



Postgraduate Consultation
Abbey 1, 5th Floor
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET.

29 May 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

Universities Scotland response to the Consultation on Support for Postgraduate Students

1. Universities Scotland, as the representative body of Scotland's 19 higher education institutions (HEIs), welcomes the commitment of the UK Government to ensuring access to postgraduate excellence for all with the ability and aspiration to do so.
2. Universities Scotland fully endorses the responses to the consultation made by Universities UK and Universities Wales, subject to the addition of the following points specific to our members.

The Policy Objective

3. Universities Scotland agrees that finance is a barrier to postgraduate taught masters study. Internal research by our member institutions suggests that many applicants are put off from taking up their offered Masters place by the cost of study, particularly for courses with no financing options (either loan or grant) available.

Loan Amount

4. We note that the proposed loan amount may limit student choice and access to particular specialist courses, for which a high tuition fee reflects the cost of delivery, in addition to impacting on the availability of living costs for the student.

Contribution to Costs

5. The stated policy intention is for the loan to meet some of the costs associated with postgraduate taught study. Universities Scotland believes that the student as an individual is best placed to decide on direction of funds to support their study. Student control more effectively enables and encourages mixed funding options, e.g. loan + employer contribution, where a student's employer is able to contribute towards some of the tuition

fee cost. Funds flowing directly to the student will also aid in maintaining stability in the institutional setting of tuition fees.

Individual Eligibility

6. The proposed restriction on eligibility by age is problematic and potentially discriminatory under institutions' public sector equality duty. While it is clear that students at the beginning of their professional careers may be most likely to experience the biggest financial hurdles, we note that in 2013-14, 54% of UK domiciled PGT Masters¹ students at Scottish HEIs were aged 30 or over. A culture of lifelong learning and upskilling is critical to meeting the current and future needs of the economy. In the context of declining postgraduate taught numbers, and the principle of equality of access, a loans scheme should not exclude a large proportion of the postgraduate taught population. We note that there have been significant falls in Scottish taught postgraduate students aged between 30-60 at Scottish HEIs since 2004.

Institutional Eligibility

7. We strongly advocate that all publically funded higher education institutions within the UK should be considered eligible. Following the fundamental principle of equality of access, we believe that student choice should be based on the course which is right for them, and where this is available, and not be defined by the availability of finance. Universities Scotland are working with the Scottish Government to ensure reciprocity of this arrangement with Scottish PGT funding. Restriction on the basis of location is limiting to individuals and the broader economy; Scottish postgraduate education has unique contributions to key economic sectors which benefit the economy across the United Kingdom.
8. Examples of entirely unique Masters provision can be found in all areas, in many cases working directly with national and international industry (often with headquarters or major presence in Scotland) and other bodies to design provision to meet the specific high skills needs of the UK. Unique collaborative MScs are available in Scotland in cutting-edge subjects ranging from drug development to big data to marine systems, many offered and designed as a result of industry partnership with Scotland's Innovation Centres, research pools and universities. Examples include:
 - Heriot-Watt University's International Centre for Island Technology offers unique MScs at the cutting edge in Marine Renewable Energy.
 - The Scottish Centre for Excellence in Computer Games Education at the University of Abertay offers a leading MSc in Games Development, specifically designed in collaboration with games industry partners.

¹ Based on HESA Level of Study identified as Higher Degree (Taught)

- The Glasgow School of Art offers a variety of unique MScs through its Digital Design Studio, including an MSc in Medical Visualisation & Human Anatomy, and an MSc in International Heritage Visualisation.
- Scotland's Innovation Centres partner with Universities and Industry to offer MScs at the leading edge of research and emerging technologies. Examples include MSc Industrial Biotechnology (University of Strathclyde), MSc Stratified Medicine & Pharmacological Innovation (University of Glasgow), Data Lab MSc (Robert Gordon University, The University of Dundee and the University of Stirling) and an MSc in Sensor & Imaging Systems (University of Edinburgh & University of Glasgow).
- Scotland's Universities and their postgraduate talent are a significant inward attractor of international industry investment. Companies spun out from the University of Edinburgh's School of Informatics have attracted more than £100m of investment in the last 9 years, and Amazon and Disney have both located research and development centres close to the School to capitalise on the graduate and postgraduate talent available.
- Scottish HEI Masters students have access to unique collaborative support. The Enterprise Campus², hosted in the North, West and East by the Universities of Aberdeen, Strathclyde and Edinburgh respectively offers business and enterprise support to all postgraduate students from any Scottish University. The 'Making the Most of Masters'³ scheme run by the Universities of Aberdeen, Stirling and Edinburgh has been highly successful in supporting Masters students to undertake their Masters dissertation in collaboration with an employer, and will be rolled out to further partner Scottish HEIs in the future.

To artificially block cross-border flow would remove take-up opportunities of such courses from potential students at all stages in their life and career and directly impact on the future economic activity of the student in key growth sectors, e.g. Energy or IT. Blocking access based on geography will stifle growth, competition and quality across the UK.

9. Mobility between Scotland and the rest of the UK accounts for thousands of students a year in both directions. In 2013-14 there were 3375 English domiciled Masters students studying in Scotland, a 53% increase from 2002-03. English domiciled students currently comprise 25% of the UK domicile population studying for a taught Masters in Scotland. There were a further 2415 English domiciled students studying a postgraduate diploma⁴, certificate or other professional qualification (excluding initial teacher training) in Scotland. This reflects both the depth of specialisation and breadth of postgraduate provision and professional skills, only achievable by a range of specialist providers across the UK.

