

Scotland

National Higher Education Equity Policy

Governance

- The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (under the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills) is responsible for defining national policies in higher education.
- The Commissioner for Fair Access is the independent regulator. That Office is responsible for providing policy advice to the Scottish Government, as well as other organizations. The focus of the commissioner's work in the education sector is to "develop best practice, improve the evidence base, [and] hold account all those with a role in advancing fair access to higher education."
- The Commission on Widening Access advises government on how to achieve the government's goal for all youth to access higher education, regardless of their economic position ([http://www.sfc.ac.uk/access-inclusion/commission-widening-access.aspx](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/access-inclusion/commission-widening-access/commission-widening-access.aspx)).
- The Advanced learning and Science Directorate is responsible for implementing higher education policy, including accessibility of higher education regardless of income (<https://beta.gov.scot/about/how-government-is-run/directorates/advanced-learning-and-science/>)
- The Scottish Funding Council (Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council) is the public body responsible for funding universities. It advises Scottish Ministers and assesses higher education institutions in relation to how it funds them.

Higher Education Policy Documents

- The Higher Education Governance Act of 2016 is the most current official document defining the national higher education strategy in Scotland.
- The Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 sets the current strategy regarding equity as it relates to further and higher education.

Non-Discrimination Legislation

- The Equality Act 2010 (1 October 2010) merges different legislation pieces that pertain to nondiscrimination and equality.

Equity Policy Documents

What broad and specific equity objectives do the policy documents identify?

- The Post-16 Education Act of 2013 focuses on widening access to higher education as it relates to “socio-economic groups” through policy, funding and monitoring/reporting on widening access.
- The Scottish Funding Council formulated a Gender Action Plan in 2016, which provides guidelines and support for higher education institutions to address gender imbalances.

Which equity target groups are identified in the policy documents?

The 2013 act mentioned above has a broad category of “socio-economic groups” that may be disadvantaged in higher education.

- Low-income students
- Gender
- Students with disability
- Students with care-experience: This population is defined to “include anyone who has been or is currently in care or from a looked after background at any stage in their life. It includes people who have been in foster care, kinship care, and those who are looked after at home with a supervision requirement.” (Scottish Funding Council)

Does the country have concrete targets for the participation of specific equity groups?

Targets are set out in the 2016 “Blueprint for Fairness: Final Report of the Commission on Widening Access:”

- By 2021, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 16% of full-time first degree entrants to Scottish HEIs as a whole.
- By 2021, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 10% of full-time first degree entrants to every individual Scottish university.

- By 2026, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 18% of full-time first degree entrants to Scottish universities as a whole.
- In 2022, the target of 10% for individual Scottish universities should be reviewed and a higher level target should be considered for the subsequent years.

“By 2030, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent 20% of entrants to higher education. Equality of access should be seen in both the college sector and the university sector.”

Scotland has a standalone policy document dedicated to equity promotion in higher education: the 2016 “Blueprint for Fairness: Final Report of the Commission on Widening Access.” The document makes 34 recommendations to the government, higher education institutions and relevant stakeholders for ensuring wider access.

What specific interventions and/or instruments of equity promotion are included in the official strategy and policy documents (monetary and non-monetary)?

Monetary Policy Instruments

- No tuition fees for Scottish students
- Needs-based scholarships and grants / Other grants targeted for equity groups
(Annual minimum income for least well-off students in HE; Full bursary (£7,625 in 2017 to 2018) for students under 26, with care experience.)
- Continued support for disabled students through the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) Dependent on household income, Scottish-domiciled students applying to Scottish Universities are entitled to bursary and loan support

Non-Monetary Policy Instruments

What are the main non-monetary instruments to promote equity?

- The University of the Highlands and Islands was set up to offer learning opportunities to students living in remote areas. The University of the Highlands and Islands is an integrated university that is comprised of a partnership between 13 independent colleges and research institutes. It combines further and higher education.
- Outreach and bridge programs (summer schools, gateway programs and top-up schemes)
- Academic and career guidance and counseling

- Flexible pathways (articulation pathways) and transfers / Recognition of prior learning (bridging programs in one university) at other institutions
- Retention programs/recruitment programs – adaptation of the first year of the degree/targeted support in first year of degree

See recommendations from <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/blueprint-fairness-final-report-commission-widening-access/pages/5/> (2016)

Financial Resources

What financial resources does the country devote to equity promotion measures?
Information not available

- Not available

Quality Assurance

Do the quality assurance criteria take equity elements into consideration? In what way?

Scotland has its own Quality Assurance Agency (QAA-Scotland), which is part of the wider UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). As part of the QAA-Scotland Enhancement-led Institutional Review of Scottish Higher Education Institutions for 2017-2022 (ELIR 4), equality and diversity of the student body is taken into account:

- Scope of ELIR: “ELIR considers how effectively the institution manages equality and diversity within its student population. This will include the arrangements for identifying and responding to student needs.” (p6, ELIR Handbook)
- In relation to Enhancing the Student Experience: “Recognising and responding to equality and diversity in the student population, including widening access and mode and location of study.” (p21, ELIR Handbook)

Monitoring and Evaluation

Who is responsible for monitoring the impact of equity promotion measures?

- The Commissioner for Fair Access is responsible for monitoring the impact of equity promotion measures in Scotland. In addition, the Scottish Funding Council provides statistical data reporting on widening access efforts in its annual report.

What instruments, methods and data are in place to carry out the monitoring and evaluation activities?

- The main instrument is the Scottish framework for Fair Access. An online toolkit for access practitioners (from schools, universities, colleges and third sector) is under development. It will help evaluate and improve activities, and be embedded into the evaluation capacity building work within the sector.

Dedicated Equity Promotion Agency

- The Commission on Widening Access is dedicated to equity promotion in higher education (see above).

Sources

Ministry for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, <https://beta.gov.scot/about/who-runs-government/cabinet-and-ministers/minister-further-education-higher-education-science/>

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The Equality Act 2010 (1 October 2010)
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

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