

European and External Relations Committee

Connecting Scotland: how Scotland can engage most effectively in a globalising world

Background

Traditionally, Scotland's colleges have been active players on the international market, both in terms of recruiting international students and pursuing markets to identify commercial opportunities, however this position altered following the reform and regionalisation of the college sector and the Office of National Statistics (ONS) reclassification of incorporated colleges in 2013. These significant changes brought several areas of complexity as well greater accountability to the Scottish Government. Today, colleges now have to consider carefully what international activity, including recruiting overseas students is part of their delivery plan. Any commercial income streams received are considered in addition to the grant funding received from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and a college would need to spend this income in the same year, otherwise the college would need to sterilise the cash and would not be able to use it or move the monies into an arms length foundation.

Even with all the complexities, there are a number of colleges who continue to be leaders in specialist niche markets, with considerable potential to attract more international business and enhance Scotland's reputation in those markets.

In 2013, the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Michael Russell, asked Stephen Magee, Regional Chair – Fife College to lead on the development of '*A Framework for the Future of Internationalisation*' for the college sector. The framework was founded on a number of key principles to which colleges were asked to subscribe to by the Scottish Government, and which sets a standard for the college sector as a whole. In 2014, the framework was published and endorsed by the Scottish Government, SFC and the Colleges Scotland Board, and is what the college sector abides to today in relation to internationalisation. A copy of the Framework is provided in Appendix 1.

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 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

Post-Study Work Visas

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 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.

The Future

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.

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.

May 2015
Colleges Scotland

Framework for the Future of Internationalisation

Introduction

This Framework for the Future of Internationalisation is founded on a number of key principles to which Colleges are asked to subscribe, and which set a standard for the College sector as a whole.

The establishment of a College sector framework will ensure that international activities are undertaken in a context of recognising the core purpose of Colleges and ensuring those activities do not detract from that core purpose but are aligned and complimentary in terms of business and educational benefits. The intention is to promote clarity in respect of risk assessment, business and educational justification in order to provide the necessary platform to assure government, other stakeholders and the public generally that the Sector takes internationalisation seriously and responsibly but also seeks to encourage entrepreneurial initiative.

The College sector will seek to increase outward mobility of Scottish students to enhance experience and learning, while simultaneously attempting to recruit international students and inward mobility through exchange. Individual institutions may also seek to develop off-site provision in identified areas of expertise and in some instances may wish to establish overseas campuses. Potential exists not only for collaboration between colleges but also with universities.

It is recognized that not all colleges will be equally willing or have the capacity to internationalise in the same way or at the same pace but all can learn from shared experience based on accepted principles of good practice.

It is recognized that there will be occasions where competition will arise within the Sector but equally that collaboration may be the preferred solution especially with regard to capacity. The principles established will support the wider aspirations of the sector and specifically develop international activities that foster positive change. Through appropriate reporting it will also be possible not only to provide timely indication of ongoing international initiatives but also to have available a regularly updated and accurate overall national picture of such activities.

Overall the College sector will seek to establish a supportive environment for international initiatives and to work with Colleges Scotland, Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Funding Council to ensure sector-wide recognition of opportunity and expertise, opportunities, potential and appropriate analysis of risk.

Principles

Accountability and transparency, with a minimum of associated bureaucracy and process, but firmly founded, will be informed by the key principles set out in the Annex. These principles will inform a 'light touch' infrastructure that will be coordinated by Colleges Scotland and reported to Colleges Scotland Committee for Corporate Affairs.

This will enable the process of sectoral self-regulation of international activities in a transparent manner that can assure boards, government and other stakeholders, and the public generally, that funds are appropriately expended, that potential and actual surpluses benefit both the individual institutions which earned them, and therefore the sector as a whole, and that risks have been considered and assessed and therefore that unnecessary risks are not being taken in relation to potential public liability.

Accepting such principles will also allow for the systematic preparation, use and sensitive sharing of intelligence on internationalisation that can help inform future activity and growth. Wider use and development of market analysis and intelligence should help focus effort, achieve economies of scale, stimulate market advantage and generally help promote and augment appropriate internationalisation for colleges.

