



FIFE & TAYSIDE WIDER ACCESS FORUM

Policy Context: National, Regional and Local

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1. Introduction

The aim of this report is to provide a context for the evaluation framework by summarising and articulating the key developments in national, regional and local policies impacting, or likely to impact, the Forum's activities. An extensive desktop evaluation and interviews with key individuals was undertaken to achieve this. In addition, the report also sets out some of the baseline statistics against which subsequent progress will be measured. We will wish to give further consideration to the suite of statistics in the light, in particular, of the response to the recently issued McGoldrick report, *Learning for All*.

The Fife and Tayside Wider Access Forum (FATWAF), a partnership of three universities, five¹ local colleges and the Open University in Scotland, has been in existence in its present form since 2003. For the three preceding years, the Forum operated as a partnership of the three universities and the Open University in Scotland. It is one of four regional wider access forums funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) with the objective of promoting wider participation in higher education to traditionally under-represented groups.

In the wake of an evaluation of all regional forums conducted by the then Scottish Funding Councils (SFCs) in 2003, and consistent with Scottish Executive policy and strategy pronouncements in, for example, the Executive's Lifelong Learning Strategy and Higher Education Review, FATWAF has embraced the need to take a more strategic role in wider access activities. To this end, over the last two or so years, it has, amongst other things, formed a stronger Executive; commissioned research into participation in the region; prepared a strategic plan for the period 2004 - 2008; and consulted on the implementation of that plan in order to develop an operational plan.

The Forum's strategic and operational plans require the establishment of target groups and measures for its activities. In determining these, the Forum will be guided by a number of sources, including its own research; work undertaken by the Scottish Executive and by local authorities as part of their community planning processes; and by local responses to national initiatives that may be complementary, e.g. *Determined to Succeed* and *Schools of Ambition*.

¹ Following the merger of Fife and Glenrothes Colleges in August 2005 to form Adam Smith College

2. Current and developing context

It is crucial to understand and articulate the current and developing context at national, regional and local levels. A desktop analysis was undertaken to establish the key policy developments that have, or are likely to have, an impact upon the Forum's current and future activities. A synopsis of the main national policy documents consulted in this connection is in annex to this document.

The desk top analysis was further enhanced and supplemented with face to face interviews with a number of key individuals, including Forum staff, the National Co-ordinator for widening participation, the Project Co-ordinators for the other Scottish Wider Access Forums, members of the Forum Executive Committee and other appropriate officers.

National policy context

A review of the national policy context helps to highlight the key drivers to widening participation in Scotland and determine the way forward from a strategic viewpoint.

Government in Scotland, both pre and post devolution, has shown a continuing concern for, and commitment to, securing greater participation in learning. This is explicit in the **Partnership Agreement for a Better Scotland (PABS)** where, in the context of Theme 1, Growing Scotland's Economy, the Government commits, amongst other things, to improving the skills base to meet the needs of the knowledge economy; investing to improve the quality and effectiveness of further and higher education; and increasing the proportion of graduates in the workforce. The driver to participation in learning here is principally economic growth and success.

The economic driver is apparent also in two documents issued by the Scottish Executive around the time of the Agreement: **Determined to Succeed**, the review of enterprise in education, and **A Smart, Successful Scotland**, Scotland's current enterprise strategy. The former urges action on, and makes recommendations for, the development of vocational skills and enterprising behaviour in school pupils, advocating partnerships between local education and business communities as one means towards that end. The latter recognises knowledge as a key factor in economic success and, as such, puts skills and learning high on its agenda. It asks not only for education at all levels to contribute to a culture of enterprise, but also for greater participation in education in order to narrow the gap between rich and poor sections of the community, this being a condition of long term economic prosperity.

Benefit to the economy is highlighted again in the document that now stands as the overarching driver to participation in learning in Scotland, the Scottish Executive's **Lifelong Learning Strategy**. However, this strategy attaches equal weight to the benefit of learning to the individual and to society. Individuals stand to benefit both through personal fulfilment and through enhanced job opportunities and earnings; society stands to gain strength and cohesion through better informed and more inquiring, confident citizens. It sets out five people centred goals related respectively to: personal attributes such as confidence, enterprise, knowledge and skills; a high quality learning experience; recognition and effective use and development of knowledge and skills; availability of information and guidance to support effective learning decisions and transitions; and opportunity irrespective of background or personal circumstance.

Subsequent documents take the strategy forward, confirming fixity of purpose in relation to greater participation in learning. **The Higher Education Review Phase 2, A Framework for Higher Education in Scotland** reinforces the messages of the Lifelong Learning

Strategy. In respect of teaching and learning, its focus is firmly on learners - on providing for their needs; on recognising their achievements; on providing information to support informed choice; and on improving pathways for progression. Specifically, the report of the Review recognises ‘the need to see real improvements in the proportions of students from the most economically disadvantaged groups benefiting from provision in our HEIs and to improve retention rates across students from all backgrounds’.

In the past year, since November 2004, there have been several documents focusing on school age. Their concern is on creating a disposition to learn among school pupils and engaging them with learning on an ongoing basis, ie, ensuring that ‘first chances’ at education are embraced. They include **A Curriculum for Excellence, Schools of Ambition and the Schools and Colleges Review**. All call for partnership working in some degree – between permutations of local authorities, schools, colleges, HEIs and businesses. There has also been information from the **Employability Framework** on transition management for school leavers to minimise the risk of them becoming part of the NEET group – young people not in education, employment or training.

Finally, in September this year, the Scottish Funding Councils issued **Learning for All**, the report of a review of their approaches to widening participation. The report acknowledges that more people from all parts of society are accessing further and higher education but indicates that participation and achievement by those from the most deprived areas still remains low and that retention and achievement rates for disadvantaged groups are lower than those for the rest of the population. It notes that participation in further and higher education in Scotland is highly skewed, especially with regard to socio-economic background, geographical location and gender. The report recommends a prioritised programme of action, much relying on the regional wider access forums and based on partnership working with schools and local communities. If the report is received positively, it is likely that there will be a fresh impetus to the widening participation agenda; that the wider access forums could be placed on a firmer footing for the longer term; and that the sphere of their operation could be broadened to include all post-compulsory education.

Overall, the desktop analysis shows a Government committed to increasing participation in learning and for the benefit of individuals and society as much as for the economy. Arguably, it shows one whose commitment has gained force and momentum following the publication of the Lifelong Learning Strategy. Partnership between key and interested parties – public, private, voluntary and community - emerges as a common feature of the delivery of objectives, while, given the map of participation, collaboration at regional level looks set to become a key focus of effort for improvement.

To conclude the desktop review at national level, a particular action signalled under PABS Theme 1 and confirmed in the Lifelong Learning Strategy should properly be noted: the merger of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and Scottish Further Education Funding Council. The merger was achieved in October 2005 when the Scottish Funding Council was established. This represents a key contextual development. As well as distributing funding to HEIs and Colleges for the support of learning, teaching, research and other associated activities, the Council is responsible for working with those institutions to develop strategies in support of ministerial priorities. Clearly, widening participation in higher and further education is one of those priorities.

Regional and local policy context

A range of strategies and plans is in place to facilitate progress with national policies at regional and local levels. In Fife & Tayside, these include the **widening participation**

strategies of the Forum member institutions as well as the **Forum's own corporate strategy and supporting operational plan**. The aim of the Forum's strategy is

to address under representation in higher education by promoting fair access, and enhancing subsequent achievement for school pupils; students following further education routes to Higher Education; and adult returners to education from the social and business communities.

The operational plan serves to inform the Forum on the key projects and activities to meet the aims of the strategy 2004-2008.

