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SPICe Briefing

Higher Education Institutions: Subject Profile

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This briefing provides an overview of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland. It provides key statistics and information on recent policy developments.



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Scotland's 19 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are diverse in terms of size, origin and organisation. Around 221,000 students study at higher education level in HEIs, the majority of which are full-time undergraduates. Most students studying at Scottish HEIs are domiciled in Scotland.

Although HEIs are autonomous bodies, the Scottish Government provides funding to HEIs, through the Scottish Funding Council, and in this way it can implement its policy aims for public expenditure. Current policy aims of the government include maintaining student numbers at current levels, protecting access to higher education and increasing the impact of the sector's research on economic development in Scotland. The future direction of policy will be influenced by the wide ranging government consultation on higher education carried out in late 2010 and the commitments made in the SNP Manifesto which included a commitment to maintain free higher education for Scottish students studying higher education in Scotland. Legislation concerning the whole "post-16" landscape, including reforms to governance and funding is expected sometime in 2012.

HEIs income comes from five main sources, with funding from the Scottish Funding Council, tuition fees and research accounting for the biggest share. While government investment in HEIs has increased over the last few years, the budget for 2011-12 has been cut. Recurrent funding for 2011-2012 amounts to £968m, a drop of 7.5% from the previous year, and it is likely that this budget will remain static over the next few years. Many HEIs have been reviewing their staffing and course arrangements in light of the financial situation. As yet it seems as if there have been relatively few compulsory redundancies made but many HEIs have put in place voluntary severance schemes.

UK Government plans to allow HEIs to charge higher tuition fees in the rest of the UK (RoUK) have led to the 'funding gap' debate. The funding gap relates to the resources available to HEIs for teaching purposes. Scotland and England have been broadly comparable proportionately in terms of the total teaching resources available. Therefore, if England was to generate higher levels of teaching income there would be concerns about Scottish HEIs losing their competitiveness.

Initial estimates (assuming static student numbers) on the size of the funding gap suggested the gap could be between £97m and £263m. Since that work was carried out, the average fee that will be charged in England has been announced as £8,161 (when fee waivers are included), higher than the £7,500 that had been expected. This would suggest that the size of the funding gap is more likely to be at the higher end of estimates. However, identifying an exact figure is difficult as it will depend on how many students actually take up courses from the academic year 2012-13, what courses they take up (some HEIs have varied fees by type of course) and how HEIs will change their fees in future years.

The Scottish Government has committed to closing the funding gap and it is likely that this will be a challenging task. To date it has announced the proposal to allow HEIs in Scotland to charge RoUK students higher fees from the academic year 2012-13. Further work is also being undertaken by the Scottish Government to identify possible ways of increasing contributions from EU students. These issues have led to questions about fairness and access to higher

education, the long term future of HEIs, impacts on Scottish Government and UK budgets and the scope for HEIs to maximise other sources of income.

Over the last few years there has been a policy focus on improving access to higher education and the SFC has a widening access strategy in place called Learning for All. A recent report on widening access noted that while progress has been made in some areas, in other areas there is still work to be done. For example, participation in Scottish universities by deprivation quintile has not changed. The SFC is currently reviewing its approach to funding widening access initiatives.

Recently, there has been debate as to the effectiveness of governance arrangements of HEIs and the extent to which senior management have been able to unduly influence the decision making process, particularly in relation to issues about job losses and course cuts. The Scottish Government has commissioned a review of the governance of the higher education sector, which is being led by Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski, and which is due to report to Ministers at the end of the year.

INTRODUCTION

Scotland's 19 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (see list in Appendix 1) are responsible for providing the majority of higher education in Scotland. Higher education is defined as study at [The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#) (SCQF) level 7 or above which includes HNC, HND, degrees and postgraduate degrees. Around 82% of higher education students in Scotland study at HEIs, mainly at degree level or above. Colleges in Scotland provide about 18% of higher education, mainly at sub-degree level (Scottish Government 2011a). SPICe Briefing Colleges (Kidner 2011) provides more detail on the college sector.

The HEIs in Scotland are diverse in terms of origin, size and organisation. They include:

- 4 'ancient' universities: St Andrews; Aberdeen; Glasgow and Edinburgh which were constituted under the Universities (Scotland) Acts 1858 to 1966
- 4 Pre-1992 'chartered' universities: Stirling; Dundee; Heriot-Watt and Strathclyde that were founded in the 1960s
- 6 Scottish 'post-1992' HEIs: Glasgow Caledonian; Robert Gordon; Abertay; Napier and Queen Margaret Universities and the University of the West of Scotland that gained HEI status under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992¹ ('the 1992 Act')

In addition to the above, there is also the University of the Highlands and Islands, the Open University Scotland, an art school, a conservatoire (Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama) and an agricultural college. On 1 August 1 2011, the Edinburgh College of Art merged with the University of Edinburgh's School of Arts Culture and Environment to form a new Edinburgh College of Art within the University.

Despite this diversity these HEIs are all:

- Legally independent corporate institutions
- Bodies with charitable status
- Accountable through a governing body which carries ultimate responsibility for all aspects of the institution (Universities Scotland 2011a)

In Scotland, an institution wishing to use the title 'university' has to have both taught and research degree awarding powers. The power to grant consent for the use of the university title lies with the Privy Council under section 49 of the 1992 Act. In practice, the Privy Council passes applications for university title to the Scottish Government, who in turn seek an evaluation of the application by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

Two of the 19 HEIs in Scotland do not have the power to award their own degrees. These are: Glasgow School of Art (degrees validated and awarded by the University of Glasgow) and the Scottish Agricultural College (degrees validated and awarded by the University of Glasgow or Edinburgh dependent on course type).

¹ Section 44 of the Act allows Scottish Ministers to designate any institution providing higher education (whether or not it also provides education of any other kind or carries on any other activities) as an institution eligible to receive support from funds administered by the Scottish Funding Council.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT ROLE

HEIs are autonomous bodies although they still receive an element of government funding, via the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), and in this way the Scottish Government can exercise some degree of influence in terms of its priorities for higher education.

