

Universities Scotland Briefing: Scottish Government Debate: A Migration System that Meets the Needs of Scotland

The Scottish Government's paper, *Scotland's population needs and migration policy* is a valuable and evidence-based contribution to addressing Scotland's demographic challenges. We particularly note the document's reference to cross-party support in Scotland for a return to post-study work visas for international students.

What we would like to see from a future immigration system

- **The UK's decision to leave the EU offers an unparalleled opportunity** to review the whole migration system and build a future structure which maximises impact to the UK. That is what we want to see. It is imperative that the forthcoming Immigration Bill at Westminster works in such a way that universities can continue to access talent from across the EU but it also needs to open the UK up to the rest of the world on a competitive basis.
- **There is a strong case to support devolution of aspects of immigration policy.** We believe there is a strong and compelling case as articulated by Dr Eve Hepburn's study¹ to see some aspects of immigration policy devolved to Scotland. Scotland has different demographic challenges to other parts of the UK with 90% of projected population growth expected to depend on migration. In particular, Scotland could run a different system for post-study work VISAs from the rest of the UK with sufficient safe-guards built-in to ensure that international talent stayed in Scotland. All political parties in Scotland felt that could work (as stated in the March 2016 final recommendations of the cross-party post-study work group².)
- **Remove international students from the net migration targets.** Exit checks data published by the Home Office in August 2017 revealed 97.4% of international students who had visas expiring in 2016/17 had departed the country in time and in compliance with their visa. The figure for compliance with all visas (visit, work & study) is 96.3%. The Home Affairs Committee³ is the latest in a long line of bodies/organisations to recommend that international students are removed from the net migration target set by the UK Government, effective immediately.
- **We welcome the move to a more evidence-based approach taken by the UK Government.** Although belated, we very much welcome recent moves by the UK Government to establish a firmer evidence base for immigration policy. The publication of exit data in August 2017 and the Migration Advisory Committee's (MAC) call for evidence to assess the impact of international students are two such moves. We want this trend to continue.
- **The UK Government must work with the whole HE sector on merit in regards to immigration policy.** It is welcome that the Tier 4 pilot has been extended to include two Scottish universities in Glasgow and Edinburgh but the first phase of the pilot had no post-92 Higher Education Institution (HEI) involvement and the second phase (extended to an additional 23 HEIs) only includes 1 post-92 HEI. We understand that visa refusal rates were one of the deciding factors for participation but all Scottish HEIs are within the law in terms of the visa refusal rates allowed for Highly Trusted Sponsors. Every Scottish HEI is under 10%. We believe that any future policy announcements should be mindful the contribution that all parts of the sector make when taking forward immigration policy.
- **Simplifying employer sponsorship regulation.** Universities take their role as employee sponsors very seriously and comply fully with the law. We support any moves to make the process less

¹ http://www.parliament.scot/S5_European/General%20Documents/CTEER_Dr_Hepburn_report_2017.04.24.pdf

² <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/03/5056>

³ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmhaff/500/50002.htm>

onerous for legitimate sponsors with a track record of compliance and quality assurance. We believe this should happen as soon as possible.

International Students

Scottish universities are committed internationalists. Highly internationalised institutions are

linked to high-quality research and learning and teaching. In classrooms, international students provide diverse perspectives and create enduring networks and relationships. Fees paid by international students are an essential part of the financial sustainability of institutions⁴. More broadly, international students have a substantial positive economic impact on Scotland and foster 'soft power' relationships. International students also contribute to community development and support employment and the sustainability of services in the areas in which campuses are located.

Students at Scottish HEIs 2016-17¹

	Non-EU	EU excluding UK	UK
First Degree	12,180	14,040	134,905
Postgraduate (taught)	13,080	4,435	28,260
Postgraduate (research)	4,080	2,095	6,875

Economic contribution

Recent research by London Economics⁵ published in January 2018 identified the net economic impact to Scotland of international students entering higher education in 2015/16 to be £1.9 billion. Looking specifically at living costs, international students' spend in Scotland is estimated to have been £517.5 million in 2015-2016⁶. Alongside fees paid to institutions and living costs, spending by international students is a significant contribution to the economy. To this may be added spending by family and friends who visit students whilst they are studying, boosting tourism spend. Universities Scotland estimates this tourism spend was £25.7 million in 2015/16 in Scotland⁷.

Impact on Scottish students

International student demand and participation in higher education in Scotland allows universities to offer a wider range of courses, whilst diversity in classrooms provides home students with better learning outcomes. Under Scotland's HE quality enhancement approach, the sector has conducted work on graduate attributes for the 21st century.⁸ One of eight key attributes is 'global citizenship'. A diverse campus supports the development of skills and attributes by all students, UK, EU and non-EU. This resonates with a review by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy,⁹ which noted that diversity on campus provides students with an international outlook and networks for personal and professional development.

Impact on course provision

For some universities, in some courses at the taught postgraduate level, international students count for as much as 63% of all students, and it is not uncommon for international students to make up 30-50% of enrolments in some courses, at some HEIs in Scotland. Universities' ability to attract students from outside of the UK is an important element in the sustainability of some courses, and therefore the opportunities available to Scottish-domiciled students and the strategic skills capacity of the economy more broadly. The demand for courses by international students can provide Scottish HEIs with a competitive edge as some courses, particularly from small, specialist institutions, are rare or not offered anywhere else in the world.

⁴ Audit Scotland (2016) [Audit of Higher Education in Scottish Universities](#) p49-50

⁵ London Economics. The costs and benefits of international students by parliamentary constituency

⁶ US figures 2015/16 based on BIGGAR Economics methodology

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⁸ <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/publications/graduates-for-the-21st-century-integrating-the-enhancementthemes-leaflet.pdf>

⁹ Global Growth and Prosperity: An Accompanying Analytical Review (2013)



International Staff

Higher education stands to be one of the Scottish sectors most impacted by Brexit. 11% of all university staff in Scotland are from the EU (Over 5,090 full person equivalent in 2015/16) in total in Scotland, which accounts to 17% of academics and 24.8% of research-only staff FPE). In total, 8,450 staff working in Scottish HE (FPE) are non UK nationals. That's 19% of our total workforce from outside of the UK. This covers everyone from our research stars to our operations staff covering essential functions like laboratory support and caretaking. We need a new immigration system, post-Brexit that recognises how important access to talent – at all levels – is to higher education.

International (non-EU) staff are particularly important as researchers in the science, technology and engineering disciplines where they form a higher proportion of staff:

- 20% of research staff in biological, mathematical and physical sciences are non-EU international
- 30% of research staff in engineering and technology are non-EU international
- 22% per cent of researchers in design, creative and performance arts are non-EU international¹⁰

ENDS

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Universities Scotland represents Scotland's 19 higher education institutions. We welcome the opportunity to submit our briefing ahead of the Scottish Government debate on A Migration System that Meets the Needs of Scotland. For over 600 years, Scottish universities have shaped many of the world's best and brightest minds. Higher education remains one of Scotland's most influential exports on the international stage.

¹⁰ HESA Staff record 2013/14