Beyond the Forum and its member institutions, **Community Planning Partnerships** exist to support effective joint working between public, private, voluntary and community bodies to improve the delivery of public services. These services include education and learning, and community plans have set the objective of promoting learning opportunities which prepare people for employment and learning. The Partnerships in Fife & Tayside each recognise the importance of lifelong learning in improving the overall quality of life and health, and the vibrancy and long-term sustainability of the region. Consistent with the intention signalled in the Lifelong Learning Strategy, all Partnerships now have guidance from the Scottish Executive relating to community learning and development.

Associated with the Planning Partnerships are **Regeneration Outcome Agreements (ROAs)**. In Fife & Tayside, these are in place for Angus, Perth & Kinross, and Dundee & Fife. These Agreements demonstrate how locally delivered programmes and projects contribute to meeting the strategic aims and priorities set out in the relevant Community Plans and the Scottish Executive's National Priorities. The ROAs help to determine how well the Community Planning Partnership has performed in achieving its aims and in meeting the Executive's Closing the Opportunity Gap Objectives by reducing the equality and opportunity gap which currently exists between disadvantaged communities and the rest of the Fife & Tayside and the Scottish population.

Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were also undertaken with key individuals to ascertain any issues which existed at a local or project level. Individuals highlighted a number of issues, although some of these were acknowledged to be equally relevant to the other wider access forums. The main comments included:

- Although first off the mark with its action plan in 2000, FATWAF had experienced some difficulties subsequently. Some progress had been made in that partners within the Forum worked together on a number of projects and activities, including awareness raising events with selected communities, research projects, information production and marketing of opportunities. However, the overall impression had been that there had been less activity than in other Forums. No single reason for this was identified; rather a range of potential contributory factors was suggested. These included a diverse Forum membership with varying levels of support at senior level; a lack of regional coherence, socially, economically, and geographically; lack of a clear and pressing driver for collective working; institutions tackling participation in their own specific ways and with some success; post the reconstitution of the Forums in 2003, the shadow of the SHEFC Wider Access Strand 4 projects, when FATWAF's role had been perceived purely as that of an advisory board for the projects.
- A reluctance - by no means unique - to learn from other Forums.

- Improvements were now being realised throughout the Forum. In the last year in particular, through co-ordination and concerted development work on its Corporate and Operational Plans, the Forum had regained a sense of direction and, with it, new energy.

3. Baseline evaluation

To provide an informed evaluation of the Forum's progress at later stages of the project, it is necessary first to establish the current baseline position. This, at present, limited baseline was derived from a number of statistical sources at national, regional and local levels and relates to the period 2003/04. The one exception is the information on retention rates in HEIs (Graph 11), where the latest available data were for 2002/03. We anticipate that the baseline presented will be built upon and developed particularly, in due course, in the light of the recommendations of, and response to, the McGoldrick Report **Learning for All**.

A number of key messages have been identified in the baseline analysis. These are set out in the following summary.

- **The staying on rates of high school pupils** in three of the four areas in Fife and Tayside were comparable to the national average. The exception was Dundee with lower staying on rates. The highest rates were in Perth & Kinross.
- **The attainment rates of students (five or more qualifications at standard grade or equivalent)** in three of the four Fife & Tayside areas were comparable to the national average. The exception was Dundee, with lower attainment rates. The highest rates were in Perth & Kinross.
- **The attainment rates of students (one or more awards at higher or better)** in three of the four Fife & Tayside areas were comparable to the national average. The exception was Dundee, with lower attainment rates. The highest rates were in Perth & Kinross.
- **The % of school students entering HE** in Fife & Tayside was decreasing in all areas, as was the national average. However, higher than average student attainment levels were consistently met in three of the four areas, the exception being Dundee.
- **The % of school students entering FE** in the Fife & Tayside region was generally increasing, as was the national average. A higher percentage of school leavers went on to full-time FE than HE in Dundee City and Angus in 2003/04.
- **The % of school students entering employment** in the Fife & Tayside region was generally increasing, as was the national average. A higher percentage of school-leavers went on to employment than into FE in Perth & Kinross (and in Scotland generally).
- **The number of female enrolments in Colleges** in the Fife & Tayside region was consistently higher than male. With two exceptions, Heriot Watt and Abertay Universities, the same was true for female enrolments in HEIs.
- **The retention rates of full-time FE students** were lowest at Angus College. The highest rates of retention were in Perth College. Overall three colleges had experienced a decline in retention rates and three had experienced an increase between 2002/03 and 2003/04.
- **The retention rates of full-time HE students in Colleges** were lowest at Angus College. The highest retention rates were at Elmwood College. Overall two colleges had experienced a decline in retention rates and three had experienced an increase between 2002/03 and 2003/04.

- **The % of full time first-degree entrants who are young** was the highest in Scotland at St Andrews University.
- **The % of young full time students from NS-SEC classes 4,5,6, & 7** were particularly low at St Andrews, compared to the other HEIs in Scotland. Abertay enrolled a higher percentage than the Scottish average.
- **The % of young full time HE students from low participation neighbourhoods** was also particularly low at St Andrews. Both Dundee and Abertay were higher than the national average in percentage terms.
- **The % of first degree mature students with no previous HE experience who were from low participation neighbourhoods** was particularly high in all HEIs in Fife & Tayside compared to the rest of Scotland.

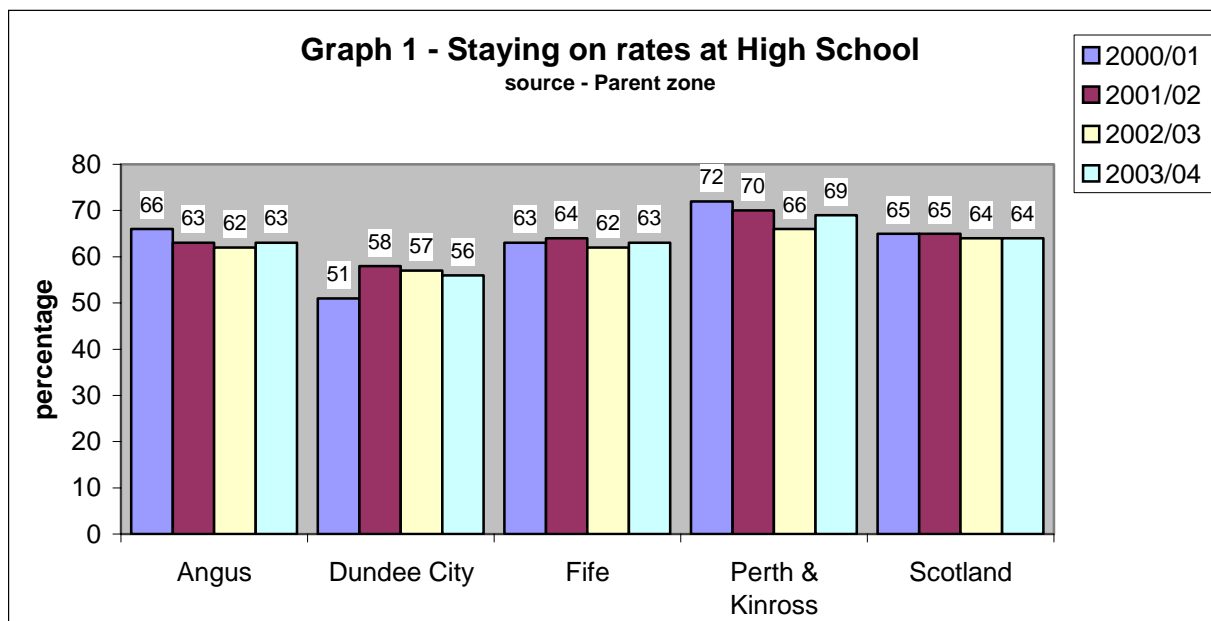
The following pages illustrate the analysis graphically.

