

Scottish Government submission of 29 March 2023

PE2009/A: Ensure fair access to Scottish universities for all residents in Scotland and the UK

Scottish universities are autonomous institutions and as such are responsible for their own admission policies and selection criteria. The Scottish Government and Scottish Ministers are unable to intervene in universities' business models.

Scottish universities have an excellent reputation both within Scotland and around the world resulting in the selection process being highly competitive. Institutions, including the University of Edinburgh, receive significantly more applications than they have available places.

Each institution is allocated a number of full time equivalent funded places via the Scottish Funding Council. It is for the universities themselves to decide: how to distribute the places between faculties; the courses they offer; and how many of the total funded places will be available on each course. Neither students from the rest of the UK nor international students are able to access funded places which have been set aside for Scottish students.

There is a need to exert a level of control over the higher education budget, which means that the number of students able to access a funded place is not unlimited. With that said, our commitment to free tuition means that, unlike elsewhere in the UK, Scottish students studying in Scotland do not incur additional debt of up to £27,750 and average student loan debt in Scotland is the lowest in the UK.

Eligibility for home rate tuition fees and student support is determined with reference to an applicant's residence rather than nationality or place of birth. There are residency rules which are laid out in legislation and set out eligibility for tuition fee and living cost support. They generally require students to:

- Be ordinarily resident in Scotland on the relevant date (the relevant date is the 1 August for Autumn start courses; ordinary residence can be described as habitual or normal residence, by choice, over

a period of time in one place and does not include residence solely for the purposes of education).

- Have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands for 3 years immediately prior to the relevant date.
- Be settled in the UK within the meaning of the Immigration Act 1971 (for example, be a UK national or otherwise have a right to stay in the UK without time restriction, for example 'Indefinite Leave to Remain').

The Scottish Government provides the sector with additional investment to fund extra places targeted at learners from Scotland's most deprived communities. Since this investment is additional to core places, it has no impact on opportunities for learners from non-deprived backgrounds.

Addressing socioeconomic inequality and ensuring excellence in Further Education and Higher Education are key priorities for the Scottish Government. There is an underrepresentation of those from our most deprived communities in our higher education institutions and in certain professions. We believe this is fundamentally unfair and it means we are not maximising Scotland's full talent pool. We believe firmly that every child, no matter their background, should have an equal chance of accessing university. By 2030, we want 20% of students entering university to be from Scotland's 20% most deprived backgrounds.

In terms of Scottish students accessing Scottish universities, since 2006-07 the number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree entrants has increased by over 30%, to a record 33,880 in 2021-22. UCAS data for the 2022 cycle shows a record number of 18-year-old Scots secured a place at Scottish universities in 2022, and the latest HESA data shows that there were 183,025 Scottish Students in 2021-22, a 1.6% increase on the previous year.

UCAS data out on 12 January 2023 shows that a near-record number of Scottish students secured a place at the University of Edinburgh.

- 2,535 Scottish students secured places in the 2022 cycle at Edinburgh, the 2nd highest since 2015 and only bettered by the record high in 2021. [Note: 2015 is the earliest time series comparisons allow due to changes in methodology.]
- If we look at 18 year olds only, which is your typical school leaver, 1,590 Scots secured places at Edinburgh. This is 37% higher than 2019, the last year of exams.

- Only 9.1% of Edinburgh's full-time first degree entrants in 2020-21 came from the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland, compared to over 16% across Scotland. This must be improved if we are to achieve our ambitions on supporting students from the most deprived areas in Scotland.