Introduction

Edinburgh University Students’ Association (EUSA) welcomes much of what is included in the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill. We particularly look forward to progression with the provisions relating to widening access and university governance. However, EUSA would like to see included in the bill regulations for international student tuition fees and further provisions to ensure that students from the rest of the UK are not discouraged from studying in Scotland as a result of increased tuition fees. EUSA calls for:

RUK students
- A lower cap on the maximum fee that institutions can charge students from the rest of the UK (RUK).
- A provision to ensure that institutions put a percentage of the income from RUK fees back into bursaries for students.

International students
- Fixed fees for international students - annual tuition fees that are fixed at the same rate for the duration of a student’s course.

RUK students

EUSA believes that education should be free and that RUK students should not be charged tuition fees. If the Scottish Government continues to allow institutions to charge these students fees then we believe that the bill should set a fee level which institutions cannot vary. Failing that we think that the bill should set a lower cap on RUK tuition fees to ensure that at the very least these students do not pay more than the average total that they would pay for a three year degree in England.

As the bill currently stands RUK students studying for a four year degree in some universities in Scotland will pay £36,000 - the most expensive in the whole of the UK and one of the most expensive in Europe. We recognise that RUK fees have increased in response to actions by the Westminster Government but surely this goes beyond what is necessary and may even discourage potential RUK students from studying in Scotland.

As well as fixing a lower cap EUSA would like the bill to require institutions to put a percentage of the income from RUK fees back into bursaries for students. The University of Edinburgh has promised to put 54% of the fee income towards bursaries, meaning that the poorest students will receive £7,000 financial support per year. This will help to mitigate the impact of increased fees on RUK students and help to ensure
that the University can still attract the brightest of students regardless of background. Requiring all institutions to do this would help to further efforts to improve widening access and complement outcome agreements.

**International student fees**

EUSA believes that the bill should include regulations for international student tuition fees. Tuition fees for international students are currently unregulated and this has led to variable fees across institutions and across courses. These fees often increase each year of study without students being aware that this will happen making it difficult for students and their families to plan financially for their studies.

EUSA would ideally like to see a cap on international student tuition fees and for institutions to apply a fixed fee across each year of study so that fees do not unexpectedly increase. At the very least we would like international student tuition fees to increase with inflation rates and no higher, and for students to know well in advance of the start of their studies what each year will cost them. Fixed fees would enable students and their families to budget better in advance for their studies in Scotland helping to prevent unexpected financial problems when they are here.

We know that unexpected fee increases create considerable pressure on international students and their families. International student tuition fees are already considerably higher than fees for other students so increasing fees yearly without notice makes it even harder for these students. On top of that stricter visa rules introduced by the Westminster Government are creating further barriers for international students studying in the UK. Unfair fee policy could damage Scotland’s reputation globally and discourage international students from studying in Scotland. The Scottish Government should show that rather than placing barriers in their way it wants to welcome talented international students to our universities.

*James McAsh*

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