Notes on the graphs:

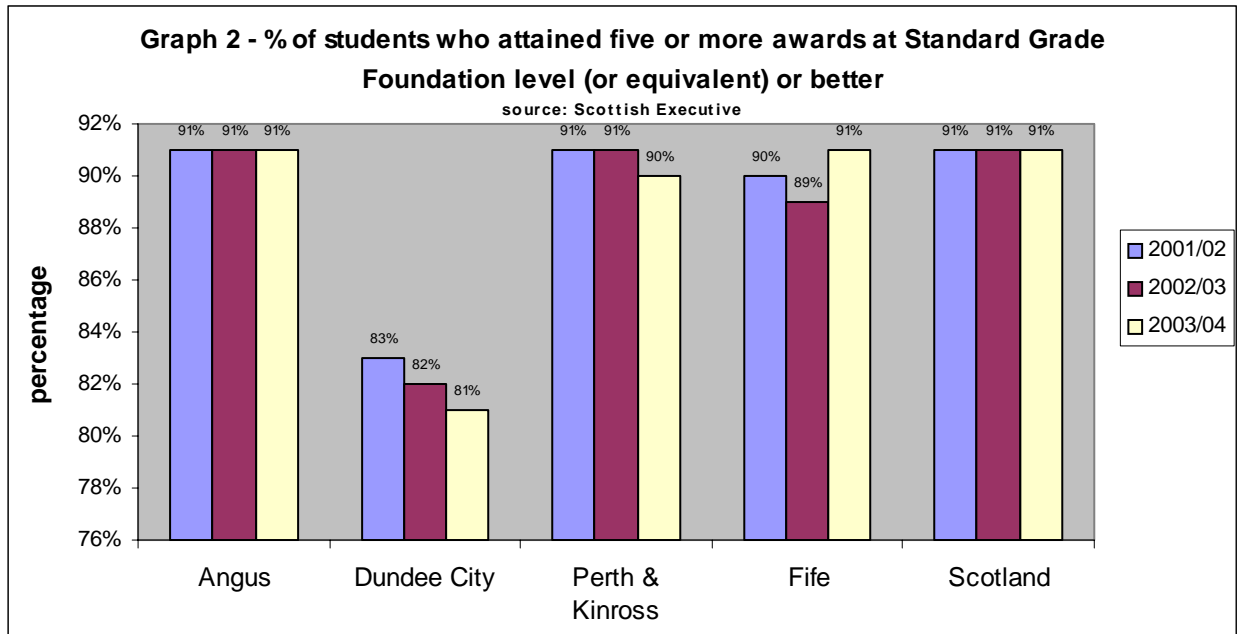
Where appropriate, these figures have been compared with figures prepared for the December 2004 Report, *Disengagement in Fife and Tayside and what to do about it*. That report used the same source but subsequent revisions have rendered the new source information better for these purposes. It has required less averaging and manipulation on the part of the authors and this, in turn, has resulted in slight differences between the figures in 2004 report and this report.

‘School leavers’ comprise all leavers from S4, S5 and S6.

Unless otherwise stated, definitions of further and higher education are programme-based and not institution-based.

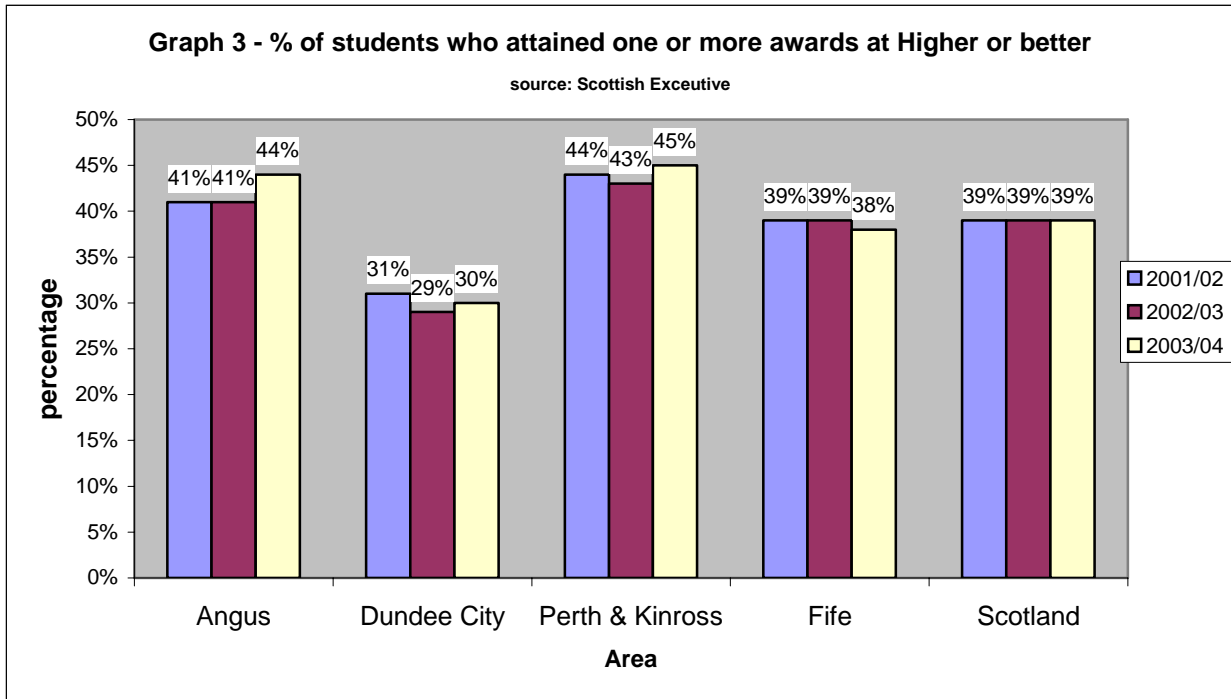


Perth & Kinross have consistently experienced high rates of pupils choosing to stay on at school compared with other areas within Fife & Tayside and Scotland as a whole for the period 2001 to 2004. With the exception of Perth & Kinross, no other area within Fife & Tayside has managed to attain rates above the national average for the period 2001 to 2004. The lowest staying on rates are in Dundee City, which is 13% lower than Perth & Kinross for the year 2003/04.

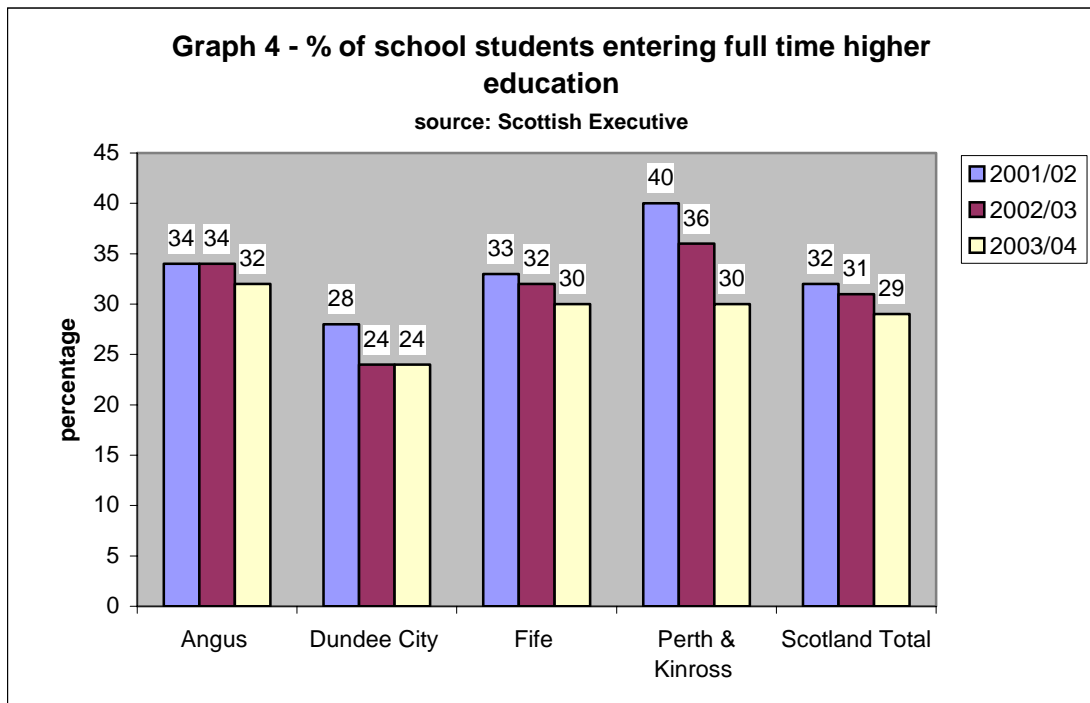


Graph 2 shows attainment rates of school students in Fife & Tayside. The lowest staying on rates are in Dundee and coincide with the relatively low attainment rates that the area has experienced. The other three areas within the region have comparable attainment and staying on rates compared to the national average.