Each year, the government sets out its Ministerial priorities in letters of guidance to the SFC. The priorities for 2011-12 are:

- to maintain student numbers at current levels
- to protect excellence in research
- to protect access to higher education
- to work with schools, colleges and universities to increase articulation and entry with advanced standing, thereby meeting learners' needs
- to continue to increase the impact of the sector's research on economic development in Scotland.
- to support the sector as it continues to accelerate the progress it has made with the Council's support on efficiency, collaboration, possible mergers and on the rationalisation of provision in the light of available resources (Scottish Government 2010a)

The letter of guidance for 2011-2012 also recognised that meeting these priorities would be challenging in light of the current economic climate and budget reductions. The Scottish Government also has a role in workforce planning in “controlled subjects” such as medicine and teacher training.

In light of proposed changes to funding higher education in England and Wales, the Scottish Government published the consultation paper, *Building a Smarter Future: towards a Sustainable Scottish Solution for the Future of Higher Education* in October 2010 (Scottish Government 2010b) which sought views on the future of the sector, with a particular focus on funding issues. This consultation paper was followed by commitments in the SNP Manifesto (SNP 2011) in relation to higher education which included:

- maintaining free higher education and filling the ‘funding gap’ from other sources
- modernising university governance
- maintaining student numbers
- setting a minimum student income which should in time equate to around £7,000 a year
- a new Higher Education Bill to establish a “sustainable and secure long term settlement for the sector”

It is not clear what the exact content of the Higher Education Bill will be, but it is expected that a consultation paper on the Bill will be issued by the Government in due course.

THE SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL (SFC)

The SFC is a non-departmental public body, established under the terms of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 (the '2005 Act'). It is the national, strategic body that is responsible for funding teaching and learning provision, research and other activities in Scotland's colleges and HEIs. The budget for the SFC in 2011-12 is around £1.5bn (Scottish Government 2010c).

The main roles of the SFC include: developing policies and strategies which support Scottish Government priorities; ensuring that the quality of teaching is enhanced and assessed (in conjunction with other bodies); monitoring the financial health and sustainability of colleges and universities, collecting, evaluating and publishing relevant statistical data and other evidence about further and higher education; and providing advice to the Scottish Government on further and higher education.

In 2008, the Joint Future Thinking Task Force on Universities was set up by the Scottish Government to consider how to optimise and shape the contribution which the Scottish university sector can make during the next 20 years to the Scottish economy, to Scottish culture and society and to the political priorities of the Scottish Government. Following the report of the group, (Joint Thinking Task Force on Universities 2008), the SFC is working towards a "lighter touch" approach on regulation of the higher education sector, relaxing its control over the use of funding streams and reducing its data collection from HEIs. It is also working towards reducing the amount of advice, guidance and information it provides on operational matters, in order to free up resources within the organisation that can be used more strategically.

TRIPARTITE ADVISORY GROUP

The Tripartite Advisory Group (TAG), set up in 2008, consists of the Scottish Government, the SFC and Universities Scotland (the representative body of the HEIs). The Group allows HEIs to offer feedback to the SFC on how well the funding streams are operating, and how quickly the SFC is moving to a "lighter touch" approach toward regulation. The terms of reference for the TAG and the minutes of meetings are publicly available at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/UniversitiesColleges/16640/Tripartite>

GOVERNANCE OF HEIS

HEIs have responsibility for their own governance arrangements and a mix of constitutional arrangements exists amongst HEIs. Governance arrangements in the 'Ancients' have a statutory base under the Universities (Scotland) Acts 1858 to 1966. They involve a Senate, which is the supreme academic body of the university, presided over by a Principal (effectively a 'chief executive'), a University Court which is responsible for the finances and administration of each university, and a General Council which is a corporate body of all senior academics and graduates presided over by the Chancellor of the university.

The 'pre-1992 universities' were founded in the 1960s and operate under a Royal Charter which sets out their overall constitution, and statutes, which give more detail as to how the university should operate in practice. Arrangements commonly include a Court which is the supreme governing body and Senate as the supreme academic governing body.

The post-1992 HEIs and small specialist institutions draw on a mixture of the 1992 Act, the Companies Act and other legislation (Universities Scotland 2011a).

In terms of public funding of HEIs, the 2005 Act provides that the SFC must ensure suitable governance and management of all bodies that it funds. Furthermore, all bodies with charitable status are also subject to the control of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).

Changes to HEI governance arrangements may require Privy Council consent. In practice, this means a positive recommendation from the First Minister, Lord Advocate and, in the case of certain universities, the Lord President of the Court of Session. The Scottish Government's consultation paper (2010a) sought views on removing or further limiting the requirement for Privy Council consent to give universities greater control of their own governance arrangements and to reduce the level of bureaucracy.

Recently, there has been debate as to the effectiveness of governance arrangements of HEIs and the extent to which senior management have been able to unduly influence the decision making process, particularly in relation to issues about job losses and course cuts (UCU 2011).

As the Scottish Government's consultation paper *Building a Smarter Future* recognised;

“...concerns have been expressed from some quarters that the democratic nature of decision making in universities has been eroded by the development of such executives and that the influence of senior management has been too great. Questions have also been posed about the expertise and experience that Governing bodies have to hold executive teams to account. In addition, public and political criticism of the reward structure for Principals structure has been notable in the past year.” (Scottish Government 2010b)

Following the consultation, the SNP manifesto made a commitment to, “...modernise university governance” (SNP 2011). During a parliamentary debate in June 2011 the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning Mike Russell MSP, indicated that later in 2011 a package of reforms for the whole of post-16 education would be set out. In the meantime he had asked Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski, the principal of Robert Gordon University, to chair a five-member panel that will undertake a review of the current governance of higher education which would include unions and students, as well as a chair of court. The panel will report to the Minister at the end of the year (Scottish Parliament (2011)).

