

CROSS PARTY GROUP (CPG) ON SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

13.00 – 14:00 on Wednesday 14 December 2016, Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament

Post Study Work Visas (PSWV) and Immigration

Note of Meeting

Present:

Ms Elizabeth Smith MSP	Scottish Parliament	CPG Convener
Mr Iain Gray MSP	Scottish Parliament	CPG Deputy Convener
Ms Joanne Buchan	Colleges Scotland	
Dr Martin Campbell	University of St Andrews	
Ms Risga Carson	NUS Scotland	
Mr Vincent Chung	Thorntons Law	
Mr Martin Fairbairn	Scottish Funding Council	
Ms Moira Gibson	University of Edinburgh	
Ms Naomi Graham	Edinburgh Napier University	
Prof Grant Jarvie	University of Edinburgh	
Mr Chris Land	Scottish Parliament	
Ms Susannah Lane	Universities Scotland	
Professor Matthew MacIver	University of the Highlands and Islands	
Mr Ian Maclellan	University of Strathclyde	
Mr Stephen Magee	Forth College	
Mr Ryan McFadden	Glasgow Caledonian University	
Ms Joanna McGillivray	City of Glasgow College	
Mr Duncan McKay	Universities Scotland	
Mr Alastair Merrill	University of St Andrews	
Ms Tope Orororo	Heriot-Watt University	
Ms Vonnie Sandlan	NUS Scotland	
Ms Jane Scott	Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	
Ms Alison Shields	Heriot Watt University	
Mr Alastair Sim	Universities Scotland	
Ms Heather Sloan	Universities Scotland	
Mr Kenny Stewart	The Open University in Scotland	
Mr Eóin Welsh	West College Scotland	
Mr Andrew Witty	Colleges Scotland	

Apologies:

Mr Peter Aitchison	University of Glasgow
Mr Paul Bradley	EUSA
Prof Alan Dearle	University of St Andrews
Professor Charlie Jeffery	University of Edinburgh

Ms Fiona Larg	University of the Highlands and Islands
Ms Monica Lennon MSP	Scottish Parliament
Dr Finlay MacCorquodale	Edinburgh Napier University
Dr Judith McClure	Scotland China Education Network (SCEN)
Professor Clive Mulholland	University of the Highlands and Islands
Ms Margaret Munckton	Perth College, UHI
Ms Elizabeth Passey	University of Glasgow
Ms Rebecca Scarlett	Lead Scotland
Ms Linda Somerville	NUS Scotland
Mr Martyn Spence	Heriot-Watt University
Ms Shona Struthers	Colleges Scotland

1. Welcome and introduction from the Convener

The Deputy Convener, Mr Iain Gray MSP, welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the CPG on Colleges and Universities in session 5 of the Scottish Parliament, on the topic of Post study Work Visas (PSWV) and UK immigration policy as it relates to international students and universities and colleges. Mr Gray welcomed the speakers:- Mr Stephen Magee, Regional Chair, Fife College; Mr Ian Maclellan, Student Support and Wellbeing Manager, University of Strathclyde; and Ms Tope Orororo, and International post-graduate Student, Heriot-Watt University.

Mr Gray thanked Colleges Scotland for sponsoring the lunch for the meeting.

2. Apologies and approval of Minute from 5 October 2016

Apologies were noted and the minute was approved.

3. Introduction to topic of Post Study Work Visas (PSWV) and Immigration.

Mr Gray invited the speakers to make their presentations.

Mr Stephen Magee, Regional Chair, Fife College.

Mr Magee described the current approach on Post Study Work Visas (PSWV) as ‘scunnersome’ and as being a ‘dis-benefit’ socially, economically and educationally. He outlined seven points by way of context:-

1. Education as an export is disincentivised by the withdrawal of PSWV;
2. Education and employment are inextricably linked. Mr Magee commented that international students choose to make an investment in their education which should be met with the opportunity for employment. It is problematic if this is not recognised.
3. Mr Magee illustrated the economic disbenefit of the current system, where the number of international students coming to the UK is limited, pointing out income generated through international students paying fees and that 35 per cent of all students at St Andrews are non-EU.)

