

# Colleges Scotland's Submission to the Scottish Affairs Inquiry on UK Immigration Policy

## 1. Introduction

Colleges Scotland is the collective voice for the college sector in Scotland, representing its interests and ensuring that colleges are at the heart of a world class education sector that is recognised, valued and available to all. Colleges Scotland, as the membership body, represents all 26 colleges in Scotland, which deliver both further education and around 28% of the provision of all higher education in Scotland.

## 2. Area of Focus

One of the key areas of focus for the college sector is to ensure that the approach to immigration for Scotland supports colleges in their achievement of providing the skilled workforce required to support an increase in Scotland's productivity and wider economic growth.

In order to achieve this, there are a number of key issues on which Colleges Scotland is seeking proactive interventions from the UK Government. These are set out further in this submission.

## 3. Colleges Play a Vital Role

The college sector plays a vital role in providing support to a thriving and growing economy. A sustainable college sector brings positive benefits to learners, society and the economy and allows Scotland's colleges to contribute to government strategies and policy direction. Colleges in Scotland:

- play a vital role in contributing to increased productivity and economic growth through the training of a skilled workforce and delivering skills and process innovation, particularly for SMEs
- are the key deliverer of the skilled workforce needed to work in a modern economy.
- are focused on skills and process innovation i.e. delivery and design, industry engagement, networking, bespoke and transitional training, transfer of skills and knowledge exchange.
- have a key role to play in encouraging and supporting an innovative economy, facilitating knowledge transfer of skills for innovation within the economy, providing business incubator space and ensuring access to resources to aid the start-up of ventures.
- will generate additional value worth £20 billion for the Scottish economy in the long term. This represents an additional £55,000 boost to productivity in the Scottish economy per graduate over their working lives<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Fraser of Allander Institute, *The value of college graduates to the Scottish economy*, 2017.

## 4. Key Issues

### Influence of Scottish Labour Market Needs

Future immigration policy should allow Scotland to address and influence the labour market needs within the country. This must be undertaken in such a way as to ensure that the regional context and differences in skills needs are able to be addressed.

It should be ensured that changes to the immigration system as part of Brexit negotiations do not damage the Scottish economy. For example, the tourism sector and the food and drink industry contribute substantially to Scotland's economy. Almost a third of EU nationals in employment in Scotland work in the distribution, hotels and restaurant sector<sup>2</sup>. The success of these sectors is, therefore, heavily dependent on the contribution from EU migrants living and working in Scotland.

One aspect of this is to ensure that the Scottish Shortage Occupation List has greater links to the skills needs reports which identify the skill shortages within Scotland and its regions.

### Post-study Work Visas

The abolition of post-study work visas by the UK government in 2012 has been an issue of concern for Scotland's colleges. These visas allowed recent graduates to work or set up businesses in the UK for 24 months following the completion of their studies, which retained skilled and educated graduates as part of the labour force.

International students from around the world enrich the experience of Scottish learners by providing a more diverse pool of learners, with a broader global perspective. Such cultural exchanges benefit everyone as well as helping to promote Scotland.

Colleges Scotland would want to see any future approach to immigration policy undertaken in such a way that there can be a re-introduction of post-study work visas. This could be achieved, for example, by changing the current Tier 4 rules to give students an exemption from the Points Based System or through the introduction of a Scottish study visa. This would attract more overseas students thus enhancing the college experience for all while retaining skilled graduates who contribute to the Scottish economy.

In July 2016, a two-year pilot was agreed by the Home Office, easing student visa rules at four English universities. The universities involved in the pilot are responsible for eligibility checks, and students within the pilots are allowed to stay in the UK for six months after the end of their courses to find a graduate job here. Colleges Scotland is disappointed that no Scottish institutions were included in the pilots, and would be supportive of expanding the pilots to Scotland.

### Brexit

Colleges in Scotland have a history of attracting staff and students from around the world and leading on key overseas projects, and want to maintain this work and relationships with European partners at all levels.

The college sector is already working in collaboration with other key stakeholders in Scotland to further increase the opportunities presented by seeking to work in an international context. This includes a desire from several colleges to look at ways in which they can work in partnership in relation to gaining further inroads into international markets. Therefore, it must be ensured that any post-Brexit immigration arrangements adequately provide for Scotland's needs.

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<sup>2</sup> SPICe, *EU Nationals Living in Scotland*, 2016.

### **Provision of Training Post-Brexit**

Once any particular restrictions post-Brexit are more clearly known, an exercise should be undertaken to identify the additional workforce training requirements. It will be important to ensure that the college sector is adequately funded and able to deliver the necessary skills training to provide businesses with the skilled workforce required to fill the needs identified in any particular region. This will include employability training for Scottish domiciled students to prepare an individual for the workforce and will be particularly important if there are any restrictions in relation to access to immigrants who have historically undertaken particular roles.

### **Students in Colleges**

Students have benefitted from EU funding which ensures places are available, in state-of-the-art college campuses, with the opportunity to undertake study or placement within Europe either through the Erasmus+ scheme or other mechanisms. The system, by which EU students are entitled to access education with the equivalent standing to Scottish domiciled students, has ensured college campuses are diverse and students experience different cultural and educational perspectives to their own thus enhancing their academic, social and cultural knowledge. Post-Brexit arrangements should be put in place to ensure that EU students can continue to study at Scotland's colleges.

### **Staff in Colleges**

Colleges have benefitted from freedom of movement of people as a result of membership of the EU. Participation in EU Framework Programmes has enriched the talent pool for staff, where ease of travel has afforded opportunities for UK staff. Consideration should be given to providing new and additional safeguards to protect a withdrawal of EU talent from the UK, including a similar exemption for other skilled educators and highly-skilled staff. As of 31 March 2017, there were 11,064 people employed in colleges in Scotland, 3% of whom identified as non-UK EU nationals<sup>3</sup>.

### **Cultural Exchange Programmes**

The opportunity for student exchange within Europe enriches the learning experience, enhances employability and promotes greater understanding and respect of different people and cultures. Colleges Scotland considers programmes such as Erasmus to be extremely beneficial and it would be a considerable loss if some equivalent arrangements are not introduced as the UK leaves the EU. Consideration should be given to whether any negotiated settlement would allow continued participation in programmes like Erasmus for college students in Scotland to be able to study abroad, and to facilitate EU students to continue to study in the UK. Alternatively, a replacement structure should be set up to allow the benefits of exchange programmes to continue to be available to Scottish students. It should be noted that Scotland's colleges serve learners from the most deprived circumstances, for whom such provision made available through the education setting may be their only opportunity for travel outside of the UK.

## **5. Summary**

Colleges have a significant positive effect on learners, businesses, communities and the economy, and this is enhanced by both inward investment from abroad and the presence of international students and staff. As mentioned earlier in this submission, Scotland's colleges will generate an estimated additional value worth £20 billion for the Scottish economy in the long term<sup>4</sup>.

It is vital that there is an approach to immigration for Scotland that supports colleges in their achievement of providing the skilled workforce required by industry and in widening access to all, both of which contribute to a growing economy in Scotland.

Colleges Scotland  
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<sup>4</sup> Fraser of Allander Institute, *The value of college graduates to the Scottish economy*, 2017.