

Socioeconomic Diversity in Scottish Universities

Kang Wang

Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee, Dundee, DD1 4HN, UK

852413539@qq.com

Abstract

“Diversity is the fact of many different types of things or people being included in something and a range of different things or people” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). One important type of diversity is socioeconomic diversity. Socioeconomic is “related to the differences between groups of people caused mainly by their financial situation” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Tsuo (2019) believes that socioeconomic diversity is beneficial for all students. When socioeconomic diversity increasing, many students from disadvantaged backgrounds can have more opportunity to explore the higher education and the university can attract more students to join them. While the lack of socioeconomic diversity is a huge problem for the Scottish universities. One significant way for Scottish universities try to increase socioeconomic diversity is the free tuition fees for Scots from disadvantaged backgrounds, but is not enough. Other methods including the scholarships and Sutton Trust summer schools are both the useful ways to solve this problem. Using these methods is a key step to increase socioeconomic diversity in the Scottish universities. This essay will firstly look at attempts to increase the socioeconomic diversity in the Scottish universities, followed by the evaluation of these methods.

Keywords

Socioeconomic Diversity; Students; Scottish Universities.

1. Introduction

Free tuition is one way they have tried to increase socioeconomic diversity in the Scottish universities. This is because in September 1998, the UK Labor Government introduced tuition fees throughout the UK for the first time to provide tuition to university undergraduate and postgraduate student certificates (Wikipedia, n. d). “In 1998 Teaching and Higher Education Act, whereby up-front tuition fees of £1,200 per year were introduced for degree courses for the first time” (Lorraine, Emla and Gill, 2011). The tuition fees of the university put a huge burden on students from disadvantaged background in Scotland. The problem of lack of socioeconomic diversity in Scotland’s universities became more serious and the gap of students from different families increased. The Scottish government found that free tuition fees in the university might be a key solution to tackle this problem. The six members of the Ministerial Group - three Labour and three Liberal Democrat - agreed a programme which planned to expand the opportunity for admission to students who were less well off. They decided that tuition fees for Scottish students who study in full-time higher education have been abolished since the autumn of 2000 (BBC, 2000). After this year, all Scottish students at the university of Scotland are entitled to free tuition fees, compared with their English counterparts who must pay tuition fees (Sosu et al., 2018). There are some specific requirements: If you are a Scotland domiciled student, you may be assessed to bear the tuition fees of Scottish families (The University of Edinburgh, 2019). SAAS (Student Awards Agency for Scotland) also confirms the tuition fee for Scottish students (University of Glasgow, 2019).

2. Methods to Increase Socioeconomic Diversity

2.1. Free Tuition Fees

For free tuition fees in the past year, it could be a useful step to increase a part of socioeconomic diversity in the Scottish universities, but it cannot solve the whole problem of lack of socioeconomic diversity. Hunter (2014) claims that free tuition is a beneficial policy. Over the past nine years, the number of people in Scotland's poorest areas receiving higher education has increased by 29% (cited in BBC, 2016). However, Scotland's research showed a 90% increase in the number of students from low income families in higher education comes from colleges, rather than universities (BBC, 2016). There is little evidence that it has encouraged more Scots to study in universities (BBC, 2016). It is a good practice at Scottish universities regarding access, but if talent is not wasted, we really need a strong push (BBC, 2016). It is clear to us that simply abolishing tuition fees will not significantly improve the status of poor students, thereby promoting wider access to schools (BBC, 2000). A report by BBC (2016) showed that youngsters from disadvantaged areas in Scotland were still four times less likely to study in the university than those from advantaged backgrounds and this data in England, Northern Ireland and Wales are 2.4 times, 3 times and 3 times respectively (BBC, 2016). In contrast, this problem was still more serious in Scotland than in other parts of the UK in 2016. Lampl (2016) concludes that Scotland is facing a "shocking access gap" (cited in BBC, 2016) and this strategy cannot solve this problem completely.

2.2. Scholarship

In recent years, the scholarship is a positive method to continue increasing socioeconomic diversity in the Scottish universities. This is because despite the tuition fees, living expenses is also an enormous burden for Scots from poor families. For example, many Scottish low-income families worry about these payments and these families are less able to support their children during their university years (Minty, 2015), which is an important reason that they prevent their children from studying in university. Without the help of external resources, students may not be able to pay for the degree and they need to enter the labor market and become social contributors (Community Force, n. d). These are two reasons that prevent students from higher education. However, scholarships for Scotland domiciled students can provide a support to these families to solve this problem. On the University of Edinburgh website, there is an introduction of the scholarship for Scotland domiciled students: the Scotland Scholarships aim to help Scotland's domiciled students to pay for their living expenses during their study life in the university (The University of Edinburgh, 2019). Scholarships can offer more Scots from low-income family's access to higher education and scholarships can provide them with more opportunities to study in the university without many cautions and encourage them to study harder in their study experience.

