

Vicki Carson
Scottish Executive
Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department
2nd Floor, Europa Building
450 Argyle Street
GLASGOW
G2 8LG

Tel: 01786 892100
Fax: 01786 892109
e.mail: enquiries@ascol.org.uk
web: www.ascol.org.uk

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Dear Ms Carson,

Consultation on cross border student flows: Higher Education tuition fee levels

I refer to Mark Batho's letter of 4 April seeking comments on Scottish Executive proposals regarding the cross border student flows and higher education tuition fee levels.

The Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC) is the policy and representative voice of colleges across Scotland. The college sector is the largest provider of post school education and training in Scotland.

ASC has restricted our comments in response to this consultation to the issues of greatest importance to the College sector. ASC recognises that there are more issues involved in this consultation for the Higher Education sector than Scotland's Colleges.

ASC recognises that the new tuition fee regime in England may have an impact on numbers of students from the rest of the UK coming to study in Scotland. ASC is also aware that the build up of income for institutions from variable 'top-up' fees will not be fully realised until 2010 or later.

ASC considers that the Scottish Executive's final proposals regarding tuition fee levels should indicate there are no changes to FE student support as a result of the proposed changes.

ASC believes it is essential that students must clearly understand their entitlement to support, and welcomes the work the Scottish Executive has undertaken to improve sources of information, advice and guidance for students. ASC also takes the view that financial support for learning should be available throughout a student's career.

ASC supports the Scottish Executive's aim of ensuring there is a broadly level playing field between Scotland and the rest of the UK in terms of the cost of

undergraduate study. ASC recognises that the temptation to travel to Scotland for study from the rest of the UK will be particularly acute for places at Scotland's medical schools. ASC supports the Scottish Executive proposal that increased tuition fees being introduced to Scotland should be broadly comparable to those of the rest of the UK.

On the issue of self-funded Scottish domiciled students, the consultation paper indicates that around 300-400 Scottish domiciled students with an HND enter university in first year. These students are therefore liable to pay tuition fees for one year.

ASC agrees with the Implementation Advisory Group recommendation that all full-time Scottish domiciled students should be protected from the changes to Higher Education tuition fees. ASC agrees with the suggestion that this group of students should be entitled to partial tuition fee remission, equal to the difference between the current level of tuition fees (adjusted for inflation) and the new level of tuition fee.

There would be less case for protecting students studying for a second undergraduate degree and those that repeat a year from the increased level of tuition fee.

The consultation paper goes on to state that from 2006 onwards, Colleges in England will be able to set their own fees for HNC/HNDs within a range from £0 to £3,000 per year per course. The Implementation Advisory Group considered the implications of this for demand for places at Scottish Colleges. Its view was that there is no need to alter the current level of tuition fee for HNC/HNDs in Scotland, but that this should be kept under review.

ASC understands that currently around 98.5% of students at Scotland's Colleges are Scots domiciled. Numbers of students from the rest of the UK studying at HNC/HND level is currently very low, in the region of 100 students. ASC therefore agrees that the Executive should retain current tuition fee levels for HNs.

ASC is happy to provide further information in support of any of the points made in this response.

Yours sincerely,



NEIL CUTHBERT
Policy Adviser