

MSP Briefing: Scottish Government Debate – Post Study Work Visas

Tuesday 24 March 2015

1. Summary

The abolition of post-study work visas by the UK government in 2012 has been an issue of concern to Scotland's 26 colleges. These visas allowed recent graduates to work or set up businesses in the UK for 24 months, which retained skilled and educated graduates as part of the labour force. The post-study work visa encouraged international students to come to Scotland as the ability to stay, and work, is an important factor when choosing a place to study.

International students enrich the experience of Scottish learners by providing a more diverse pool of learners, with a broader global perspective. The cultural exchange benefits everyone as well as helping to promote Scotland, internationally.

The re-introduction of a post-study work visa would attract overseas students thus enriching the college experience for all whilst retaining skilled graduates who contribute to our economy.

2. 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 migration to Britain. As such, they have closed the post-study work visa to new students. This change came into effect in April 2012.

Colleges Scotland believes that students should be excluded from UK objectives on reducing net migration and that the post-study work visa should be reintroduced. This would encourage more talented people from around the world to further their education in Scotland, enhance our global standing and support economic growth.

3. International Students

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.

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

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 and the abolition of the post-study work visa 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	2013/14	% Change between 09/10 – 13/14
EU	2223	951	760	682	565	- 75%
Europe	122	565	32	42	23	- 81%
International	2414	2388	1879	1837	1850	- 23%

Source: SFC Infact database

4. Future Opportunities

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. The re-introduction of a post-study work visa would help to promote Scotland, and Scottish colleges, as a destination for international students and retain talented graduates who contribute to the economy.

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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