

CONSULTATION ON CROSS BORDER STUDENT FLOWS HIGHER EDUCATION TUITION FEE LEVELS

RESPONSE FROM GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY

- 1 Before we reply to the specific questions raised in the consultation paper on Cross Border Student Flows: Higher Education Tuition Fee Levels, we would like to make some observations on the underlying principles and introduce some pragmatic considerations.

Principles

- 2 Our mission and vision at GCU is to be inclusive. We consider that education should be free for all those who have the potential to benefit irrespective of family means, class, race or creed. Under these proposals that will not now be the case for students domiciled in other parts of the UK. In particular, students from low income families would be much less likely to study in Scotland if they are debt averse.
- 3 A second principled concern is that in a global economy it seems very restricting of the student experience to take measures that are intended to have the effect of reducing cross border flows, and in particular to create incentives for Scottish students to study in Scotland.
- 4 Third, it seems inconsistent with the Fresh Talent initiative to put up barriers to prevent students from elsewhere in UK to study and potentially to settle here. Is it completely impossible to raise the cap and get this financed by HMT?

Pragmatic Reasons

- 5 Markets can be very perverse. It would be all too easy to convey an impression that students domiciled elsewhere in the UK are not wanted. That could produce a fall of many thousands of students in Scotland. There must be a risk that students from elsewhere in the UK will expect to see better quality education and bursaries in return for their additional fees. The current proposal expressly prohibits the universities from benefiting. So the students will pay the fee and incur the debt for no additional personal return.
- 6 What impression is going to be given to international students on the www and in prospectuses if Scotland charges £2000 pa and England £3000? Is our price lower for good reason or is quality lower too?
- 7 In GCU we have a significant number of students domiciled in Northern Ireland – 268 FT Undergraduates in the current year. Taken together with students domiciled in England, they represent about 5% of our students. If they were put off in future and there was no substitution from elsewhere, this would have a significant and largely unpredictable budget effect.
- 8 There is the issue of confusion. It is impossible currently to give a clear description to prospective students. But even when fee levels are set, and the rules for loans and maintenance have been established for cross border movers from and to any part of the UK, how will students be able to assess their position when English Universities can charge variable fees and afford highly variable bursaries and scholarships?

- 9 For the Executive's proposal to work to produce a level playing field with England, at the very least we need to be sure that English, Welsh and NI students will have the same standard access to bursaries and loans if they study in Scotland. Moreover, since many Scottish degrees are of four years duration, these students will have one extra year of debt associated with living costs.
- 10 In the light of the above, how can the fee level in Scotland be set across the whole country for all courses except medicine and hope to achieve the stated aim of rebalancing relative costs of study so that flows stay roughly as they currently are?
- 11 We recognise that this problem is not of the Executive's making, and that pragmatically, as Universities Scotland has said, what is proposed may be the least worst solution.
- 13 However, we would prefer to stick to the principles, wait and see for 06/07, and only intervene for 07/08 if it has become clear that there really is a practical problem.

Specific Answers

- 14 Our answers to the specific questions are:

- Q26** i No, for all the reasons set out above. We do not agree with the principle of raising fees and certainly do not agree that the proposal to ensure fees are raised sufficiently to pay for Scottish domiciled students studying in English HEIs is anything at all to do with regulating cross border flows. While you recognise that English HEIs will be resourced to afford a wide range of competitive bursaries and incentives, you omit to note that Scottish HEIs will not be resourced to respond flexibly. The Scottish fee level will be set over a year before "clearing" for 06/07 entry and it is not at all clear how you can set any top-up fee level in Scotland which avoids the risk of reducing the number of students coming from elsewhere in the UK. We calculate that there is leeway for these numbers to rise by about 17% and still be below 1998 levels – do you count 17% as significant?
- ii Wait to see if the change is significantly above 17% and introduce these proposals for 07/08 only if it has become clear that there really is a practical problem.
- Q30** No change.
- Q37** i Possibly. But it seems perverse to raise existing fee levels for some second chance students simply because of the cross border flow issue.
- ii All groups described.
- Q44** i No, but we recognise that this could present more of a problem in practice than for other subjects.
- ii N/A
- iii We agree with NUS that the issue of retention in Scotland should be dealt with by making NHS jobs more attractive.
- Q45** i Yes.
- ii N/A
- Q47** i Yes
- ii N/A

