

Universities scheme backs cutting entry requirements

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LOWERING university entry requirements for pupils from disadvantaged communities does not amount to “dumbing down”, new evidence shows.

Results from a pioneering national scheme to break the middle class stranglehold on professional degrees such as medicine and dentistry science show virtually identical drop-out and completion rates for both groups of students.

Under the Reach initiative, Scottish universities work alongside secondary schools with low participation rates in higher education.

Pupils who have an interest in studying dentistry, law, medicine, veterinary medicine and surgery are given experience of university learning and are supported through the application process.

Those who complete it can benefit from lower than normal entry requirements.

Such schemes have attracted criticism in the past because they are seen as “dumbing down”, but new statistics from Glasgow University show that is not the case.

Dr Neil Croll, the university’s head of widening participation, said: “More than 80 students who have come through our Reach programme are now graduating so now we know how well they are performing.

“Completion and continuation rates for all courses are above 90 per cent which is a similar level to the overall student cohort and exactly what we hoped the programme would do.”

Mr Croll said successive cohorts who were still progressing through their degrees

were also performing at the same level as the overall group.

He added: “This shows admitting these students to professional degrees has not affected or lowered performance standards which is the erroneous argument put forward to discredit or argue against widening participation.

“It also justifies our belief that pupils living in the most deprived postcode areas were just as talented and capable and had the same potential as their peers attending higher progression schools and living in more affluent areas.”

Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli, principal of Glasgow University, said the institution strived to attract the best and brightest of students regardless of background or economic circumstance.

He said: “We run multiple widening access programmes and put great emphasis on both engaging with schools and talking to pupils about why university, and particularly why Glasgow, should be an option for them.

“Reach is a vitally important part of that



commitment, providing access to pupils with an interest in and ability to study for a professional degree in dentistry, law, medicine or veterinary medicine and surgery.”

Shirley-Anne Somerville, minister for higher education, welcomed the progress highlighted under the Reach programme.

She said: “We are determined to ensure that every child gets an equal chance to fulfil their potential, regardless of circumstance. The achievements of these students demonstrate that background should be no barrier to success, with the right opportunities and support. It underscores the importance of our work to widen access to university.”

‘It gave me experience and confidence to reapply’

CASE STUDY

WITHOUT Glasgow University’s ground-breaking Reach programme Dagshagini Taylor would have struggled to fulfil her ambition of becoming a doctor.

The 23-year-old former pupil of St Roch’s Secondary School in

Royston, in the city’s east end, secured five As at Higher, but slipped up on the clinical aptitude test.

She said: “Getting into medical school was already a challenge for me because I was the first member of my family to go to university and the only person in my school applying to do medicine.

“Although I got my grades,

unfortunately I had an unsuccessful first application because of a lack of preparation and insight into the importance of the clinical aptitude test.

“The Reach programme gave me the experience and confidence I needed to successfully reapply.

“It is really important all schools like mine get the support needed to give pupils a fair fighting chance.”





Dagshagini Taylor was the first member of her family to go to university. Picture: Kirsty Anderson

