University of the Highlands and Islands
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd agus nan Eilean

University of the Highlands and Islands: Social Mobility and Widening Access

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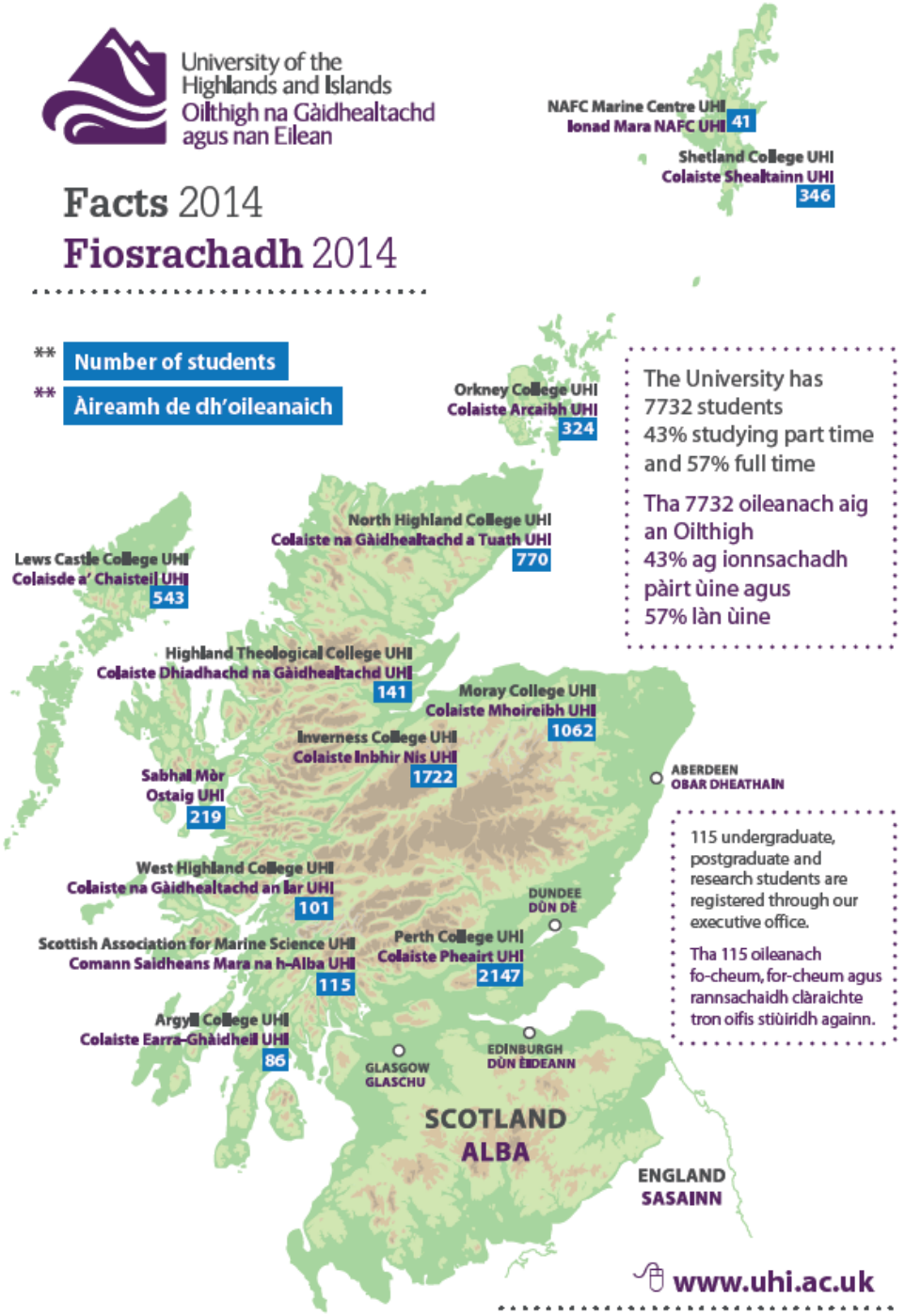
The University

Purpose:

The University of the Highlands and Islands will have a transformational impact on the development and prospects of the region, its people and its communities