QUALITY ISSUES

This section provides a brief overview of how HEIs maintain the quality of the academic and teaching standards. SPICe briefing *Higher Education: Quality, Quality Assurance and Assessment* (Mullen 2010a) provides more detail.

HEIs enjoy a considerable degree of independence in terms of quality control and academic standards. Each HEI is responsible for the standards of the qualifications it offers and the quality of education it provides to its students. Each has its own internal quality assurance procedures and each institution's governing body is responsible for overseeing quality assurance and enhancement, as set out in guidance from the SFC.

All publicly funded HEIs in the UK use a common set of tools for maintaining their academic quality and standards, known as the UK Academic Infrastructure. Some key elements of this are developed to reflect the distinctive features of higher education in Scotland however, and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland (QAA Scotland) carry out independent, external reviews - known as Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) - of institutional systems to ensure quality assurance and enhancement is maintained.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is an independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges and through contracts with the higher education funding bodies. QAA has a separate Scottish office, known as QAA Scotland, to develop and operate quality assurance and enhancement arrangements that reflect the needs of higher education in Scotland. QAA Scotland work closely with SFC, Universities Scotland, NUS and other stakeholders to ensure an enhancement-led approach to quality in Scottish universities and through ELIR, ensure that Scottish universities continually improve the quality and standards of the provision offered.

QAA also have a role in monitoring how universities maintain their own academic standards and quality, identifying good practice and making recommendations for improvement. The QAA also provides advice on applications for the grant of degree awarding powers, university title, or designation as a HEI.

Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF)

The Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) was designed to help higher education institutions assure and enhance the quality of their programmes and awards (such as degrees). It consists of five parts:

- **a comprehensive programme of institution-led reviews**, carried out by higher education institutions with guidance from the [SFC](#)
- **Enhancement-led institutional [review](#)**: external reviews run by QAA Scotland that involve all Scottish higher education institutions over a four-year cycle
- **improved forms of public information about [quality](#)**, based on addressing the different needs of a range of stakeholders including students and employers.
- **a greater voice for student representatives** in institutional quality systems, supported by [spargs](#) (student participation in quality Scotland); and
- **a national programme of Enhancement [Themes](#)**, managed by QAA Scotland. The programme encourages academic staff, support staff and students to share current good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching.

The procedures established to deliver these objectives are reviewed every four years and AY 2011-12 is the final year of the current cycle. SFC, QAA and other stakeholders represented on the Universities Quality Working Group (the Group charged with overseeing the arrangements) are currently updating the current procedures and expect to introduce revised quality assurance arrangements in AY 2012-13.

Research

'The four UK higher education funding bodies have agreed to the future arrangements for the assessment of research - the Research Excellence Framework (REF)

This will replace the previous Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and will be completed in 2014. The REF will be a process of expert review, informed by indicators where appropriate. Expert sub-panels for each of 36 units of assessment (UOAs) will carry out the assessment, working under the guidance of four broad main panels. Institutions will be invited to make

submissions to each UOA, to be assessed in terms of: The quality of research outputs, the wider impact of research and the vitality of the research environment. The results of the REF will be used to:

- inform the selective allocation of research funding to HEIs
- provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks
- provide accountability for public investment in research and demonstrate its benefits.

Further detail of the framework is available at: <http://www.ref.ac.uk>

The last RAE was conducted in 2008 and was assessed and classified according to a five grade profile - with 4* being the best grade where research is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour, to 'unclassified' where research falls below the standard of nationally recognised work. The 2008 RAE showed that every Scottish HEI was undertaking world-leading research in some area and that the proportion of Scottish research graded at the highest level has increased since the last RAE in 2001.

STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

As Table 1 below indicates, in 2009-10 there were 220,910 students studying at higher education level in Scottish HIEs. Overall, 74% of students were in full-time study while 26% of students were in part-time study. In the past ten years, the number of part-time students has increased at a proportionately higher rate compared with full-time students. This illustrates the response of HEIs to demands for more flexible forms of learning.

With regard to the level of study, 76% of students were enrolled in undergraduate courses (full and part-time), while 24% of students were enrolled in post-graduate courses (full and part-time).

Table 1 also shows that 150,823 students studying at Scottish HEIs were domiciled in Scotland (68% of all students). Students domiciled in the rest of the UK accounted for 13% of all students, while students from Other EU countries accounted for 7% and students from Non-EU countries accounted for 11% of all students.

Table 1: HE Students at HEIs in Scotland by domicile, level of study and mode of study 2009-10

Domicile	Postgraduate			Undergraduate (includes first degrees, but also sub-degree level courses)			All Students
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Total
Scotland	10,325	15,525	25,850	95,088	29,885	124,973	150,823
Rest of UK	2,195	6,075	8,270	19,472	1,335	20,807	29,077
Other EU	3,750	1,045	4,795	10,360	780	11,140	15,935
Non-EU	12,850	2,160	15,010	8,915	1,150	10,065	25,075
Total	29,120	24,805	53,925	133,835	33,150	166,985	220,910

Source: HESA (2011a) Scotland figures obtained by personal communication from the SFC. This data was then subtracted from HESA UK figures. HESA figures include the Open University as an English HEI so the above figures do not include the approximate 17,000 Open University students that study in Scotland.

In 2009-10, total student numbers at Scottish HEIs rose by 3% from the previous year. The number of 'Other EU' students increased by proportionately more, at 17%, compared to an increase of 1% in UK students and 5% in non-EU students (HESA 2011a).

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International (non-EU) students are important to Scottish HEIs as a source of income from the fees that they pay and they can also bring wider benefits to the Scottish economy and enrich Scottish culture and society. International students do not pay fixed fees in the way that EU and UK students do (see below for more discussion on finance), rather HEIs can set their own fees which are generally higher than for other students. For example, the University of Edinburgh [fees](#) for international undergraduate students studying in the academic year 2011-2012 will generally be £12,050 or £15,850 depending on the course chosen.

Over the years, the proportion of international students studying at HEIs has increased from 6.7% in 2001-02 to 11% in 2009-10 (Universities Scotland 2008 and HESA 2011a).