The lowest attainment rates for **fourth year exam results** are 10% lower than the Scottish average for 2003/04. Both Angus and Fife have attained the national average figure of 91%, while Perth & Kinross are only slightly below average at 90%.

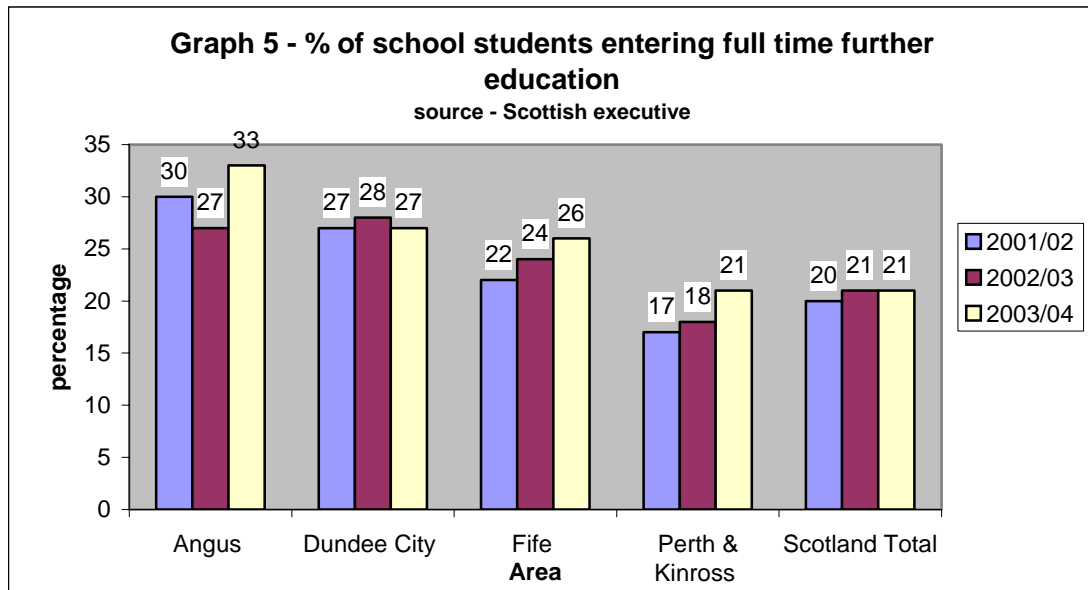


The Scottish average for **fifth year students** attaining one or more Highers (or equivalent) has remained relatively consistent (c.39%) for all areas within the region with the exception of Dundee (30%) for the period 2001 to 2004. Both the Angus and Perth & Kinross areas have exceeded the national rates at 44% and 45% respectively, although Fife has consistently achieved the national average of c.39%. Dundee City is 9% below the national average.

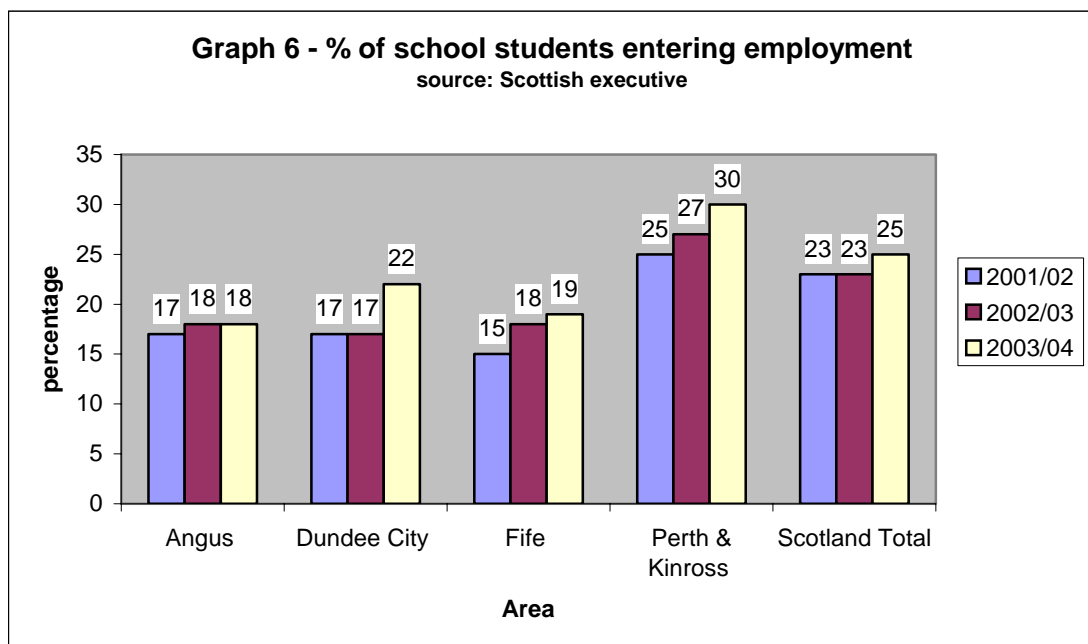


Graph 4 (above) illustrates an overall decreasing trend of school leavers in Fife & Tayside entering full time HE between 2001 and 2004. However, this decrease is not isolated to the Fife & Tayside area, as a general decrease has also been experienced at a national level, which is down from 32% in 2001/02 to 29% for 2003/04. The most notable decrease within Fife & Tayside is in the Perth & Kinross area, which has decreased by 10%. However, three

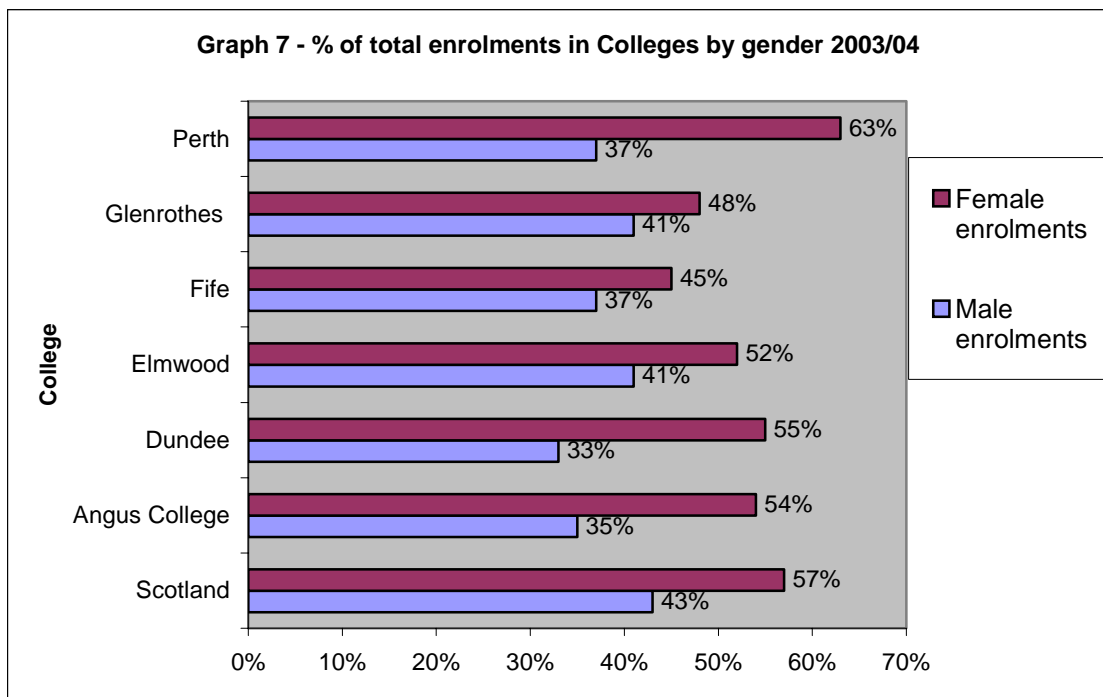
out of the four Fife & Tayside local authority areas still have a higher percentage of students entering HE than the Scottish average for the year 2003/04. The exception is Dundee.