² <http://www.enterprisecampus.org.uk/about-us/>

³ <http://www.mastersprojects.ac.uk/index.cfm/students/>

⁴ Based on HESA Level of Study identified as Postgraduate Other, excluding those flagged as pursuing initial teacher training.

10. The high quality of the UK's postgraduate market is driven by competition on the international stage, without borders. In recognition of this, the European Investment Fund on behalf of the European Commission's Directorate General for Education & Culture has recently issued a call for interest to financial institutions to participate in a new Pan-European Erasmus+ Masters loans scheme. This is designed to ensure that all EU students can access the right course for them, and recognises the benefits of mobility without limit of border.

Fee Inflation

11. As outlined in Section 5, Universities Scotland believes that the most effective way to maintain a high quality and competitive international market in high level skills provision is to place full control in the hands of the student. Average postgraduate taught tuition fee levels have remained relatively stable in Scotland, broadly rising in line with inflation over the last five years⁵ and we see no convincing market-based reason why this would change, if there was no guarantee that the maximum loan amount could flow to institutions.

Course Eligibility

12. Universities Scotland agrees that all postgraduate taught Masters courses should be eligible for funding. We agree that integrated undergraduate masters and initial teacher training courses should be ineligible, as these already have support in place.

13. We would however urge that postgraduate diplomas, certificates and other professional postgraduate courses should be considered eligible for some support. Postgraduate diplomas require a similar level of study to that of a full masters. 42% of English domiciled postgraduate taught students (excluding those following initial teacher training) at institutions in Scotland in 2013-14 were pursuing postgraduate certificates, diplomas or other professional postgraduate qualifications.

Course Intensity

14. Loans should not discriminate against students only able to pursue study on a less than 50% part-time basis. Such students could include those with disabilities, caring responsibilities or employment commitments who are no less likely to face financial barriers.

Repayment Terms

15. Universities Scotland notes that the proposed repayment terms may adversely impact on students intending to undertake further study or research, e.g. a MPhil or PhD.

⁵ Reddin Survey of University Tuition Fees, based on self-reported typical fees.

Universities Scotland would urge Government to consider other complimentary measures which could usefully be taken to encourage and widen access to postgraduate study. Useful learning into 'what works' could be obtained from an in depth evaluation of HEFCE's Postgraduate Support Scheme in 2014-15 and 2015-16. It is important that lessons learned from the pilot projects are not lost. Incentivising employer support leads to highly positive outcomes for students, and new, productive partnerships across multiple sectors. Examples include:

- **Glasgow Caledonian University** partners with Howden⁶, the global engineering company headquartered in Scotland to run the 'Howden Academy'; which draws on both the University's learning facilities and engineering expertise to deliver job-specific training postgraduate modules. The Academy has delivered training over the last four years to more than 400 of the company's engineering graduates.
- **Heriot Watt's** 'Engineers of the Future'⁷ programme combines a five year undergraduate integrated masters, with vocational training with tuition fees and a salary paid to the student while studying by a sponsoring company. A modern apprenticeship and HND are completed at a partner college, before progression to the MEng, with summer work placements with the sponsoring company. Employment with the sponsoring company on graduation is guaranteed.
- **American Express/University of Sussex**⁸: 'American Express has supported 30 graduates through an IT Masters programme. During that time the graduates work part-time for the company, gaining valuable hands-on experience alongside their academic studies. The students are eligible to apply to the company for permanent positions after graduation.'

Postgraduate Research

On the proposals for enhancing Postgraduate Research Support, Universities Scotland would note the following:

16. Any Loan Support must be **in addition** to the existing ecosystem of support provided by the nation's funding bodies and Research Councils UK. This is critical to supporting the next generation of researchers and enables leverage, demonstrating to partner bodies in the public, private and third sector the UK's firm commitment to research training. Complementarity with existing schemes can be achieved by rendering students in receipt of another award ineligible for a loan.

⁶ <http://www.gcu.ac.uk/business/educationforbusiness/businessacademies/howden/>

⁷ <http://www.undergraduate.hw.ac.uk/eps/mecheng/index/>

⁸ <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=sussex-amex-masters-programme-for-web.pdf&site=20>

17. A £25000 loan would be **partial**, and would only cover a small proportion of the full costs to either students or universities in research training. University research operates in an international environment with the skills gained in demand on a global level. We would register serious misgivings aligned to the principle of a loans system for postgraduate research, noting that such research delivers direct public benefit, potentially much more so than to the individual. Partial funding combined with significant loans may make this an unattractive option for most, and would not address the need for growth in international competitiveness.
18. We do not agree that loans should be restricted to specific subjects. We note that there is little evidence to suggest a difference in earning profile between STEM and non-STEM subjects: a recent Vitae⁹ report noted median earnings of £40k for biomedical sciences doctoral graduates, and a median salary of £39k for social science doctorates.
19. There are **opportunities** to capitalise on new and innovative approaches to PGR funding. Scotland leads the way in capitalising on strong partnerships in this area, with PhDs already co-funded by industry through the Innovation Centres, and the Research Pools. Innovative crowd-sourcing initiatives are already underway, see for example the University of the Highlands and Islands Scholarship Fund¹⁰.
20. These approaches are calibrated by the **need to recognise excellence¹¹ wherever it is found**. We must ensure that excellent researchers are not prevented from securing funds or opportunities due to any unhelpful exclusion criteria.

Universities Scotland strongly advises Government to consider these points alongside those raised in the UUK response, to the benefit of a future highly skilled workforce within the UK.

Yours sincerely,

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On behalf of Universities Scotland.

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⁹ <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/reports/what-do-researchers-do-early-career-progression-2013.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.development.uhi.ac.uk/scholarship-fund-donate>

¹¹ As recognised by the national Research Excellence Framework 2014 and successors.