Recruiting international students is a strategic priority for many Scottish HEIs and they compete with each other, and other HEIs outwith Scotland, to attract international students to study at their institutions. Some HEIs have also established a presence overseas. For example, Heriot-Watt University has a campus in Dubai that offers a range of undergraduate and post-graduate courses. 17,205 students registered at Scottish HEIs study wholly abroad through a variety of arrangements (HESA 2011b).

Evidence suggests that Scottish HEIs have competed well with other countries in attracting international students, and that they can offer a quality experience to international students (British Council 2008). However, competition from overseas HEIs is growing and the widespread delivery of higher education in English within non-English speaking countries and the implementation of stricter UK immigration controls present challenges to Scottish HEIs to maintain their competitive advantage (Scottish Government 2010).

Changes to the student immigration system have been proposed by the UK Government in order to reduce annual net migration to the UK, and to reduce abuse of the student immigration system. Proposals to make changes to the student immigration system were set out in a consultation paper in December 2010 (Home Office UK Border Agency 2010). These proposals included introducing tougher entry criteria for students and limiting entitlement for students to work, although various changes were made to plans following the consultation.

While the UK government has set out a statement of intent in relation to student visas it has made it clear that further changes may be made (UK Home Office Border Agency 2011). The Government's impact assessment concluded that the proposals would result in a reduction of around 46,000 fewer students a year with around £170m lost in tuition fees (UK Home Office Border Agency 2011b). The Scottish Affairs Committee has expressed concern that these proposals may have a disproportionate effect in Scotland both because of the disproportionate size of the sector in Scotland, and that the proposals are primarily designed to address a problem (i.e. abuse of the student immigration system) which is largely insignificant in Scotland (Scottish Affairs Committee 2011). At the time of writing this briefing the UK Government had not responded to the Committee's report.

The Post Study Work (PSW) scheme gives international graduates two years leave to enter/remain in the UK and to work without the need for sponsorship. However, this scheme will close from April 2012 (Home Office UK Border Agency 2011). Instead, those graduating from a UK university with a recognised degree, PGCE, or PGDE will be able to switch into the migrant Tier 2 category, before their student visa expires. The Tier 2 general category is for migrants who have a skilled job offer to fill a gap in the workforce that cannot be filled by a settled worker. The migrant must earn the appropriate salary or other remuneration package for the job in the UK. The Scottish Affairs Select Committee (2011) concluded that, "Removing the Post Study Work route should reduce the number of international students who do stay on in Scotland and take jobs that do not require a degree. However, we are concerned that this might be at the expense of international students who would seek graduate level jobs, because they will have been deterred from applying to study in Scotland".

HIGHER EDUCATION COURSES AND QUALIFICATIONS

As mentioned earlier, the SCQF sets out the relationships between different levels of qualification offered at schools, colleges and universities (see Appendix 2 for details). Courses at higher education level are considered to be those at SCQF level 7 or above and generally courses taken at HEIs are at SCQF level 9 and 10 or above.

The design, and content, of HE courses is the responsibility of individual institutions. The Scottish Government can, however, through its guidance to the SFC, encourage specific types of courses, such as those that develop the employability of graduates and the Quality Assurance Agency has a role in ensuring academic quality.

In terms of subjects taken at HEIs, statistics show that the most popular subjects for undergraduate degree study (full and part-time) are subjects allied to medicine and business and administrative studies, which together accounted for 30% (15% each) of student enrolments in 2009-10. At postgraduate level (full and part-time), business and administrative studies is the most popular type of course accounting for 22% of student enrolments in 2009-10 (HESA 2011c).

Most undergraduate degree courses in Scotland last four years, one year longer than in England, although some degree courses permit direct second or third year entry to candidates with advanced or appropriate vocational qualifications. Some courses such as Law and Medicine may require longer periods of study and may involve a professional work experience

placement. Although the Scottish Government has maintained a commitment to the traditional four year degree it has also recognised the need to make the “learner journey” more flexible to meet the increasingly diverse needs of different types of students. For some, this may mean teaching through the summer to reduce the time taken to complete a degree. For others, this could mean a more modularised system that allows greater flexibility for the individual on what to study and when, blurring (or removing) the boundary between full and part-time study (Scottish Government 2010b).

ARTICULATION

Some students may start degree courses at second or third year at an HEI, and this may be achieved by using a Higher National Certificate or a Higher National Diploma (HNC/D), gained in a college, as an entry qualification. This is commonly referred to as “articulation.” Articulation can encourage participation from students from less privileged backgrounds, given that colleges generally have a higher proportion of such students.

Encouraging articulation has been a key policy theme in recent years. Since 2007, the SFC has funded the Open University in Scotland and five “Articulation Hubs”, which are regional partnerships led by new universities to build and improve college/university articulation from HNC/D to years 2 and 3 of degree programmes. Around 20% of all entrants to undergraduate degree programmes in Scotland articulate into years two and three, and half of this group do so having previously attained an HNC or HND (Universities Scotland 2011a).

The Scottish Government’s consultation paper noted that five universities (mainly post 1992 universities) are responsible for 90% of articulation and further stated that, “... we have yet to unlock the key benefits of articulation, but we are mindful that this has to be balanced with the costs of developing and implementing a more flexible system” (Scottish Government 2010b).

In response to the consultation the following points were summarised:

“In many of the responses there were calls for improvements to be made in the articulation between schools, colleges and university. Some responses wanted guaranteed articulation routes from college to university programmes. Other responses felt that the inflexible approach of professional bodies; poor levels of information about articulation; inconsistent practices amongst some universities; and insufficient transitional support between the different education sectors were the main barriers to articulation.

In broad terms there was agreement on the need to improve and encourage early or advanced entry in order to reduce the length of time learners spend on gaining their skills”. (Scottish Government 2011a)

The SNP Manifesto proposed to, “..deliver new pathways from school into 2nd year degree courses including through the Scottish Baccalaureate (SNP 2011)”. The SFC is undertaking a project on advanced entry and articulation which is due to report in the summer, with recommendations on how to reduce the length of time learners spend achieving a degree.

