



You are here: | [Newsroom](#) | [Speeches & Briefings](#) | [Statement on Widening Access to Higher Education](#)

30/05/17 15:53

Statement on Widening Access to Higher Education

Search News Items

Minister for Further and Higher Education and Science, Shirley-Anne Somerville.

Scottish Parliament 30 May 2017.

Presiding Officer, this Government wants every child, no matter their background, to have an equal chance of going to university.

Statistics show that currently, that is not the case. Where you are born and the area you grow up in conspire to make it harder – much harder – for young people from Scotland's most deprived backgrounds.

That is not acceptable.

That is why this Government established a Commission on Widening Access and accepted all 34 recommendations in its Blueprint for Fairness. Crucially, we accepted its ambitious targets to widen access, so that by 2030, 20% of students entering university will be from Scotland's 20% most deprived backgrounds.

The Government also agreed to report on progress one year on and I welcome the opportunity to do so today.

I can also advise that we have published a written report of progress, now available on the Scottish Government website.

Follow Us



Email



RSS



audioBoom



Twitter



Youtube



Flickr

Contacts

- [News Desk Contacts](#)

And I want to make clear, Presiding Officer, that not only are we making progress in relation to delivering the Blueprint recommendations, but that there are also clear signs of progress in terms of outcomes for our young people.

The latest figures from UCAS for 2016 showed a record percentage of 18 year olds from the most deprived areas in Scotland entering university. The entry rate of 10.9% represents a proportional increase of 51% since 2006.

What these statistics show is that there is change, just not at the pace that is required. That is why the Widening Access Commission set out five 'foundational recommendations' which it determined were necessary to deliver the step change required.

Presiding Officer, I can advise Parliament that two of these foundational recommendations have been implemented and the rest are currently on target to deliver to timescale.

In December, I was pleased to announce the appointment of Professor Sir Peter Scott as Scotland's Commissioner for Fair Access.

His knowledge, experience and commitment to equality and fairness are already playing a pivotal role in driving forward the system-wide approach required to create equal access.

I want that to continue so I can announce that Sir Peter has agreed to continue as Commissioner for a further year.

Indeed, it is the Commissioner who is tasked with delivering a Framework for Fair Access. A framework that sets out what works and how to deliver it. A framework based on robust evidence.

Professor Scott has been clear that those working on access should play a key role in the development of the Framework and that its main purpose should be to support and enhance the work they do.

To achieve this he has convened a Development Group chaired by Conor Ryan, a former Commission member and Director of Research and Communications with the Sutton Trust.

The Framework will be published in 2018 and will effectively set out a route map for delivery of fair access.

The foundational recommendations also set an immediate challenge for government – to provide a full bursary for students with care experience; and for universities - to guarantee them with an offer of a place

I can advise that from this academic year 2017-18, care experienced students under 26 can apply for a bursary of £7,625 to support living costs.

This mirrors the current Minimum Income Guarantee for the least well off students in higher education and will make a real difference to some of our most vulnerable young people.

We have taken an inclusive approach to determine and define care experience, listening carefully to the voices and views of people with care

experience themselves.

The result is that already, over 100 young people with care experience have been awarded a bursary for study in 2017-18.

And we have been assured by institutions and Universities Scotland that care experience is already considered during admission processes.

It is vital, however, that this translates into students applying for entry in 2017/18, who meet at least the minimum admission standards being offered a place at university.

The final foundational recommendation concerned the 2030 target and the milestones to be met in terms of increasing access in 2021 and in 2026.

It also included the target for individual universities that by 2021, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent 10% of all full time, first degree entrants – at each university in Scotland.

The Scottish Funding Council has integrated these targets into its outcome agreement guidance.

Further, from 2018/19, institutions have been advised that they will be expected to use additional widening access places solely to support the intake of students from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland.

And I want to be very clear today about my expectations of our universities.

We can be very proud of our world class university sector and the success it delivers.

Indeed, only last week statistics were published showing that in 2016, 35.8% of workers in Scotland aged 25-64 were graduates – the highest percentage on record.

But there is also disparity between universities in terms of the backgrounds of young people who study in them.

That must change.

Every young person, must have equal chances and choices, to study at any of our Scottish institutions.

And so my first expectation for the coming year is that the Scottish Funding Council will ensure that the access targets being set through the outcome agreement process are sufficient to deliver our interim targets.

And by this I mean not only the overarching national target, but also those for institutions and full-time first degree entrants.

I also expect the Funding Council to monitor progress to identify where targets are not being met or where more challenging targets are required.

And I expect this to be done in a transparent way. To set out clearly, and publicly, the access related activity and ambitions being set by institutions through the outcome agreement process.

And to report the progress being made against them.

Implementation of the Commission's recommendations in relation to university admissions will be key to achieving these milestones and targets.

In addition to more transparency around the admissions process, the Commission recommended that all universities should set access thresholds by 2019.

I am pleased that Universities Scotland has commenced work on this through an Admissions Working Group.

This is one of three working groups, with the other two focussing on articulation and bridging programmes.

All three groups are due to report by early autumn, after which, universities will then start to implement the groups' recommendations.

I welcome the leadership that Universities Scotland has shown in these areas. I am also, however, acutely aware of the lead in time that institutions need to make changes to admissions processes and to ensure these are communicated to prospective students in time for them to apply.

Over the next 12 months, I therefore expect universities to make clear and demonstrable progress in this area, to ensure delivery of access thresholds in time for academic year 2019/20.

Presiding Officer, progress has also been made on a programme of work to take forward the data recommendations.

The Commission was clear. Although the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is the most robust measure we have at this time, we must develop more comprehensive methodology to identify the background of students.

My officials are liaising with universities to identify the data they currently use and need going forward.

The evidence base in this area is growing, with new research published in December and further research from Durham University due later this year.

A group is now being established to determine the best measures to use and will deliver this work by 2018, in line with the Commission's recommendation.

Presiding Officer, in the past year, we have created and enabled space within which all stakeholders in this agenda could explore and establish their thinking on how best to implement the Blueprint for Fairness.

But the Commission was clear that a whole-system approach would be needed to achieve our aim.

That therefore requires the whole education system to work together to deliver collectively on the Blueprint's recommendations.

I can therefore announce today the establishment of a Delivery Group to coordinate and monitor progress of implementation across all parts of the education system.

This group will include those with a key responsibility for delivery of aspects of change, and by individuals and representatives with a wider stake in the outcome of our actions, such as NUS Scotland.

It will, of course, involve Sir Peter Scott, our Commissioner for Fair Access and in recognition of the importance Government places on this Group's role, I will chair it.

Presiding Officer, this Government's work to reduce inequalities in higher education did not start, and will not end, with the Commission's recommendations.

We have introduced statutory access agreements and have invested £128 million in widening access and articulation places over the last four years.

This year we also introduced 40 new places through our pre-medical entry programme, which aims to assist students from socially deprived backgrounds to enter medicine.

Implementing the Blueprint for Fairness is undoubtedly challenging for everyone involved.

But it also provides a significant opportunity to change our education system and in the process, change the lives of the young people who need equal chances and choices the most.

The progress I have set out today demonstrates that we are determined to address the challenge in order to deliver that opportunity.

Newsroom provided by [PRgloo Ltd](#)

Crown Copyright

[Privacy Policy and Content Disclaimer](#)