source of data is less direct. Data on the ages of degree entrants entering HEIs from further education colleges with sub-degree qualifications in 1995-6 suggests that almost two-thirds transferred aged 21 or over (62.7%). These data reinforce Gallacher's evidence concerning the particular importance of further education for mature students.⁹ Once again, while this evidence is not conclusive, it does not suggest that the substantial provision of sub-degree higher education courses in the further education sector is providing a substantial alternative route for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter higher education.

DISCUSSION

The evidence reviewed here has amplified that presented or apparently available to the Garrick Committee. It has raised serious questions about the participation of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds which would repay further research and analysis. In some respects, therefore, Garrick's analysis was inadequate. There was a failure to thoroughly examine statistically the constituent elements of higher education and to carefully compare them with elsewhere in relation to some of the assertions made. Not to comparatively examine the role of HEIs in the respective parts of the UK led to the failure to assess the existing activities of these institutions to increase working class participation and the potential for more to be done.

In many ways the concerns of Garrick, and the wider Dearing Committee, were laid down by the previous government. Many of these remain valid and are being carried forward in new policies, but they have been added to since May 1997. The Labour administration has made it clear that it wishes to see initiatives on increasing the representation of young people from less well-off backgrounds. The Higher Education Funding Council for England has floated the idea of rewarding HEIs through both special schemes and/or core funding for increasing participation of these groups (HEFCE 1998). The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council has apparently not yet accepted the idea of skewing core funding but has launched the first tranche of funding for its wider access programmes designed to enhance the representation of lower socio-economic groups. The initiative involves £1m per annum over five years (SHEFC 1998). The allocations in the first instalment of the

⁹ *These data were supplied by SOEID on 28/4/98. Of course, it must be acknowledged that students transferring to university who entered their sub-degree programme at 18 would be at or around 21 when transferring*

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programme make it clear that the universities have a role to play in widening access - it is not a role primarily for the further education sector. The SHEFC has also sought to examine the methodology for identifying students from disadvantaged backgrounds based on postcodes. In many ways, therefore, policy development in relation to increasing the participation of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds means that Garrick, in this important area, has been superseded.

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