WIDENING ACCESS

The issue of widening access to higher education has had a long and complex history. However, in the last decade stakeholders have made progress in this area with the emergence of a number of related public policies which aim to widen access to lifelong learning, including access to higher education level study. SPICe Briefing *Widening Access to Higher Education Policy in Scotland*. (Mullen 2010b) provides a more detailed overview of this topic.

The SFC's strategy for widening participation in higher education is called '[Learning for All](#)' (SFC 2005). First published in 2005, it set out priorities for widening access in both further and higher education for the following five years and beyond. It provided a framework for stakeholders to build and implement widening access action plans.

The SFC's Access and Inclusion Committee (AIC) has responsibility for advising the Council on access and inclusion matters and on the implementation of *Learning for All*, including monitoring progress on the key themes of the strategy and providing statistics on the progress of 'widening access' used to demonstrate if policies are succeeding.

The fifth update of 'Learning for All' was published in March 2011 (SFC 2011a) and noted that, "The increase in the number of school leavers, an uncertain economic climate and the increased demand for places has put new pressures on our widening access effort". The report highlighted both positive trends and areas where further improvements were still required. On the positive side:

- participation at HE level in colleges and universities has increased
- the percentage of students from the most deprived areas participating at HE level in colleges and universities has continued to increase
- the percentage of mature students from the most deprived areas studying at university has increased
- the proportion of students disclosing a disability has increased and the proportion where the information is not known has decreased in both colleges and universities;
- the percentage of non-white Scottish-domiciled students has increased;
- the gap in participation between men and women in HE level at colleges has narrowed for the third year.

Where the trends are less positive, it can be seen that:

- overall participation in FE and HE together across Scotland has dropped for the last six years
- patterns of participation in Scottish universities by deprivation quintile have not changed;
- whilst the proportion of school leavers going into HE from schools in the lowest quintile for participation has increased slightly, the gap between this and the total number has only reduced by one percentage point;
- Scotland continues to have the second highest non-continuation rate for full-time first degree entrants in the UK – although this percentage has dropped in the last three years, and students from the most deprived areas remain the most likely to drop-out; and
- young men continue to account for a greater percentage of 16 to 19 year olds in the More Choices, More Chances (MCMC) group.

The Scottish Government has said that, “..current approaches to widening access to higher education in universities have not produced the step change in participation that we would have liked. As a result of this, the SFC is reviewing its approach to funding widening access initiatives and the outcomes of this review will inform thinking on how any new system should protect access (Scottish Government 2010b) SPICe briefing 11-07 *Widening Access to Higher Education: Admissions* provides some further details on widening access issues (Mullen 2011c).

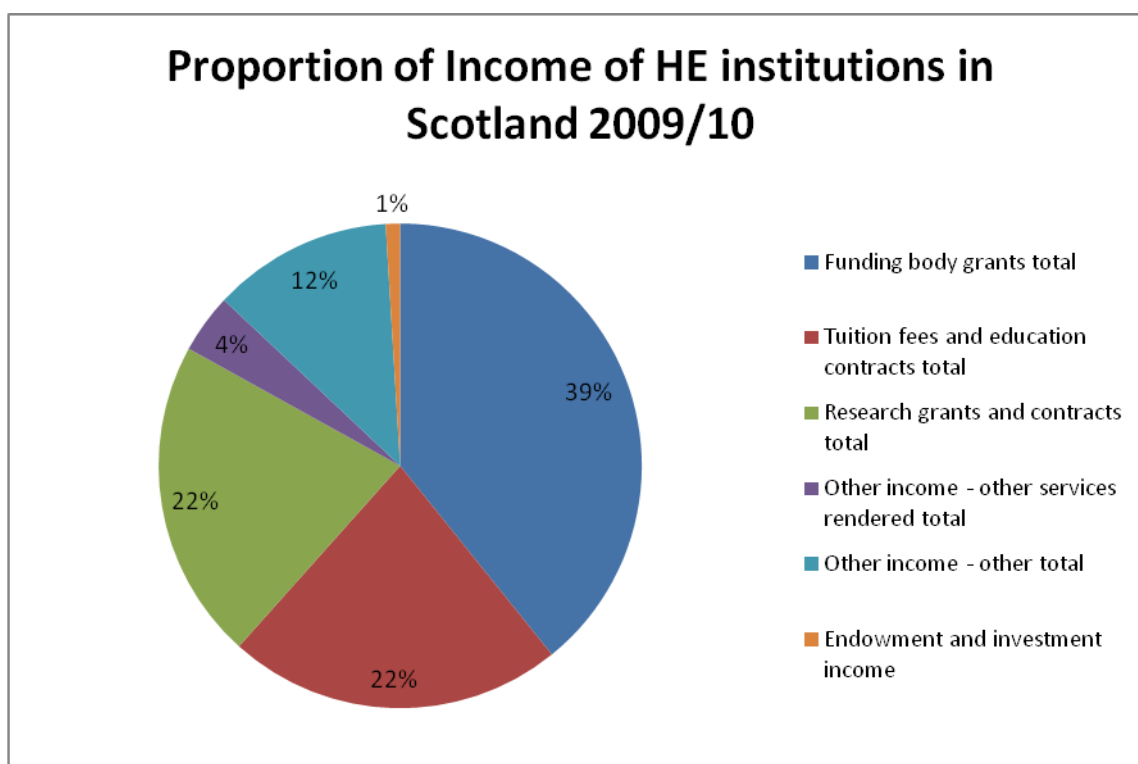
HEI FUNDING

This section provides a short overview on the funding of HEIs. SPICe Briefing *Higher Education Institutions: Finance* (Mullen 2010d) provides more detailed information on the funding of HEIs. HEIs have five main sources of income. These are:

- SFC grants
- tuition fees, education grants and contracts
- research grants and contracts
- endowment and investment income
- other forms of income

In the academic year (AY) 2009-10 the total income for HEIs in Scotland was £2.8bn. As Fig 1 shows, the greatest proportion of income is from funding body (SFC) grants, which in 2009-10, accounted for 39% of total income.