4. Education of undergraduates whether in college or University leads to future research and development to say nothing of mitigating skills shortages and securing mutual direct benefit for student and society. Not having this mix will be a disbenefit and institutions will be 'monochrome'.
5. Current UK policy is anti-competitive in respect of Australia, Canada and the USA. Australia used to have a similar PSW to the UK but now has a graduate work stream, allowing international graduates to stay and work for up to 18 months, and PSW stream up to four years. Canada has a post-graduation work permit up to 3 years and a Provincial Nominee Scheme. The USA, which shut down to international students post-9/11, now has Optional Practical training at 1 year for all international students and up to two years more for international STEM graduates.
6. There is a strong case for 'exceptionalism' for Scotland when it comes to immigration policy. Students should be excluded from the category of immigrant; the register of recognised institutions should be refined; a Fresh Talent Scheme should be reprised or there should at least be some mitigation of the anti-competitive Tier 2 and Tier 4 policies.
7. The UK has created an image of an unwelcoming and actively hostile education destination. This must be combatted.

In closing, Mr Magee tabled recent examples of front page coverage in Indian newspapers of UK Government plans which reflected the view that the UK is seen as actively hostile to international students in some priority countries.

Mr Ian Maclellan, University of Strathclyde, member of the Scottish Government's Post Study Work Steering Group and a member of UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA).

Mr Maclellan informed the group that Universities Scotland estimated that international students generate around £900 million of income every year (£400m in fees and £500 around the wider economy/off-campus expenditure.) Universities Scotland also estimated that £250m had been lost in revenue from a fall in students from key markets. He reported that in the college sector £8.5m of revenue has been lost to the economy, with publicly funded FE colleges being 'hammered' in an attempt to shut down bogus colleges.

Mr Maclellan explained that the UK is perceived as being unwelcoming, with negative press coverage. The UK talks about being welcoming but is not, and students found that the PSW experience they thought they would have had been withdrawn. He advised that the Chinese market had not been hit as badly compared to India or Pakistan, however currently the sector is very reliant on recruitment from China, 'the tap might be switched off' and diversification is necessary. Mr MacLellan explained that PSW is important to students to recovering their investment (which can cost £30k for business students), and as a way of paying back a commercial or family loan.

Mr Maclellan commented on how PSW has advantages to employers and the wider economy and informed members that we have a skills gap (for example 257,000 vacancies are expected to be in the engineering industry in 2022) and an ageing population (we need young people with talent to remain in this country). International students are valued by employers as give a different perspective and bring understanding of overseas markets and attitudes. On returning home, they provide international

collaboration and a future link for an employer in overseas markets, which is beneficial to our economy.

Addressing the current system members were informed that alternatives to PSW are limited:-

- Tier 2 – there are disincentives for smaller employers to engage. Salary thresholds, set at £20,280 for graduate level recruitment, are unhelpful, particularly outside London. Tier 2 works for bigger employers who can employ staff who specialise in navigating immigration, which is not so easy for SMEs. There is the perception that it is a difficult Tier, with a lot of administration, so SMEs are reluctant to take on the expense and red-tape involved in becoming a licenced ‘sponsor’ for international students. This missed opportunity is potentially a significant but unquantified opportunity cost to the UK economy. There will be multiple occasions where an international candidate is clearly the best candidate for the job and could potentially deliver a big return for the company.) In 2011 just over 46,000 students moved into PSW across the UK, compared with 4,176 into Tier 2 in 2013 and 5,639 in 2014. This is possibly as a result of changes to Tier 2 and increasing understanding of Tier 2 options. Additionally, some students wishing to stay in the UK to work may be using the Doctorate Extension Scheme (DES) rather than looking to transition to a Tier 2 visa. (The DES, introduced in 2013, allows PhD students nearing the completion of their Doctorate to extend their Tier 4 visa by 12 months to look for and start work in the UK.)
- Tier 5 – is difficult for employers to understand as it is currently a variety of schemes within the same tier which can be highly confusing.
- Tier 1 for graduate entrepreneur – which has 1,900 places available across the UK is attracting only ‘a handful’ of international graduates. In 2014 there were only 564 successful applicants.

