

MSP Briefing: Scottish Government Debate – The Impact of Immigration Policy on Higher Education in Scotland

Thursday 29 April 2014

1. Summary

Traditionally, Scotland's colleges have been able to recruit internationally. However, priorities have changed with the move to reform and regionalisation, and colleges have to consider carefully what international activity including recruiting overseas students is part of their delivery plan.

A study¹ from December 2012 showed that in 2010/11, Scotland's colleges generated £32.5m from non-EU international student tuition and from educational and general services. This was around 4% of the sector's income and is separate from international students' off-campus expenditure, which was estimated to be around £6.1m.

2. International Students

Over the years, the number of EU/European students has fallen significantly. As colleges have reduced their student recruitment activity outside Scotland, this likely accounts for a portion of that fall. It is also possible that the changing economic circumstances have reduced migration for this group towards college study.

Table 1: No of Non UK Students

Student Type	2009/10	2010/11	2011-12	2012/13	% Change between 09/10 – 12/13
EU	2223	951	760	542	- 76%
Europe	122	565	32	31	- 75%
International	2414	2388	1879	1097	- 55%

Source: SFC Infact database

3. Immigration

Currently, UK Border Agency (UKBA) applies a points based system to manage UK immigration. Tier 4 of this system is the primary immigration route available to students who want to study full-time in the UK. The students must be sponsored by an education provider that has a sponsor licence. When a college applies for a Tier 4 sponsor licence it is awarded an A-rating which is transitional for 12 months. The college must apply for Highly Trusted Status (HTS) during this transition period.

The UK government has a target to reduce the number of student visas issued by 25%, in line with its wider policy of reducing immigration to the United Kingdom.² As such, they have closed the post-study work visa to new students. This change came into effect in April 2012.

¹ [The Economic Impact of the International Activity of Scotland's Colleges](#)

² <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/jun/13/foreign-student-visa-numbers-cut>

Colleges Scotland believes that students should be excluded from UK objectives on reducing net migration. Students tend to stay for their period of study and then return to their home country and therefore should not be considered in the same way as other groups. Correspondingly, the UK government should reintroduce a post-study work visa. This would encourage more talented people from around the world to further their education in Scotland, enhance our global standing and support economic growth.

The college sector would welcome the opportunity to work with the Scottish Government to shape the processes and ensure consistency in granting and maintaining HTS status in light of the new regional college model.

4. Future Support

Given the positive benefits to the Scottish economy, culture, to colleges' scope and reputation, and the learner experience from attracting international students is an area that is worthy of further exploration as to how colleges can be supported, irrespective of whether there is constitutional change forthcoming.

Colleges Scotland: This briefing has been provided by Colleges Scotland for MSPs' information. More information can be found on www.collegesscotland.ac.uk.

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