Fig 1: Sources of Scottish HEIs income, AY 2009-10



Source: HESA 2011c

SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL FUNDS

As Fig 1 illustrates, SFC funds account for around 40% of the sector's income. This is an overall figure and the proportion of income raised from each source can vary widely between different institutions, for example, SFC funding accounts for around 27% of St Andrew's University's income but 71% of the University of West of Scotland's income (HESA 2010c).

Since devolution, Scottish Government funding for higher education has steadily increased. Non-capital funding increased by about 37% in real terms from 2000-01 to 2010-2011 (Scottish Government 2010b). But this period of sustained budget growth for the sector is coming to an end. As Table 2 illustrates, overall non-capital funding for HEIs in 2011-12 is £968m which is a decline of 7.5%, from 2010-11.

It is not yet clear what the full impact of the decline in funding will be. Some HEIs have been reviewing their staffing structures. Although there is no centrally collated information on the number of HEI staff that may have been made redundant, from various press reports it seems as if many voluntary severance schemes have already been offered but the number of compulsory redundancies has been relatively low (17 compulsory redundancies have been made at the Institute of Aquaculture at Stirling University). Some HEIs have also been reviewing the courses they provide. In some cases cuts have been proposed which have been controversial eg the proposed cuts to Slavonic Studies at Glasgow University. However, it is not clear what the long term impact will be, particularly in light of changes to funding arrangements in the rest of the UK (see below).

Table 2: Main Elements of SFC Funding 2010-11 and 2011-12

	AY 2010-11 £m	AY 2011-12 £m	Change 2010-11 to 2011-12
General Fund for Universities			
Teaching	678.15	606.93	- 10.5%
Research and Knowledge Transfer	244.05	242.596	-0.6%
Total	922.2	849.526	-7.9%
Horizon Funds	118.2	102.453	-7.1%
Invest to Save Funds	--	7.382	
Ring Fenced Funds	6.771	9.042	+32%
Total Non-capital	1,047.171	968.403	-7.5%
Capital (Financial years)	87.2	26+ £91m capital between colleges and universities	Not comparable

Source: SFC 2011b, SFC 2010a, SFC 2010b Note: Ringfenced funds help address specific workforce planning issues, such as increasing the number of dentistry or medical graduates.

The following provides a summary of SFC funding. For more detail see SPICe Briefing *Higher Education Institutions: Finance* (Mullen 2010c).

General Funding

The SFC is responsible for allocating funding to individual HEIs which is used to support their core activities of teaching and research. In allocating funding for teaching SFC allocates each HEI a full-time equivalent (FTE) number of funded student places for both undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision in each of 12 funding subject groups. Each funding subject group has its own unit of resource (price), with separate units of resource for undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision, which is applied to the funded places allocated to that group to derive an amount of teaching grant, which is then summed over all of the funding subject groups to obtain a gross amount of funding for teaching for an institution. This gross amount of funding includes tuition fee income and SFC subtracts estimates of the amount of tuition fee income associated with the funded places allocated to derive the SFC allocations of funding for teaching.

Institutions can be penalised if they fail to recruit sufficient students to fill their allocations of funded places. However, institutions have some flexibility in how they use their funded places and do not have to fill the specific allocation of funded places to each funding subject group. Apart from funded places allocated to the 'controlled' subjects, which tend to be the subject areas leading to entry to the professions such as medicine, dentistry, nursing and teaching, which institutions are expected to fill, institutions are monitored as to whether they filled their overall number of funded places. Institutions can also transfer some of their 'non-controlled' funded places between subject groups to obtain a better fit with their own priorities and patterns of recruitment.

If an institution recruits more students than its allocation of funded places then the number of students in excess of the funded places is referred to as 'fees-only,' as the institutions only receive tuition fee income for these students. The tuition fee income will come from a variety of sources including the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) and other bodies in the UK responsible for student support.

In order to conform to the Scottish Government's consolidation policy, institutions are set limits on the number of full-time and sandwich undergraduate students they can recruit in the non-controlled subject areas, with separate limits for priority and non-priority subject areas. Institutions can be penalised for breaching these limits. No limits are set for either part-time or taught postgraduate students.

HEIs can enrol as many international students as they choose to, over and above their numbers of funded student places and 'fees-only' students.

Strategic Funding

In addition to funding for teaching, the SFC distributes funding to HEIs for strategic purposes. This is achieved through the "Horizon Fund" which was set up following the work of the *Joint Future Thinking Task Force on Universities*. The aim of the fund was to help HEIs support the Government's strategic priorities. The letter of guidance issued by the Cabinet Secretary in November 2010 asked the SFC to 're-purpose' Horizon Funds and, "create a 'spend to save' fund which would support strategic change and enable the sector as a whole to deliver more for less" (Scottish Government 2010a). The SFC announced details of the new *Invest to Save* fund in February 2011 (SFC 2011c). While the fund is only worth around £7m this year it is likely to grow in future years. This means that the Horizon Fund is closed to new proposals.

Capital Funding

In 2011-12, the SFC was given a joint capital budget for both the college and university sectors of £91m from the Scottish Government (a 53% reduction from the 2010-11 separate budgets which together totalled £193m). Of this, £46.3m will be distributed as project grants to (mainly) colleges and universities with particularly high estate needs and to which the SFC has contractual commitments (the projects having been approved prior to the 2011/12 budget announcement).

The balance (£44.7m) has been allocated to colleges and universities as capital maintenance grant, (£18.7m to colleges and £26m to universities). Capital maintenance funding is distributed to individual colleges and universities on a formula basis based on each institutions# volume of teaching activity. This funding must be used in support of institutions' agreed estates strategies. The SFC is currently reviewing its policy on the allocation of maintenance funding in response to more limited capital funding available, and the need to ensure maximum value for the public's investment.

In his most recent letter of guidance to the SFC (November 2010) the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning noted that colleges and universities had benefited from significant levels of investment in recent years, and asked the SFC 'to ensure that the value of that investment is maintained'.