The national average of school students entering Further Education (FE) has increased slightly from 20% to 21% over the period 2001 – 2004, as shown in graph 5. Over the same period, the Fife & Tayside region has remained stable or increased the percentage of students entering FE. Three of the four areas within the region have exceeded the national average of entrants into FE in terms of a percentage, whereas Perth & Kinross have experienced an entrance rate of 21%, which is equivalent to the national rate. This increase in the Perth & Kinross area might in part explain the decrease that the area experienced into HE. Dundee, and now in 2003/04 also Angus, both have higher percentages of students entering FE than HE.



- Graph 6 highlights that the national percentage of school pupils entering employment has increased slightly from 23% to 25% for the period 2001 to 2004. This increase has also been generally reflected in Fife & Tayside as all areas within the region have experienced an increase in students preferring the option of employment. Perth & Kinross have witnessed the largest increase in the region of 5%. It is the only area within the Fife & Tayside region that has experienced a higher rate (30%) than the national average of 25% for the year 2003/04. Again, this could be a contributing factor to explaining the significant downturn in HE demand within the Perth & Kinross area. A higher percentage of school-leavers went on to employment than into FE in Perth & Kinross (and in Scotland generally).



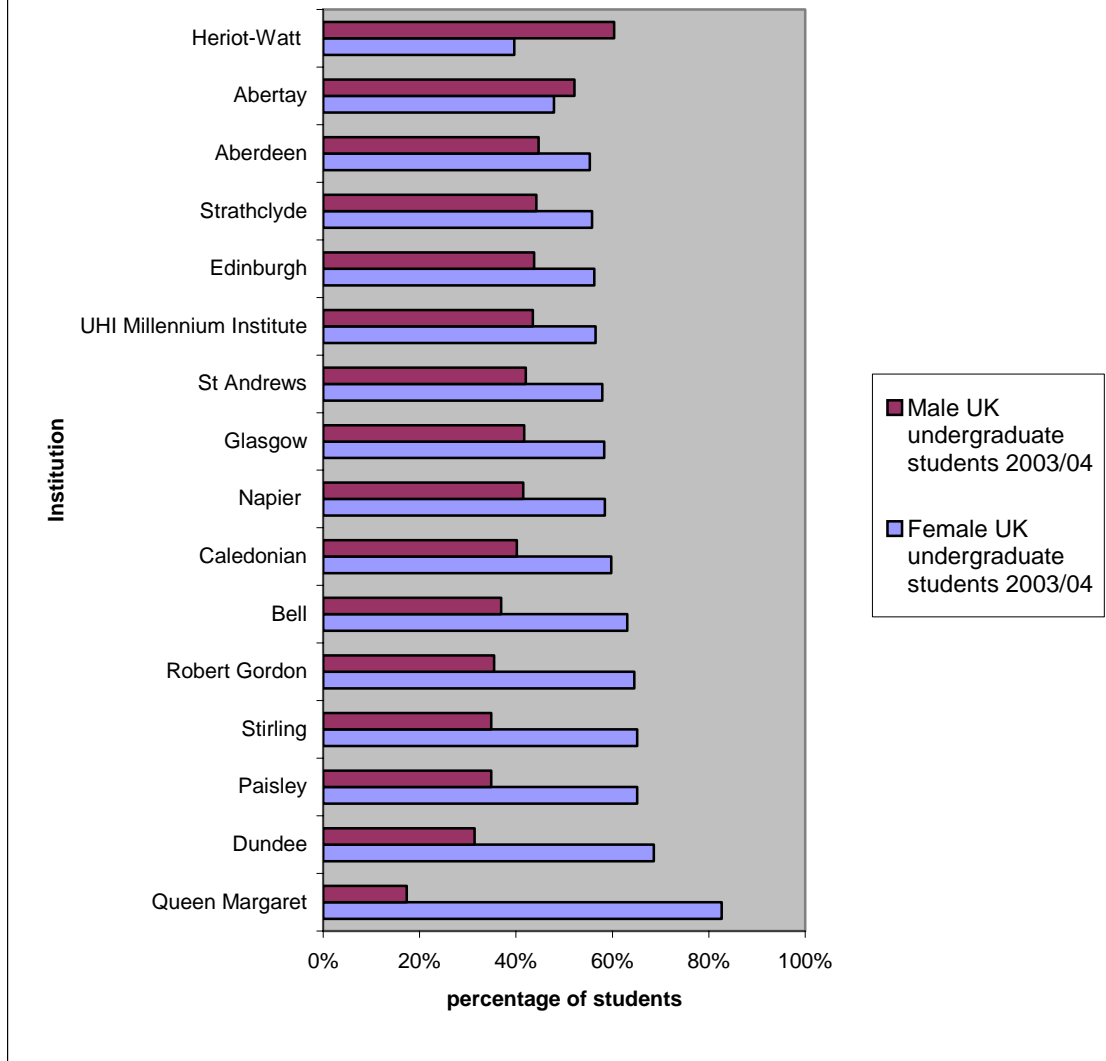
The percentage of total enrolment by gender is shown above in graph 7. The number of female enrolments is consistently higher than male. The highest enrolments for females are in Perth, which is also higher than the national average. All of the other colleges within Fife & Tayside are lower than the national average for female enrolments.

Male enrolments are highest at both Elmwood and Glenrothes colleges at 41%. All of the college enrolment rates in Fife & Tayside are lower than the Scottish average. These findings are consistent with those of the *Learning for All* report.

