



THE HIGHER EDUCATION UNION

## **Response to consultation on Cross Border Student Flows: Higher Education Tuition Fee Levels**

### ***Preamble***

The Association of University Teachers Scotland (AUTS) has over 6,500 academic and academic-related members in Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs). We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on Cross Border Student Flows: Higher Education Tuition Fee Levels.

### ***Consultation Questions***

Responses to the questions raised in the consultation document are given below.

#### **General tuition fees**

*Question* – do you agree with the principles on which the general fee level should be based?

We agree with the general principals in setting the overall fee in that it should be set at a level comparable to the average fee in England. However, when setting the level the Executive should consider that those wishing to study in Scotland are more likely to be those that would have to pay the top level of fee in England. The Scottish Executive should also consider in future that the level has been set incorrectly and may need to be re-visited. Further, in the medium term Scotland's population is likely to decline so it should not be set so high that other UK students are totally put off coming to Scotland.

*Question* – if you do not agree, please suggest alternatives.

Not applicable.

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

The Scottish Executive's principle on this issue is that the fee level in Scotland should be set so as to lead to an equivalent cost for programmes in Scotland when compared with those in England.

Given the proposed top fee in England of £3,000 per annum from 2006, but allowing for moderation of that fee in respect of bursaries and the possibility that not all institutions will charge the full fee for all programmes, it might be reasonable to assume something like a £7,500 cost for a three year programme in England on average.

Most honours programmes in Scotland take an extra year when compared with England (though this is not true of the general or ordinary degree). Thus it makes some sense to set the Scottish annual fee level for the main honours degree

programme at three quarters of the total cost of the equivalent degree in England. This leads to a notional fee of £1,900 per annum.

The anomaly of the three year non-honours degree is probably not worth noting, since it is very unlikely that RUK students will come to Scotland seeking such a degree.

When setting fee levels it should also be borne in mind that students with 'A' levels could enter at the second year of the Scottish Four-year honours degree. The pressure for such entry is likely to increase for English students who wish to avoid an extra year of increased fees. This puts an extra burden on staff who would have to teach a class of mixed ability in the second year as direct entry students would not have the same specific grounding as those starting at first-year.

We would suggest a fee level of around £2000.

### **Self funded Scottish domiciled students**

*Question* – should any self funded Scottish or non-UK EU domiciled students be protected from the increased level of tuition fee?

Self funded students should be protected from this increase by having part of their fee paid by SAAS as otherwise this would increase the income to institutions. As this is stated specifically not to be the intention of this measure then it should be avoided.

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

All such students should be protected.

### **Medical tuition fees**

*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?

Medicine poses a problem because it **does** attract very significant numbers of RUK students, and it seems irrational to have a total programme cost in Scotland significantly lower than that in England. In this case, the English cost of 5 x £3,000 (£15,000) would be significantly undercut were the Scottish medical programme to cost 5 x £1,900 (£9,500). If, however, the principle is that the programme costs should be equivalent, then the calculation is different. Assuming the same moderation of the total fee (see above, on the general fee level) the Scottish medical programme would need to be costed at  $75/90 = 5/6^{\text{th}}$  of the English fee:

$$5/6 \times £15,000 = £12,500$$

This in turn gives an approximate annual fee of £2,500, which should be understood not as a variation of the 'same fee' principle but rather as a result of the different situation of medicine.

*Question* – if you agree, at what level should tuition fees for medical courses be set?  
£2,500

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

More should be done to retain medical students whatever their nationality in Scotland by making the NHS in Scotland more appealing both financially and in terms of job satisfaction. However, private medical practice in Scotland will never be as lucrative as that in London and England. So consideration is also required of the type of student that is being enticed into medicine and whether for such a vocational and people centred discipline that academic grades alone are the correct gauge for those wishing to study medicine.

*Comments* are welcome on the statement from NUS Scotland.

We agree with the principle of the NUS statement and are concerned about the marketisation of higher education but in the particular case of medical students we do feel that this measure is required. However, we agreed with NUS that the Further and Higher education (Scotland) Bill as introduced would allow top-up fees and therefore welcome the extra scrutiny of fee levels brought into the Bill at the third stage. We now believe that the Bill meets our concerns and that the variation in fees can now only be used for medical courses and in the future other courses where there are particular problems.

*Comments* are welcome on the statement from Universities Scotland.

This seems to take a balanced view of the arguments and in this case comes form a position where Universities in Scotland neither gain nor lose from the changes.

*Comments* are welcome on the statement from BMA Scotland.

We agree that some thought should be given to changing the admissions process for medical students to encourage a more socially diverse cohort.  
We do not entirely agree with their final statement as the proposals will not affect Scottish students.

## **Implications for FE**

*Question* – do you agree that the Executive should retain current tuition fee levels for HNs?

Yes, as such students are unlikely to come to Scotland for purely financial reasons.

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

Not applicable.

## **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.

Yes

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

Not applicable.