The £26m allocated to Scottish HEIs as capital maintenance grant in 2011-12 represents a 56% reduction on 2010-11 capital funding levels (£59.9m).

The SFC also distributes funding on behalf of the UK Government's Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in support of the UK's research and science infrastructure. BIS funding for Scottish HEIs in 2011-12 of £8.6 million, representing a reduction of 63% from 2010-11 levels (£23.6 million).

TUITION FEES

As Figure 1 indicated, tuition fees are an important source of income to HEIs, accounting for around a fifth of total income. Sections 9(6) and (7) and 34(2) of the 2005 Act permit the specification of the level of higher education tuition fees in Scotland by Order and allows Ministers to increase fees specified in an Order without the need for further legislation, as long as the fee levels do not rise by more than inflation. Fee levels were set out under the Student Fees (Specification) (Scotland) Order 2006/401 and have been uprated since then, although fee levels have not changed in the last two years.

Eligible full-time Scottish domiciled students studying at Scottish institutions do not pay a tuition fee, and neither do EU students studying at Scottish HEIs. Instead, the Scottish Government pays the tuition fee on behalf of eligible Scottish and EU students directly to HEIs, through the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) (see further detail below). Table 3 summarises the position regarding payment of tuition fees in Scotland.

Table 3: Tuition Fees for students studying at Scottish Universities

	Pay a tuition fee?	Comments
Full-time Scottish students	No	Tuition fees are paid by SAAS direct to the institution (if this is a first degree)
Part-time Scottish students	Yes	Most part-time students and those on distance learning courses are expected to pay their own tuition fees. Colleges and HEIs have the discretion to set their own fees for part-time courses, so tuition fees for part-time students may vary by institution and course. Scottish HE students who are on low incomes, in receipt of certain benefits or are disabled may be eligible to have their tuition fees waived under the SFC part-time fee waiver scheme.
EU students	No	Under EU law, all EU nationals are entitled to use a host country's education system on the same terms as its own nationals (Articles 18, 165 and 166 (ex Articles 12, 149 and 150) of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union). This means that if Scottish students pay tuition fees then so must every other EU student EU law does not apply between <i>regions</i> of a Member State, but only between Member States. This means that different arrangements can be made for students of the rest of the UK.
Other UK students	Yes.	Fees are currently £1,820 a year (degree or equivalent, HNC, HND, or equivalent,) and £2,895 for medicine. Students can apply to their regional student support agencies to cover the cost of these fees*
Other international (non-EU) students	Yes.	Individual HEIs can set their own tuition fee levels for international students. International students are not entitled to the Scottish student support package – examples of fee levels?

*Sections 9(6) and (7) and 34(2) of the Act permit the specification of the level of higher education tuition fees in Scotland by Order.

Tuition Fees in other parts of the UK

Other UK countries have policies of charging students tuition fees which are currently capped at £3,375 for home and other UK students, but these will rise in future years. From the academic year 2012-13, HEIs in England and Wales will be allowed to charge tuition fees up to £9,000 per year (the Welsh Assembly will pay everything above £3,375 for Welsh students studying anywhere in the UK). Any institution that wishes to charge above £6,000 will have to put in access arrangements for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Currently, eligible Scottish domiciled students wishing to study outwith Scotland, at an institution elsewhere in the UK, are entitled to a non income-assessed loan of up to £3,375 a year towards the cost of their tuition fees.

The 'Funding Gap'

The decision to increase tuition fees in the rest of the UK has led to claims that a “funding gap” will arise between Scottish HEIs and English HEIs, as these institutions have been broadly comparable, proportionately, in terms of the total teaching income available to them and the Scottish Government has maintained its opposition to making students pay tuition fees. It is argued that if the funding gap remains, Scottish HEIs will struggle to maintain their relative competitiveness, as staff and students will be attracted to better resourced HEIs.

The Scottish Government's response to changes to funding elsewhere in the UK was to publish the *Building a Smarter Future* consultation in 2010 (Scottish Government 2010b) on, amongst other issues, how the sector could be funded. As part of the consultation, a short life technical working group was set up to establish the potential funding gap between Scotland and England. In March 2011, the [final report](#) (Scottish Government 2011b) of the technical working group estimated that the potential annual funding gap between Scottish and English HEIs by academic year 2014-15 could be within the range of £97 million to £263 million, depending on the average fee levels set and whether fees will be raised in line with inflation (it has now been confirmed that they will).

In July 2011 the average fee charged by HEIs in England was confirmed as £8,161 (when fee waivers are included) (Office of Fair Access 2011), higher than the £7,500 that was assumed. This would suggest that the size of the funding gap will be at the higher end of estimates. However, identifying an exact figure is difficult as it will depend on how many students actually take up courses from the academic year 2012-13, what courses they take up (some HEIs have varied fees by type of course) and how HEIs will change their fees in future years.

The Scottish Government has confirmed its intention to close the funding gap without resorting to tuition fees. To date the only specific measure that has been announced is the proposal to allow HEIs to charge RoUK students higher fees from AY 2012-13 (Scottish Government 2011). Initially, this is planned to be achieved through secondary legislation, which is expected to be introduced in autumn 2011. In the longer term the Government plans to introduce primary legislation for AY 2013-14 to restrict the fees that HEIs can charge to RoUK students to £9,000. Further work is also being undertaken by the Scottish Government to identify possible ways of increasing contributions from EU students. The forthcoming consultation paper on reforms to the “post 16” landscape is expected to cover these issues.

RESEARCH

Research income accounts for around another fifth of HEI total income. Most HEI research funding comes through the 'dual support system' which distributes funding in two streams:

- the Scottish Funding Council: The largest grant distributed by the Scottish Funding Council for research is the Research Excellence Grant (REG) which totalled £213 million for the Scottish sector in 2011/12. It is distributed according to the excellence of individual departments in higher education institutions using the results of the RAE. How this money is spent is at the discretion of the institution.
- the UK Research Councils: There are seven research councils which invest around £2.8 billion in research covering all academic disciplines. Research funds are awarded to successful researchers on the strength of their applications and research potential which is assessed by independent, expert peer review. In 2009/10 the UK Research Councils awarded £218 million worth of funding to researchers in Scottish higher education institutions (Universities Scotland 2011b).