Graph 8 - % of undergraduate* students at HEIs by gender

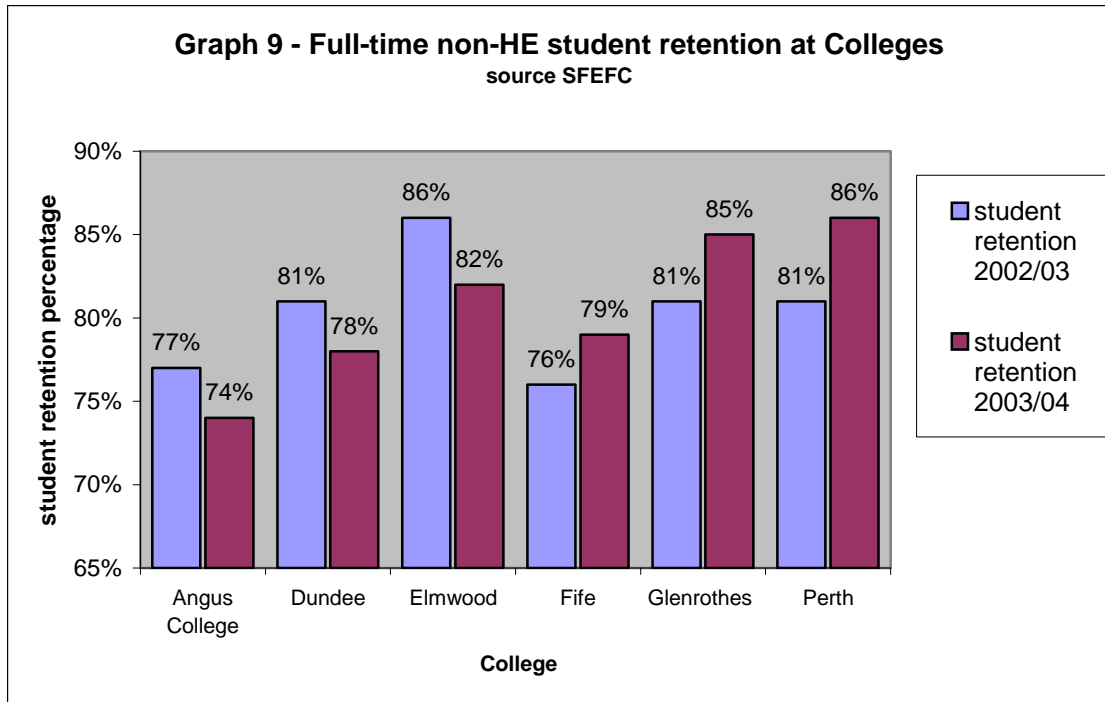
2003/04

source: HESA

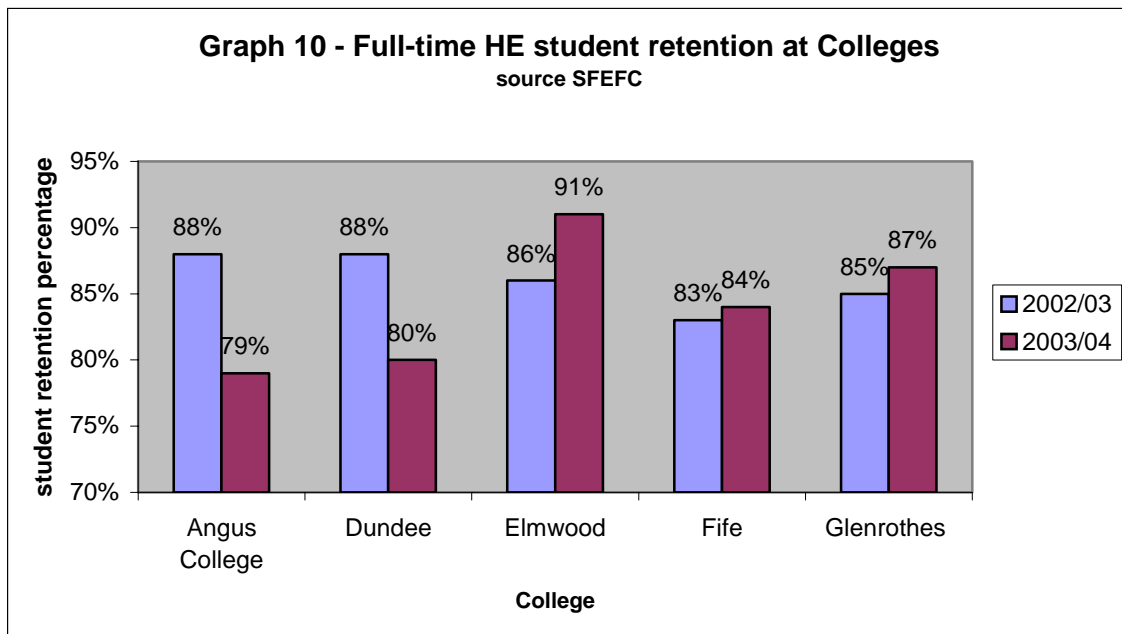


* Includes first degree, HN and NVQ/SVQ level 4 and 5 programmes

All but two of the HEIs in Scotland enrolled more undergraduate female students than male in 2003/04. The highest number of female enrolments in Scotland is at Queen Margaret University College, and the highest number of female enrolments in Fife & Tayside is at Dundee University. The lowest number of undergraduate female enrolments in Fife & Tayside is at Abertay University, which is one of the two HEIs which enrolled a higher proportion of male than female students in 2003/04.

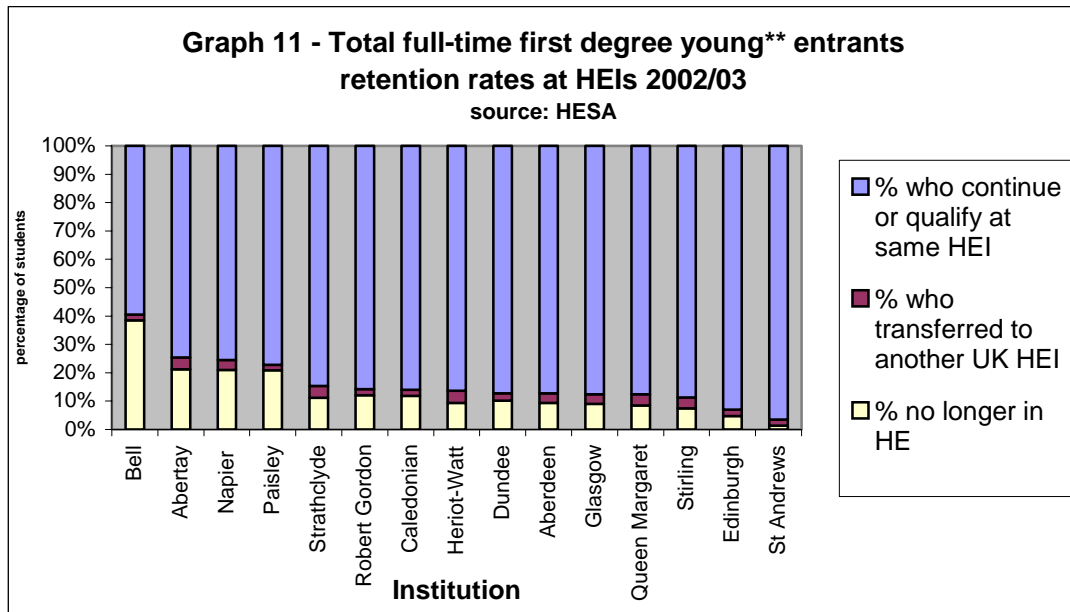


Graph 9 illustrates the non-HE retention rates of colleges in the Fife & Tayside region. Three of the Further Education Colleges (Angus, Dundee and Elmwood), have experienced a decline in student retention for the period 2002/03 to 2003/04. The other Fife & Tayside colleges have all improved their retention rates for 2003/04 compared to 2002/03. The highest retention rates for 2003/04 in the region have been attained by Perth College, at 86%. The lowest rates in Fife & Tayside are in Angus College (74%).