The scholarship is a positive strategy to increase socioeconomic diversity in the Scottish universities. Scottish scholarships help Scottish students pay for their living expenses during undergraduate studies. This award reflects that the universities in Scotland commit to expanding admission opportunities to Scotland's domiciled students (The University of Edinburgh, 2019). For example, the University of Edinburgh will offer scholarships of up to 8,100 pounds a year to Scots (The University of Edinburgh, 2019), and this is just part of the scholarship for Scots. With these scholarships, many Scottish families may not need to pay the daily-life expenses for their children and might award a lot of money with their children's best performance in their study life.

2.3. Sutton Trust Summer Schools

On the other hand, the Sutton Trust summer schools also can increase the socioeconomic diversity in Scotland. Sutton Trust is identified as a charity in the educational field in the UK

which aims to improve social mobility and solve the problem of educational disadvantage (Wikipedia, n. d). The research by Weedon et al. (2016) shows that although Scottish students are more likely than the other parts of the students to receive higher education, they are less likely to go straight to college, and many Scottish students who study in the college tend to repeat it for more than one year (Sutton Trust, 2016). This phenomenon is caused by student's panic about their future study life in the university. Psychologically speaking, many students from poor families think that they cannot interact with their peers in the university and would lose a lot of confidence to study in the university, which is a psychological barrier for them and will lead to these students are less likely to go directly to university. One positive strategy taken by Sutton Trust to reduce this barrier is that "Runs summer schools with St Andrews and Edinburgh universities with places for 250 students each year" (Sutton Trust, n. d). For this policy, many students would answer how about the fees and quality of the Sutton Trust summer school? There is the information on the Sutton Trust website to explain that: Sutton Trust Summer Schools are totally free and have more than 40 different subjects with 13 top universities in the UK (In Scotland, including The University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow and University of St Andrews) (Sutton Trust, 2019). With no tuition fees and the higher teaching quality, the Sutton Trust summer school is just like a "big cake" for Scots from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate.

Sutton Trust summer schools provide a useful way to increase socioeconomic diversity. Because it gives students a chance to adapt to the university's study life in advance and avoid psychological barriers with their peers. For example, in these courses, students can build self-confidence, understand independent learning and get inspired about their study life (Pop, 2018). When they finish the summer school course, they will overcome their panic and have a new perspective about their future study life in the university. Without some psychological barriers, young Scots are more likely to study in the university than before.

3. Conclusion

The information above has shown that free tuition fees, scholarships and Sutton Trust summer schools are the crucial strategies to increase socioeconomic diversity in the Scottish university. Because of these strategies, students from low-income families are more likely to study in the university than before, which means many more people in Scotland are benefiting from higher education and giving them an equal chance to show their own talent. Although the free tuition increases the socioeconomic diversity, it is not enough. It would take with scholarships and Sutton Trust summer schools through all aspects of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to increase socioeconomic diversity.

References

- [1] BBC. 'Full text of tuition fees agreement', BBC NEWS, 2000.
- [2] BBC. 'Analysis: University tuition fees in Scotland', BBC NEWS, 2013.
- [3] BBC. 'Scots students face 'shocking' university access gap', BBC NEWS, 2016.
- [4] Cambridge Dictionary. Diversity. 2019.
- [5] Cambridge Dictionary. Socioeconomic. 2019.
- [6] Lorraine, D., Emla, F. and Gill, W. 'The impact of tuition fees and support on university participation in the UK', *EconStor*, 11(17), 2011. p. 1-32.
- [7] Minty, S. 'Young people's attitudes towards tuition fees and debt in Scotland and England', University of Edinburgh, 2015.
- [8] Tsuo, K. 'Diversity for All: The Importance of Racial and Socioeconomic Diversity in Higher Education', The Century Foundation, 2019.

- [9] Pop, A. '12 Benefits of Summer School Abroad: Make the Summer of 2019 Unforgettable', Short courses portals, 2018.
- [10] Sutton Trust. Summer Schools. 2019.
- [11] Sutton Trust. Vast majority of Scottish access students go to college, not university. n. d.
- [12] The University of Edinburgh. How much will it cost. 2019.
- [13] The University of Edinburgh. The Scotland Scholarship. 2019.
- [14] University of Glasgow. English, Welsh and Northern Irish students. 2019.
- [15] Weedon, F et al. 'Access in Scotland', Sutton Trust, 2016.
- [16] Wikipedia. Tuition fees in the United Kingdom. n. d.
- [17] Sosu, E et al. 'Addressing socioeconomic inequality in access to university education: an analysis of synergies and tensions in Scottish policy', Nature, 18(152), 2018. p. 1-16.