

## Submission from The University of Edinburgh

### Widening access

#### *Undergraduate*

Scotland-domiciled undergraduate applications to the University of Edinburgh, including those from areas of multiple deprivation, continue to increase, irrespective of the changes to student funding arrangements. This reflects the University's long-standing commitment to targeted, evidence-based outreach, engagement and bursary provision.

There is evidence of geographic immobility in Scotland, particularly amongst groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education. In the context of the current funding environment, living at home is an economically rational decision for many students. However, it necessarily limits the choices available to prospective students and, once enrolled, students living at home can find it harder than their peers to fully engage with student life, which may put them at a disadvantage both during their studies, and post-graduation.

In response to this concern, the University of Edinburgh has developed its uncapped Scotland Accommodation bursary scheme, the only one of its kind in Scotland, which provides automatic support of between £500 and £2,000 p.a. to enable students from low-income households to live away from home while they study. The aim is to remove a financial barrier – real or perceived – to enable students from widening participation backgrounds outwith Edinburgh to study at the University.

#### *Postgraduate*

The funding options for postgraduate study are far more limited than for undergraduate study. While Scottish undergraduates do not pay tuition fees, most will still leave university after 4-5 years with significant debt. This may particularly deter those from widening participation backgrounds continuing to postgraduate study, though is a potential barrier to all. The University of Edinburgh is the only university in Scotland to have analysed the destinations of its leavers from widening participation backgrounds. Our analysis suggests that students from widening participation backgrounds are somewhat less likely to pursue further study than their peers from non-widening participation backgrounds.

The University provides £0.74 million fee support for Scottish postgraduate taught students and £4.82 million fee and living support to Scotland domiciled postgraduate research students (figures from 2013-14). There is far greater demand for support than there are funds available.

#### *Part-time*

The part-time fee grant is a valuable source of fee support for those studying towards an award. This helps students on low incomes as well as on benefits, and we find that the majority of the University of Edinburgh's Scottish-domiciled students on progression pathways qualify for it. However, loans and bursary support are only available for full-time students and this can be a problem when, for example, students need to purchase books or a laptop or to travel, or when they have childcare costs to meet.

### Discretionary Funds and Postgraduate Students

The Scottish Government provide Scottish institutions with generous discretionary support which can be used for enrolled students experiencing financial hardship. At present institutions can only allocate a maximum of 10% of that funding towards bursaries/scholarships. There should be further flexibility to use these funds for postgraduate bursaries/scholarships so that students know before commencing their studies that they have secured a certain amount of financial assistance, given the very limited funding options available to postgraduate students. At the moment discretionary funding cannot be allocated towards fees, which in some circumstances may be detrimental to the student, for example if they are living at home.

### Disabled students

The University of Edinburgh is strategically committed to equality and widening participation, and is doing much to mainstream equality, for example via its Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy:

[http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Policies/Accessible\\_and\\_Inclusive\\_Learning\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Policies/Accessible_and_Inclusive_Learning_Policy.pdf).

The Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) remains a vital resource for many UK students who would be unable to study if they did not receive the additional support that DSA can provide. DSA can fund, amongst other things, note takers for students who would otherwise be unable to participate in lectures, ergonomic equipment for students who experience chronic pain while working and assistive technology for those who struggle with language, communication and organisation as a result of significant learning difficulties. It is therefore invaluable in ensuring that the best students are able to attend higher education and are not prevented from experiencing higher education simply because they are disabled.

The UK Government is currently changing DSA provision for students from England, and delegating responsibility for support to individual universities. Whilst this could facilitate the further mainstreaming of support for disabled students, concerns remain about the way this is implemented and the negative impact it could have on the accessibility of higher education for many disabled students, if universities are unable to resource some aspects of support required by disabled students. Any changes to the scheme must be developed in close consultation with the sector and disabled student representative groups to ensure they have a positive impact on disabled students' participation in higher education.

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