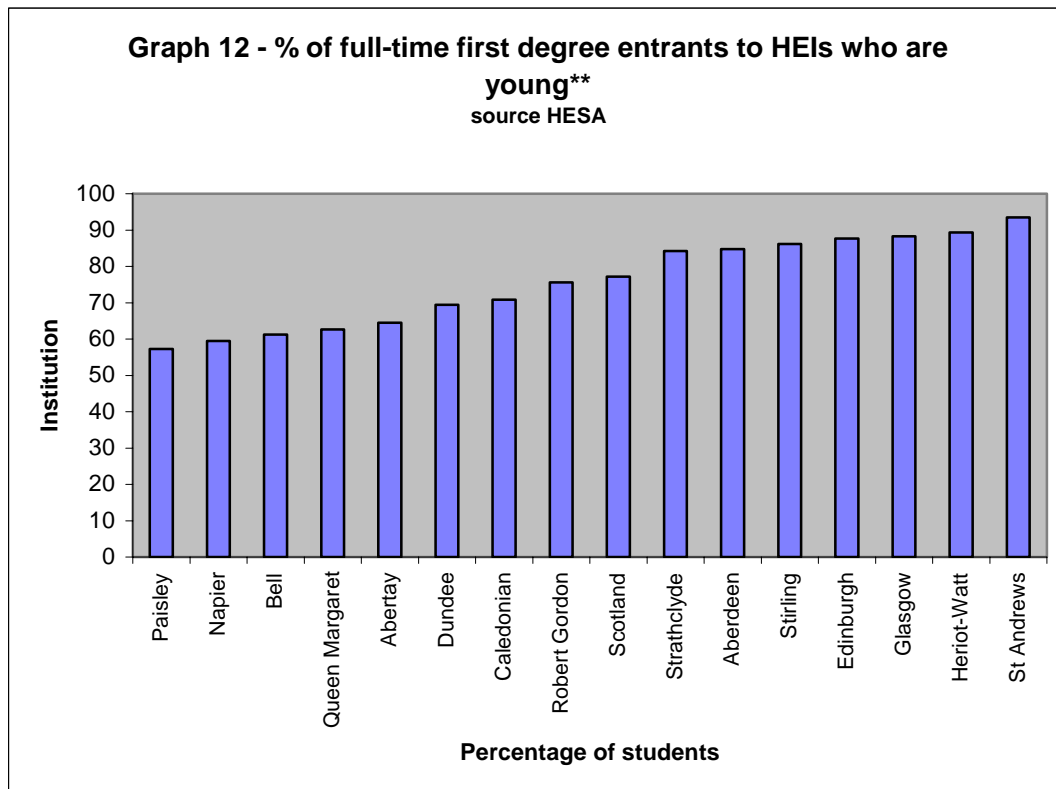
Graph 10 shows higher education retention rates declining at both Angus and Dundee Colleges respectively, which coincide with the decreases in FE retention rates at the same colleges. However, Elmwood College has increased their HE retention rate from 86% in

2002/03 to 91% for 2003/04, which contrasts with the decrease they experienced for FE retention during the same periods.



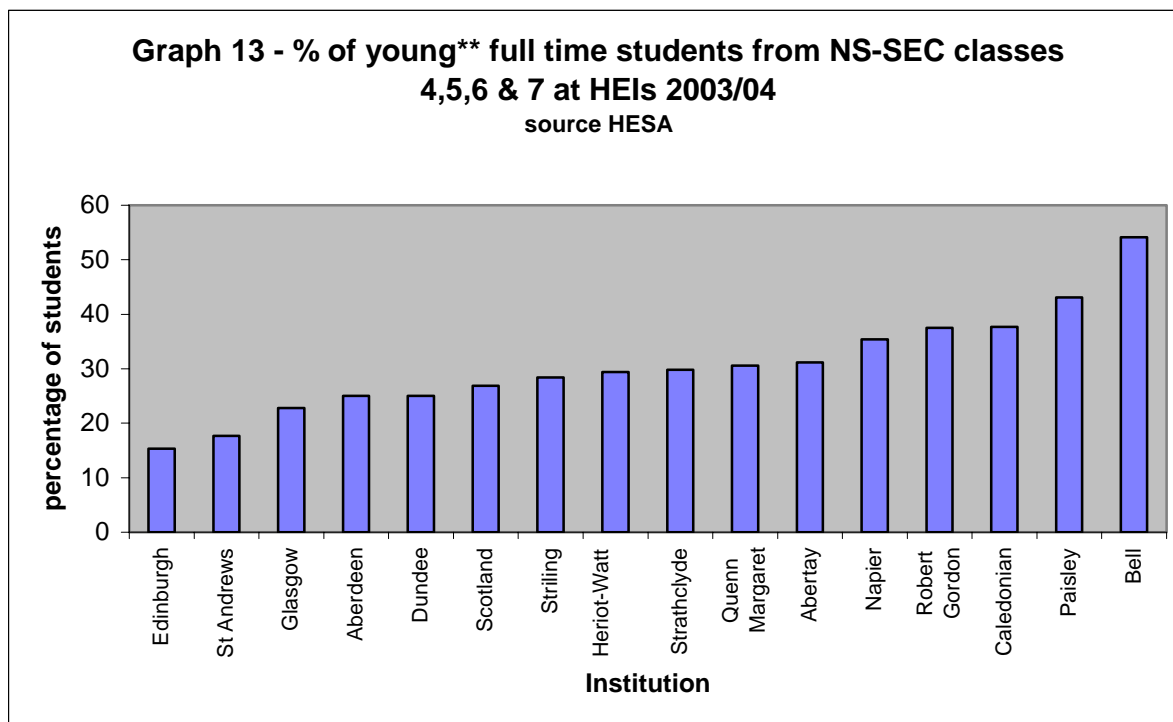
** under 21 on 30/09 of academic year of entry to institution

In 2002/03, St Andrews University had the highest retention rates in Scotland as a percentage of student intake. The lowest retention rates in Fife & Tayside were in Abertay University, which also had one of the highest percentages of students transferring to another HEI. It should be noted, however, that there were acknowledged errors in the 2002/03 data reported for Abertay University and that these impacted adversely on the University's retention rate for that year.



** under 21 on 30/09 of academic year of entry to institution

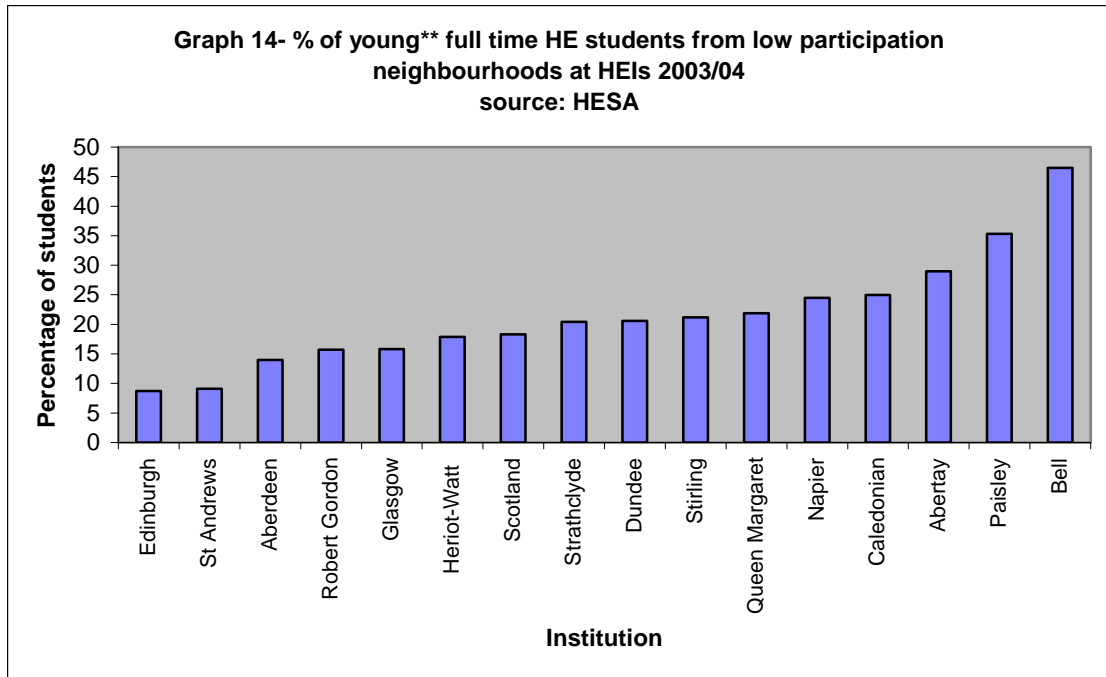
Abertay and Dundee Universities have fewer **young** first-degree entrants in percentage terms compared to the Scottish average. St Andrews University has a higher percentage than any other university in Scotland. This indicates that St Andrews have relatively few mature students entering HE.