Ms Tope Orororo, Heriot-Watt University, International Postgraduate student, from Nigeria, studying MA Fashion and Design at the University’s Borders Campus in Galashiels.

Ms Orororo explained that her course is a taught post graduate programme exploring new opportunities in fashion and textiles. It juxtaposes traditional and contemporary methods in fashion and textiles through research; the course is focused on the challenges and evolving nature of the fashion industry.

Ms Orororo reflected that it was unfortunate, in her view, that the PSWV was scrapped as the benefits are enormous to both parties; the students and the host country. She advised that the opportunity to stay and work for a short period after graduation is sought after by international students as- the experience gained in post study work cannot be achieved in the classroom.

Ms Orororo advised that amongst her peer group in Nigeria, prospective international students, no-one talks about the UK as a potential destination for study any more. Canada, Dubai and Mauritius are favoured over the UK now as a result of changes to UK policy. She suggested that issues such as the cost of tuition, living expenses, and the introduction of health surcharges for international students and minimum income have discouraged students from Africa, especially Nigeria. The perception is that this has been a deliberate deterrent. Ms Orororo commented “No nation of the world can stand alone. The UK should not feel like it can stand alone. You need us and we need you.”

Ms Orororo said that her experience of university in Scotland and of Scotland in general had been very positive. She commented that the people in Scotland are amazing, it is a friendly environment and her experience has been wonderful, with good tutors.

4. Discussion and questions

The Vice-Convener thanked the speakers for their contributions and opened the floor for discussion. Mr Fairbairn (Scottish Funding Council) offered a personal reflection and stated that the whole area of immigration policy is a 'two-way street' and this country needs to play its part in giving the same opportunities to students as other countries are doing for our home students, and that a few years ago we had this arrangement. The Home Office broke this link back in 2012 when it uncoupled the study visa from the short-term employment visa for graduates.

Mr Welsh (West College Scotland) questioned what could be done to raise the growth impact on colleges and raise the profile of colleges.

Stephen Magee suggested that the college sector is facing a "crisis point" as a result of a two-tier immigration policy. He also mentioned the need to ensure that the college sector is not treated 'as a second cousin'.

Ms Sandlan (NUS Scotland) commented on the massive consequences of existing immigration policy for universities and colleges. She encouraged every single Post-16 education institution needs to say how it will be impacted.

Ms Scott (Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh) remarked on her institution's longstanding partnership with India which involves a two-way exchange of students and staff. The UK's unwelcoming approach on immigration is having wider, adverse, impacts on that relationship.

Ms McGillivray (City of Glasgow College) concurred that her institution faced similar issues on provision and partnerships.

Mr Chung (Thorntons Law) brought the Group's attention to a live consultation on immigration by the Home Affairs Select Committee.

Members agreed that the CPG should write to the Home Affairs Select Committee to advise of the cross-party consensus on student immigration that exists within Scotland and to share the views as discussed at this meeting. The deadline for the inquiry is advised as 20 January 2017.

5. Date and topic of next meeting

Members were advised that the next meetings of the CPG are:

- Wednesday 8 March 2017: 1- 2pm in Committee Room 3. Topic: widening access
- Wednesday 10 May 2017: 1- 2pm in Committee Room 3. Topic: T.B.C

Members were kindly invited to sponsor the lunch for the next meeting.

6. Close

The Deputy Convener closed the meeting with thanks to all for attending and best wishes for Christmas and New Year.

Ends