In addition, these principles should allow for increasing and improving dialogue and collaboration with a range of partner organisations and agencies including universities, industry and SDI/SCDI which in turn could lead to further opportunities. It is also hoped that through these principles even higher standards in international work may ultimately be achieved and this in turn will enhance the reputation of colleges by creating more value add relationships and stature. Furthermore, Colleges Scotland will be better able to contribute to the appropriate policy environment on internationalisation, providing an important link to other sectors and stakeholders, and a more focused opportunity to influence and inform.

This framework, based on these clear principles, will enable the sector to provide an accurate, responsible and up-to-date picture of sector activity at any given time. This in itself will demonstrate that the sector recognises the need for accountability and is prepared to own its own activities as an integral an essential part of encouraging responsible initiatives. Although the process will provide early indication of any given college's intentions, and a robust picture of the scope of international activity within the sector will emerge; a stronger more cohesive sector 'voice' will be established whilst not prejudicing the need for effective competitive responses by individual institutions or consortia to perceived opportunities. It should also ensure that careful and clear risk assessment and appropriate mitigation measures are in place.

Process - Information Gathering and Reporting

Colleges Scotland will effectively maintain the national picture for internationalisation of the sector providing for sector level reporting of such activities. To achieve a balance of requiring regular updates from all colleges engaged in international activity, but through colleges themselves ensuring that the national database is informed as activities are developed, Colleges Scotland will build upon the existing platform created through the initial audit of activity undertaken earlier this year, and already summarized for the college chairs, to create a central database of international engagement throughout the sector.

To ensure accurate records are held and updated bi-annually, there are some key steps that need to be undertaken. Firstly colleges are requested to provide a copy to Colleges Scotland of their international development strategy which will be a key aspect of constructing a national database. Secondly, Colleges will also be requested to agree to a standard form of regular reporting which will be developed by the sector and Colleges Scotland, to collate the necessary information to ensure a national position can be reliably articulated.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is the key paramount component for this sectoral process and all information provided by Colleges will only be used for the purposes of satisfying the need for effective governance of international engagement, thereby ensuring accountability and transparency while maintaining 'a light' approach to reporting of international activities.

Annex

Commitments to Excellence in International Development

Colleges should:

- have in place a coherent strategy for international activity, developed in consultation with key internal and external stakeholders.
- have in place efficient and effective mechanisms to identify, assess and develop international opportunities which are aligned to their strategic priorities and demonstrate best value based on clear cost/benefit analyses.
- ensure that timely indication of proposed international activity is noted to Colleges Scotland and where necessary to the Scottish Government when appropriate risk assessment has been carried out.
- work with SDI, Colleges Scotland and other stakeholders as appropriate to develop mechanisms to support the internationalisation of Scottish Further and Vocational Education and expertise.
- seek to work collaboratively, where appropriate, with other regional colleges, universities or other providers to optimise resources and promote the Scottish brand overseas through recognition of individual institutional strengths.
- have in place robust criteria against which costs and benefits can be measured and a scheme of financial delegation, consistent with a college's strategy and which have been approved by the relevant Board of Governance.
- have available a robust business case in relation to the likely financial gains, incorporating clear budgets and evidence of capability as well as to any further added educational value to be secured by international activity.
- establish the benefits of internationalisation for a college as whole in developmental terms for staff and students.
- be able to demonstrate that the capacity to deliver any specific international activity has been assessed and that any consequences for a college's core business is accounted for.
- be able to show when a sectoral collaboration would be inappropriate or constrain competition in relation to established niches or proposed areas of development identified strategically.
- designate a Board Committee with responsibility for the oversight of international activity.
- ensure comprehensive support for international students whilst studying and living in Scotland.
- have in place up to date risk assessments, insurances and clear protocols for staff and students travelling or engaged in overseas activities.
- look for best value when engaged in international recruitment and in-country delivery.

It is expected that these commitments are understood across the sector in a context both of working with SDI and Colleges Scotland to develop robust market intelligence to support international activity, growth and diversification and working to promote, on an annual basis, the achievements and impact of international activity across the sector.