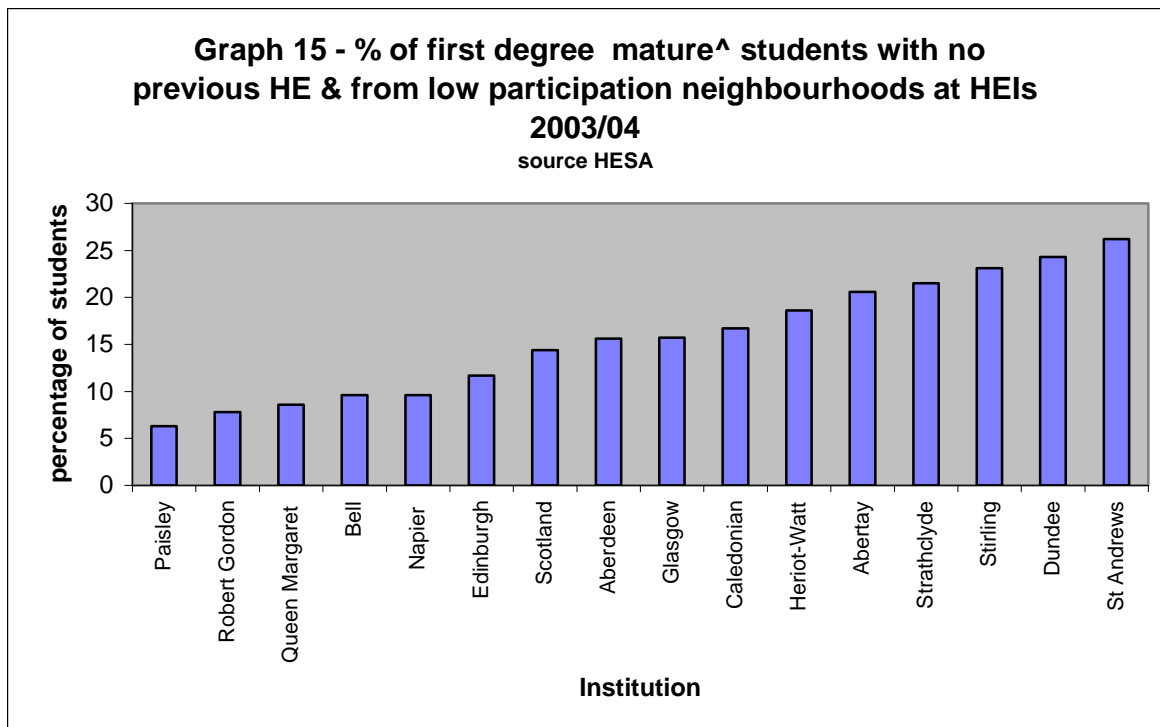
** under 21 on 30/09 of academic year of entry to institution

Graph 13 shows enrolments of young first-degree students from socio-economic classes 4,5,6 & 7 at St Andrews are the lowest in Scotland. Abertay University enrolls a higher percentage (31.2%) of students from this socio-economic group than the Scottish average of 26.9%.

Graph 14, below, shows St Andrews as having the second lowest enrolments of young HE students in Scotland in percentage terms. Both Abertay and Dundee have higher enrolment rates than the Scottish average.



** under 21 on 30/09 of academic year of entry to institution



^ age 21 or over on 30/09 of academic year of entry to institution

Graph 15, above, shows all of the Universities within Fife and Tayside have relatively high rates of enrolling mature first-degree students who have had no previous HE experience and who are from a low participation neighbourhood. St Andrews has the highest rates in Scotland.

ANNEX

National policy context

- ***Credit transfer at the FE-HE interface*** (SHEFC, November 2000), inter alia, identifies the key barriers to participation and ways of overcoming them as part of a national strategy to support widening access to education. Fundamental barriers that emerge include lack of self esteem; negative views of education; lack of study skills; lack of information on the support available; and a range of issues relating to finance such as travel costs and insufficient financial support with child care.
- **A Smart, Successful Scotland** (Scottish Executive, 2001), Scotland's current enterprise strategy, acknowledges lifelong learning and fuller participation in learning as fundamental to the nation's economic competitiveness.
- ***Futureskills Scotland*** (established in July 2001) is part of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. One of its main aims is to analyse the Scottish labour market to inform policy making. A more active labour market policy will meet the challenges addressed in ***A Smart, Successful Scotland*** (see above), such as the need for new skills and better matching of skills and opportunities. Other aims of Futureskills Scotland are to improve the availability, consistency and quality of labour market information; and to work closely with Careers Scotland to provide relevant information to people, including school leavers and FE/HE students.
- ***Determined to Succeed*** (Scottish Executive, 2002), reviews the effectiveness of Enterprise in Education. The review recognises that work based learning in schools is a key means of developing vocational skills and enterprising behaviour and also helps provide a more varied school experience. It calls for a major increase in the involvement of local businesses in schools. (Dundee City Council has acknowledged one of the Review Group's recommendations - ensuring that all pupils over the age of 14 have an opportunity to experience work based vocational learning which is linked to relevant qualifications - by developing a construction pre-apprenticeship programme with local employers, Dundee College and Scottish Enterprise).
- ***The Lifelong Learning Strategy*** (Scottish Executive, February 2003), set within the context of the ***Partnership Agreement for a Better Scotland***, details the Executive's five-year strategy for lifelong learning to make a contribution to people's wellbeing and to support a more inclusive society and vibrant economy.
- ***The Higher Education Review Phase 2: A Framework for Higher Education in Scotland*** (Scottish Executive, 2003), places higher education firmly in the context of the overall lifelong learning strategy and acknowledges the "need to see real improvements in the proportions of students from the most economically disadvantaged groups benefiting from provision in our HEIs and to improve retention rates across students from all backgrounds".
- ***Ambitious Excellent Schools*** (Scottish Executive, 2003) focuses on a number of issues, including ensuring that young people have acquired key underpinning skills in numeracy & literacy, and that support is provided for young people who are in challenging circumstances.

- *A Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, November 2004) provides a template for phased reform of the age 3 – 18 curriculum in the interests of streamlining, balancing and assisting every pupil to realise their potential.
- *Schools and Colleges Review – Building the Foundations of a Lifelong Learning Society* (Scottish Executive, May 2005), outlines a strategy for increasing and enhancing school and college partnership so that colleges can help in the development of the pupil capacities outlined in *A Curriculum for Excellence*. In particular, colleges will help raise pupils' awareness of the range of opportunities open to them and, notably, help prepare them for, and ease the transition to, further learning, training or employment
- *Schools of Ambition*, (Scottish Executive, 2005) seeks to raise the ambitions of schools and inspire pupils to extend and transform their opportunities in life. The programme includes schools which contend with the most challenging local circumstances in Scotland, and aims to set new standards of excellence. (There is one school from each local authority area in Fife & Tayside among the first twenty selected to participate in the programme).
- *Employability Framework* (Scottish Executive, June 2005), documentation reviews the problems that are associated with young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). Two primary determinants of being at risk of NEET are educational dissatisfaction and underachievement; and poverty and family disadvantage. Both have been identified as key barriers to participation. The principal objective of the document is to improve transition planning for school leavers who may be at most risk of becoming NEET.
- *Learning for All* (SFCs, September 2005) is a root and branch review of both the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) and the Scottish Further Education Funding Council's (SFEFC) approach to widening participation. It is currently under consideration by the new merged Council, the Scottish Funding Council. The report recognises that more people from all parts of society are accessing further and higher education; however, participation and achievement by people in the most deprived areas still remains low and the retention and achievement rates for disadvantaged groups are lower than those for the rest of the population. The report recommends a prioritised programme of action to make further progress. This requires work on, inter alia, building the demand for learning among disadvantaged groups, and monitoring, evaluating and learning. It envisages a significant role for the four regional wider access forums in these areas, as well as in that of identifying and sharing good practice in improving participation. Significantly, it refers to the forum remit being widened to include all post-compulsory education.

The Learning for All report also proposes a 'basket of measures' for determining the success of its proposed programme of action. The measures focus on patterns of participation; constancy of demand for learning across all groups in society; and the achievement and learning experience of learners that enhances their life chance.