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# The Carnegie Education Fund

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*This year marks the 125th anniversary of The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland. As a Carnegie undergraduate fee grantee, I was among those invited to a celebratory event in Edinburgh to look back at the stories of the people and institutions the Trust has supported over the years and to hear about its plans for the future. My graduation 'story' was one of those displayed on a screen throughout the event.*

I was brought up in a typical Glasgow red sandstone tenement, a two-bedroomed rented flat, close to the shop in the Gorbals where my dad, a pharmacist, worked for a chain of chemists. My brother and I belonged to the so-called 'golden generation', children born between the mid 1940s and mid-1950s in Britain's newly minted welfare state, who were more likely to be upwardly socially mobile than any generation before or since. We both attended Battlefield Primary and Queen's Park Secondary Schools, non-denominational state schools with a mixed working-class and (mainly lower-) middle-class intake. With three 'Highers' and three 'Lowers', I enrolled at Jordanhill College of Education, emerging three years later in 1965 with a DCE (Distinction) in primary teaching and a new love, Philosophy, born whilst penning my final essay on a practice central to Scottish education and its Presbyterian heritage, *discipline*.

Two things stood in the way of following my new love: I had exhausted my local government grant entitlement, and I lacked one of the mandatory entry requirements for an Arts degree in Scotland –



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Higher Latin. Fortunately, the University of Glasgow waived the latter and allowed my college diploma to stand in for a year of undergraduate study. This meant that I could complete my Honours degree in Mental Philosophy in three, rather than the usual four, years. The Carnegie Trust Tuition Fee Grant of £197 awarded to me in 1965 covered my fees in full, which my parents could not have done, when the average UK salary was c. £800. I acquired two further degrees whilst working, a postgraduate MA in Education and a PhD in educational philosophy.

I owe my entire career as an educational researcher, adult educator and University professor to the Carnegie Trust. I am now Emeritus Professor of the University of Glasgow where I was Professor of Adult and Continuing Education, and Honorary Senior Research Fellow of its School of Education. I continue to write and publish books that aim to bridge the gap between the academic and the popular and to engage with social movements and a broader public. My book titles reflect this, including *The Stranger Within: On the Idea of an Educated Public* (2008); *Liberating Knowledge: Research, Feminism and Adult Education* (1999); *For a Radical Higher Education* (2003) with Tom Steele and Richard Taylor; and, most recently, *The Legacy: A Memoir – One Family's Role in Britain's Cover-Ups* (2022).

At the anniversary event referred to above, the history of the Trust was outlined by the Trust's Chairman, Ronnie Bowie, and its new five-year Strategic Plan announced by its Chief Executive, Dr Hannah Garrow. The plan reframes the Trust's founding aims in relation to the present higher education landscape, re-focusing its activities on promoting improvement within the wider higher education system as well as seeking to transform individuals' lives. To reflect the breadth of its mission, the Trust is adopting a new operating name for itself - the Carnegie Education Fund – whilst still officially retaining its original name.

The Carnegie Trust was established in 1901 through an endowment of $10 million in bonds donated by the Scottish-American philanthropist/industrialist Andrew Carnegie. Born in Dunfermline (where the Trust has its headquarters), he emigrated to Pennsylvania with his parents in 1848 aged 12 and went on



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to become one of the richest Americans in history. He believed that a university education should be attainable by any person of modest means who had the potential and motivation to learn at that level. By paying the fees of eligible students the Trust would, as its Strategic Plan for 2026-31 recalls, 'embed equity in Scotland's prestigious, but elitist higher education sector, granting access to the universities to those who would otherwise not have had the privilege'. Carnegie also saw the Trust as a vehicle for the improvement and expansion of Scotland's then struggling ancient universities. Within two years of its foundation, it was providing funding to around half the students attending university in Scotland. By the middle of the 20th century, it had transformed Scottish higher education through the creation of new buildings, libraries and laboratories, and the provision of student scholarships and grants towards research, travel and publication.

Joan Eardley, whose vibrant work is regularly on show at Edinburgh's Gallery of Modern Art, was a mid-century beneficiary of a Carnegie travel grant which facilitated her life-changing study tour of Italy from September 1948 to May 1949. Other famous alumni include Jennie Lee, a miner's daughter from Lochgelly, Fife, and the first Labour woman to represent a Scottish seat in the House of Commons. Half of her university tuition fees to attend the University of Edinburgh were paid by the Trust. She graduated with degrees in Arts and Law as well as a teaching certificate in 1927. After working briefly as a teacher, she was elected at a by-election, then general election, in 1929. In 1934 she married Aneurin Bevan who spearheaded the creation of Britain's National Health Service, launched in 1947, whilst Minister of Health in Attlee's new post-war Labour government.

Since 1901, the Trust has supported over 70,000 individuals. Today, the Scottish government's commitment to free university tuition fees means that most Scottish students who want to pursue a first undergraduate degree will have their fees covered. The Trust will continue to support students from low-income households who for one reason or another don't follow a straightforward path through higher education and do not qualify for government support. It will also introduce a new grant scheme to support low-income students to pursue postgraduate Masters degrees, and refocus its Vacation



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Scholarship scheme to support Scottish undergraduates from low-income households. Internship schemes to support such students to gain work experience are also under consideration, as are bursaries to supplement fee grants. In addition, it will fund research aimed at improved understanding of barriers to access and achievement for under-resourced and underrepresented groups; promote citizenship panels as part of a wider public conversation on these issues, and pursue debate among stakeholders about embedding equity of opportunity and outcome in higher education.

The SNP has now been in power in Scotland for nearly two decades, since 2007.

Over a decade ago, Lucy Hunter Blackburn pointed to mounting evidence that free university tuition represents a middle-class hand-out by stealth: 'It's superficially universal, but in fact it benefits the better-off most, and is funded by pushing the poorest students further and further into debt'. The final chapter of *Higher Education in Scotland and the UK*, a study of higher education policy across the UK, concludes that free university tuition in Scotland has not produced the egalitarian, progressive outcomes claimed for it (Riddell 2015). A critical analysis by Tim Wigmore in the *New Statesman*, on 15 December 2015, endorses this, explaining that as a result of prioritising universal free university tuition over targeted grants, the *worst* place for poor students in the UK is Scotland. When less generous spending on bursaries by Scottish universities is taken into account (English institutions spend more than three times as much on bursaries because of their student fee income), many disadvantaged Scottish students will graduate with larger debt burdens than equivalent students in England.

Furthermore, *Access in Scotland,* a report published in May 2016 by the Sutton Trust, warns that the free tuition fees policy has not improved application, acceptance or entry rates for the poorest in Scotland, as compared with countries that charge. It may even have backfired because of the need to cap the number of university places for home students so as to make the free tuition policy affordable. The failure of the Scottish university system to keep up with rising demand for places results in greater competition, and squeezing out youngsters from deprived backgrounds. In England, where the cap on



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places has been removed, students from less advantaged backgrounds are more likely to secure a university place.

It is in light of such findings that ten years on, the Carnegie Trust's current refocusing of its activities is welcome, including its plan to implement an internship scheme for graduates from low-income families, in view of the current crisis in young people's employment opportunities. As an independent body, it is not beholden to the Scottish government. As such, its reappraisal of the current higher education scene in Scotland, based on research, and the Trust's recalibration of its own role in relation to this, is of particular value.



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