Other sources of research income include charities, industry, public bodies and European sources, some of which are accessed on a competitive basis. It is claimed that Scotland “performs above its weight”, winning 13% of all income awarded to UK universities from UK charities, 21% from UK industry and 12% EU sources despite having only 8.5% of the UK’s population (Universities Scotland 2011b).

Research Pooling

A number of research pools and collaborations currently exist amongst Scottish HEIs, such as the Scottish Institute for Economic Research and the Glasgow Research Partnership in Engineering. The concept of research pooling was established in Scotland in 2004 as a way to strengthen Scotland’s research base and achieve better value from public investment in research activity. The initiative also aims to help strengthen Scotland’s ability to compete internationally and attract the best in research expertise from overseas.

The Government’s consultation paper sought views on a number of areas relating to research, including how it is funded, carried out and used.

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Financial support for Scottish higher education students is mainly loan based with a number of means-tested grants for specific groups of students. This section summarises what is available, but for further detail refer to [Helping you meet the costs of learning 2010-11](#) and the [Student Awards Agency for Scotland](#) (SAAS). Table 4 summarises the types of funding that were available for higher education students in the academic year 2010-11.

Table 4: Type of Student Funding

Type of funding	Full-time	Part-time	Distance learning
Course fees			
Tuition fees	✓	✓	✓
ILA Scotland		✓	✓
Career Development loan	✓	✓	✓
PSAS	✓	✓	
Living costs			
Student loans	✓	✓	✓
NHS bursaries	✓		
HE Young Student Bursary	✓		
HE Independent Students’ Bursary	✓		
HE Students Outside Scotland Bursary	✓		
Travel costs*	✓		
Help for dependants			
Adult dependant’s grant	✓		
Child Tax Credit	✓	✓	✓
Lone Parent’s Grant	✓		
Loan Parent’s Childcare Grant	✓		
Childcare Funds	✓		
Other support			
Disabled Student’s Allowance	✓	✓	✓
Discretionary Funds	✓	✓	✓

Vacation Grant for Care Leavers	✓		
Funding from Charities and Educational Trusts	✓	✓	

Source : [Helping you meet the costs of learning 2010-11](#)

*For 2011-12 support for travel costs are included within the student loan

The Government's consultation paper (Scottish Government 2010b) sought views on how to make the student support system simple, equitable and fair. It suggested that changes over the years to the student support system had left it complicated and, furthermore, in light of increases in student numbers, it had become unsustainable. Amongst the ideas considered were ways to simplify the system, how to support part-time students better and changes to student loan thresholds. Various views in response to the consultation were expressed by respondents. The need to improve support for part-time students was agreed. While many of the responses agreed on the need for a simpler system, most comments were contained caveats:

“There were concerns that a new system of support would not take into account the complex lives of different cohorts of students. Some were concerned that students would leave themselves in a position whereby they had to drop out or resort to commercial debt. Those who did not support a choice were concerned that the choice system would revert to being a loan system as the bursary would not be enough to live off and therefore debt levels would significantly increase.” (Scottish Government 2011b)

The SNP Manifesto commitments in relation to student support include:

- taking forward proposals to extend the Council Tax exemption to include articulating students, so that those who are moving, for example, directly from an undergraduate to a post-graduate course will not pay Council Tax in the short period between courses.
- look to develop Scottish Science and Engineering Bursaries, with government match funding contributions from the private sector to enable us to create fifty £5,000 bursaries for young Scots looking to advance in science and engineering.
- ensure the bursary programme supports efforts to widen access and draw more young Scots into science and engineering.
- provide HE/FE scholarships for the children of servicemen and women killed while on active duty.
- start on the task of setting a minimum student income which should in time equate to around £7,000 (SNP 2011)

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF HEIS

[University of Aberdeen](#)
[University of Abertay Dundee](#)
[University of Dundee](#)
[Edinburgh Napier University](#)
[University of Edinburgh](#)
[Glasgow Caledonian University](#)
[Glasgow School of Art](#)
[University of Glasgow](#)
[Heriot-Watt University](#)
[The Open University in Scotland](#)
[Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh](#)
[Robert Gordon University](#)
[Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama](#)
[Scottish Agricultural College](#)
[University of St Andrews](#)
[University of Stirling](#)
[University of Strathclyde](#)
[University of the Highlands and Islands](#)
[University of the West of Scotland](#)

APPENDIX 2: SCQF TABLE OF MAIN QUALIFICATIONS

THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

scqf scottish credit and qualifications framework

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications			Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
12				DOCTORAL DEGREE	
11				INTEGRATED MASTERS DEGREE / MASTERS DEGREE POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA POST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	SVQ5
10				HONOURS DEGREE GRADUATE DIPLOMA GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	
9			PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARD	BACHELORS / ORDINARY DEGREE GRADUATE DIPLOMA GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	SVQ4
8		HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA		DIPLOMA OF HIGHER EDUCATION	
7	ADVANCED HIGHER SCOTTISH BACCALAUREATE	HIGHER NATIONAL CERTIFICATE		CERTIFICATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION	SVQ3
6	HIGHER				
5	INTERMEDIATE 2 CREDIT STANDARD GRADE				SVQ2
4	INTERMEDIATE 1 GENERAL STANDARD GRADE	NATIONAL CERTIFICATE	NATIONAL PROGRESSION AWARD		SVQ1
3	ACCESS 3 FOUNDATION STANDARD GRADE				
2	ACCESS 2				
1	ACCESS 1				

scqf | SCOTLAND'S LIFELONG LEARNING FRAMEWORK www.scqf.org.uk

SCQF Table of Main Qualifications 1

Source: SCQF <http://www.scqf.org.uk/features/Framework.htm>

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