

RESPONSE FROM UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

This letter responds to the Executive's invitation for comment on the consultation paper about the intention to introduce increased student fees in Scotland. It makes some general comments before responding to the specific questions in the consultation paper.

General

While we recognise that the Executive has a legitimate interest in ensuring the availability of educational opportunities for Scottish-domiciled students, we are concerned that the Executive may regard non-Scottish students as a 'problem'. Scotland's universities are leaders in promoting Scotland's reputation as a diverse and intellectually dynamic nation precisely because they are successful in attracting students and researchers from a wide range of backgrounds. If we endanger the diversity of Scottish universities' populations we will damage them as brand leaders for Scotland, and will risk fostering a parochialism which is at odds with our aspirations to be a 'Smart, Successful Scotland'. We therefore believe the Executive should do no more than is absolutely necessary to ensure that Scottish students are not unduly disadvantaged by cross-border student flows within the United Kingdom. At the moment, we do not have any evidence that well-qualified Scottish students are being displaced by any significant increase in students from the rest of the UK, and the proposed increase in Scottish fee levels does not appear to be a compelling necessity. It may be wise to defer introduction of the proposed policy until several years' experience has shown whether there is a problem which necessitates its use.

We note that there will be some potential financial savings to the Executive as a result of the proposed policy change. In particular, for students from the rest of the UK, the SHEFC T-grant will be reduced but this will not be balanced by an increased fee from SAAS. This gives rise to two considerations:

- For these savings to be realised, there will need to be tight control of the recruitment of 'fees-only' students by universities. The proposed policy change will give universities a perverse incentive to over-recruit 'fees-only' students in the subject groupings which attract very low levels of SHEFC Teaching grant. For instance, the marginal advantage of recruiting a social sciences student, over and above SHEFC-funded numbers, is currently £1,175, or 32% of the TUR of a fully-funded student. If fees were increased to £1,900, the marginal advantage of recruiting an additional student would be 53% of the TUR of a fully-funded student. There is therefore a strong likelihood that the potential savings will be consumed by SAAS grants for an increased population of 'fees-only' Scottish-domiciled students.
- If the changed policy results in savings to the Executive we would strongly argue that the savings should be used to increase the overall Teaching Unit of Resource for students in Scottish higher education. This has declined by over 40% in real terms over the past 2 decades, with an inevitable effect on the competitiveness of the quality of education we are able to provide.

The consultation paper asked various specific questions.

Paragraph 26: *Question - do you agree with the principles on which the general fee level should be based?*

Question - if you do not agree, please suggest alternatives.

We are not yet convinced that there is a necessity to change Scottish fee levels to manage cross-border student flows.

We agree with the intention that the fee level should not risk any significant reduction in students coming to Scotland from the rest of the UK.

We would be particularly concerned if fees were set at a level which was inconsistent with widening access objectives, by making higher education in Scotland unaffordable to students from less well-off backgrounds in the rest of the UK. We are not resourced to be able to offer bursaries to students from less well-off backgrounds, and may therefore become an unattractive choice to these students.

We agree with the intention that fees in Scotland should make 4 year courses in Scotland no more expensive than 3 year courses in England. However, delivery of this intention requires that, to enable Scottish universities to be able to compete for the best students from across the UK, the Scottish fee level for a 4 year degree should be significantly lower than the overall fee level of a 3 year degree in England, since as well as the fee costs students will face the living costs of an extra year's study and the opportunity cost of an additional year out of the workforce.

We disagree with the proposal that the fee level should be determined by the funding necessary for the support package for Scottish students going to English universities. Funding that package of support is the Executive's problem, and should not be at the cost of setting a fee level which reduces Scottish universities' ability to attract the students from across the UK who are best able to benefit from the education we offer.

Paragraph 30: *Question - at what level should general tuition fees be set for 2006-07?*

The simple answer is 'as low as is consistent with delivery of the Executive's policy'. Given the additional costs, outlined above, of doing a 4 year degree course in Scotland as opposed to a 3 year course in England, we would recommend a fee substantially less than £1,700 and would be content if the fee only rose in line with the general rise in the Teaching Unit of Resource.

Paragraph 37: *Question - should any self funded Scottish and non- UKEU domiciled students be protected from the increased level of tuition fee?*

Question - if you agree, which categories of Scottish and non- UKEU domiciled students should be protected from the increased level of tuition fee?

We support the IAG's policy that all full-time Scottish-domiciled students should be protected from the proposed fees increase. We also support the proposal (paragraph 48) that the fee for part-time students should not be increased. However, the Executive needs to put arrangements in place to ensure that, for students in all these categories, universities receive the full amount of the Teaching Unit of Resource appropriate to their pattern of study. It

would be completely unacceptable if the exemption of some students from the increased fee meant that the amount which universities received to teach these students was reduced.

Paragraph 44: *Question - do you agree with the principle of using tuition fee levels to protect the interests of Scottish domiciled students by setting fee levels for medicine that are broadly comparable with those being set elsewhere in the UK?*

Question - if you agree, at what level should tuition fees for medical courses be set?

Question - if you do not agree, what alternative measures could be taken to protect the interests of Scottish domiciled students?

We recognise the Executive's interest in ensuring that medical schools in Scotland are producing a sufficient supply of qualified medical practitioners who choose to work in Scotland. We recognise that, to secure this, measures may need to be taken which ensure that Scottish medical school places are not disproportionately filled by students who will subsequently choose to work elsewhere (though we agree with the BMA that a large part of the issue is about attracting people to work in the medical provision in Scotland, rather than adjusting the composition of the student body). To that end, we can accept the proposal that fees for RUK students at Scottish medical schools should be increased to ensure a degree of parity with fees elsewhere in the UK, although we support the Universities Scotland position that fees "should not be set at a level which would result in the fee burden on an English-domiciled student attending a Scottish medical school being greater than would have applied had the same student attended a medical school in England". Since a fair proportion of English students are likely to be in receipt of bursaries giving them partial relief from the fees burden (something which we cannot afford to offer from our own resources), we would argue that the Scottish fee should be somewhat lower than the English fee so that Scottish universities do not become uncompetitive and to support widening access priorities.

We could not accept any proposal to select students for medical school on the basis of anything other than fair academic competition.

There is a steady stream of Scots-domiciled students choosing to pursue a medical degree after a first degree in another subject, and we believe it is essential that they are protected from the proposed fee increase. Otherwise, the policy change will prejudice lifelong learning objectives and will cut off an important source of qualified entrants to the medical profession in Scotland.

Paragraph 47: *Transitional arrangements*

Question - do you agree that gap year students should be treated as having entered HE in 2005-06, i.e. prior to the planned changes taking effect.

Question - if you do not agree, please suggest an alternative.

We regard it as important that gap year students should be dealt with under the arrangements for the session in which they accepted their place, not the arrangements pertaining to the session they joined their course.