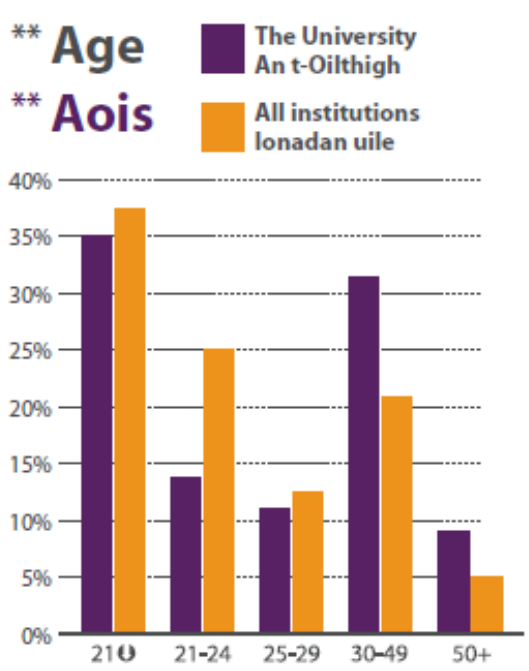
How we work:

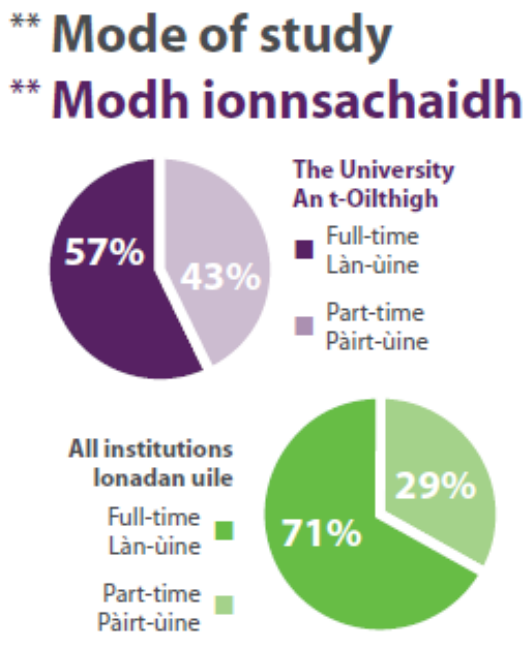
- Collegiate federal partnership: 13 partners.
- Over 50 outreach centres.
- Dual sector.
- 7,732 students.
- Blended pedagogy.



Our Students:

- 57% full time, 43% part time
- Just over half are over 25
- From HNC to PGR level





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Social Mobility and Widening Access: Island perspectives

The research projects

- Masters research into the experience of recent graduates living in Orkney.
- PhD research (on going) into the experience of students from Orkney and Shetland in HE: choices and subsequent career decisions.

Background:

- ‘Lost generation’ of 18-25 year olds (HIE, 2009a)[1]
- ‘quality of life’ as an attractor; ‘education’ and ‘employment’ as detractors (HIE, 2009b).
- Anecdotal evidence of non-completion because of difficulties adjusting to life ‘south’.
- ‘Mobility Capital’ is not equally possessed (Corbett, 2007).
- Post-graduation the role of the family home is still important (Pennington, 2013; Sage et al, 2012).

Findings: Transitions to HE

- HE: a narrative that is characterised by being ‘south’ and urban.
- Academic achievement led to an assumption that they would go to HE ‘south’
- Transitions to HE south often challenging – socially and culturally.

Findings: Transitions from HE

- 'Home' exerted a significant pull for some
- Job opportunities at 'home' were perceived as qualitatively different:
  - Lower salience of academic achievement.
  - Higher salience of experience & social networks.
  - Graduates need to maintain multiple 'identities'.
  - Skills needed include: flexibility, enterprise, problem solving.
  - Operating 'below the radar' with job search.

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Discussion of themes & the University of the Highlands and Islands' approach

Theme 1: Choices

- University established to offer HE in the area
- Curriculum strategy: core & specialist
- HE offering includes HNC & HND
- Close links with schools: FE & SCQF level 7 offering in schools

Adventure Tourism Management	BA (Hons)
Business	HNC
Business	HND
Business Administration	MBA
Business Leadership	PgCert
Business and Management	BA (Hons)
E-Marketing	MSc
Enterprise	PgCert
Enterprise and E-Marketing	MSc
Events	HNC
Golf Management	BA (Hons)
Health Leadership and Management	PgCert

Theme 2: Mobility

- Ability to move between campuses
- Blended pedagogy allows for networking across the partnership
- Students' association and activities allow development of student identity region-wide.

Theme 3: Labour market

- Specialist curriculum focused on the local labour market
- Placements: linking the labour market to the curriculum
- Specialist guidance services

Summary

- Island students may experience particular barriers to entering HE ‘south’.
- Some island graduates experience a significant ‘pull’ back home.
- For island students it is important that:
  - There is choice of HE provision.
  - Provision is flexible and allows some mobility
  - Provision is linked to the needs of the local labour market.

References

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