



International students and Scotland
Strengths, challenges and opportunities

UKCISA REGIONAL CONFERENCE

13 November 2014, Edinburgh

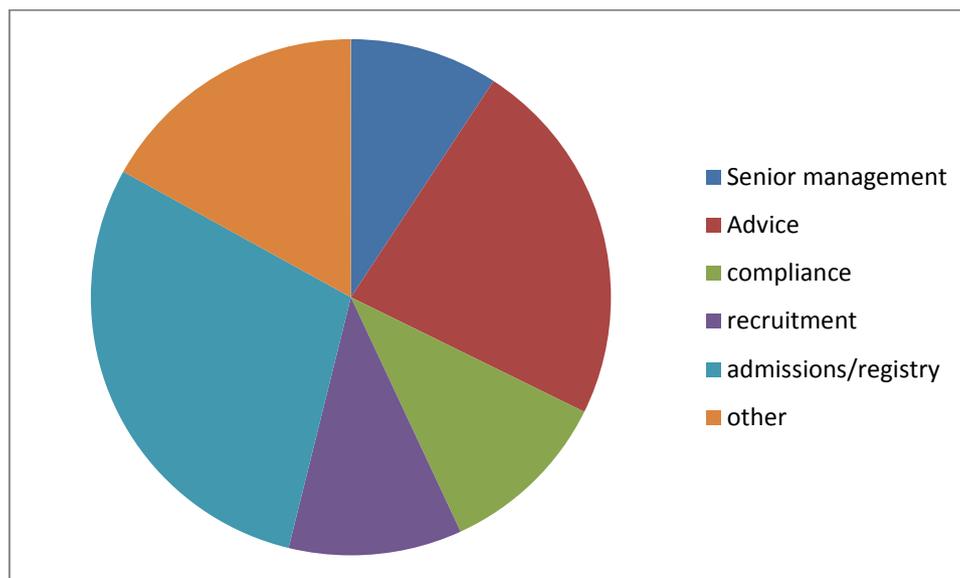
Summary report

UKCISA Regional Conference: Edinburgh 13 November 2014

This was the first in a series of Regional Conferences but this was very much a *national* event focussing on Scotland. This report is a summary of the event and will contribute to the final report after our fourth conference in London in March.

Who attended?

We were delighted to welcome 86 participants representing HE, FE, students unions with excellent support from the Scottish Government and sector bodies. We were also delighted to meet such a range of our members illustrated in the chart below:



Keynote presentation: Alan MacKay, Director of the International Office and Deputy Vice Principal International, University of Edinburgh

- Timely reminder at the start that we are talking about all international students and not just non EU
- Comprehensive description of the current market, both for the UK and for Scotland and the context – a continued global growth in demand for international education
- Must move away from the ‘popular stereotypes’ of either ‘rich’ or ‘bogus’ and design services for all
- The UK govt believes the message that international students are welcome in the UK, perceptions overseas are not so clear
- Examples of national campaigns to increase international student numbers in Australia, Germany, Canada and Sweden (noting that scholarships available for study in Germany amount to larger than the British Council annual budget)
- Ideas/recommendations for the future
 - More conferences such as this as few opportunities for the sector to come together in this way to discuss and review strategy and practice
 - Refocus nationally on the international student experience including regular research on the international student experience at a national level to benchmark performance – occasional individual institutional ‘Barometer’ surveys not adequate

- Need to tell the good news about study in the UK – ISB consistently show 90% international students are satisfied with their experience in the UK
- Use ‘student as partners’ – use their views and opinions more actively (in and via blogs and make part of the GREAT campaign where currently poorly covered)
- Counter overseas perceptions and misconceptions

Panel 1 – The UK and Scottish international student experience – strengths and strategies

- Over 1000 **Saltire scholarships** (inward mobility to Scotland from USA, Canada, China, India) have now been given. Applications now open until 31 March 2015
<http://www.scotland.org/study-in-scotland/scholarships/saltire-scholarships/>
- Recognise or emphasize Scotland’s ‘heritage of philanthropy’, reputation for ‘education as a public good’ and traditional welcome
- Quality assurance, credit recognition, learner satisfaction and research impact are all key strengths
- Need to manage the ‘multiple brands’ with Education UK, Study in Scotland
<http://www.studyinScotland.org/> and the British Council and Universities Scotland initiative: Connected Scotland <http://connectedscotland.org/>
- Too often international students are valued in financial terms but students themselves understand what they contribute – should not be ignored.
- Need to involve international students more directly in the design of surveys and action on findings and conclusions.
- Post Study Work a key consideration – and one to be considered by the Smith Commission (set up ‘ to take forward the devolution commitments on further powers for the Scottish Parliament <https://www.smith-commission.scot/>
- Need for better briefing for first year arrivals, better careers advice and support for international students and a closer, joined-up strategy, nationally
- Change terminology – students want to be ‘global’ not ‘international’

Open Forum: what more can we do or do better

Suggestions included:

- All agreed on need to remove students from net migration targets and policy
- ‘Campus’ is not the same as ‘community’. Better links with local communities to ensure all international students have a real experience of Scotland
- Beware the Immigration Act and brief students carefully – likely negative response from abolition of appeals, when health service levy introduced (Scottish undergraduate courses are four years so costs will be higher) and if landlord immigration checks imposed more widely
- Better accommodation advice both locally and from national associations especially for those renting in the private sector
- Better safety and security advice and support – as every survey shows one of the most important factors for international students
- More peer-to-peer language learning which is always tremendously popular, needs little resource and brings all nationalities (including domestic students) together
- Improve systems for or advice on banking which continues to be key concern and problematic on arrival just when it is needed most
- Improve systems for and facilitate Police Registration (or ideally abolish it entirely as so unwelcoming and divisive on first arrival)
- Wider use of international students as ambassadors in schools – providing global insight to your learners and recognising value, worth and knowledge of international students

- More truly inclusive events – for domestic and international students - and greater synergy in institutions between inward and outward mobility
- Fund Scottish students to go abroad. Could use international students in schools to encourage and inspire.
- Make contact with international students at course based events which tend to be better attended.

Panel 2 International Students and the immigration system

- Students want an ‘experience’ - not just about study. They want study plus work, internships, volunteering. Immigration rules make this problematic
- Immigration system needs to ‘cater’ better for and differentiate between different sorts of students (whole course, short course, short visit/research attachment, semester abroad etc)
- Sector wishes to emphasize ‘seamless progression’ but Home Office rules (and especially the need for initial and then longer visa and para 144 of Guidance) mitigate against this and gives out entirely wrong message.
- Need to, but sometimes challenge of, ‘aligning systems’ with partner pathway providers
- How are we currently explaining the PBS rules to students? Can we keep things simple? Can we ‘insulate’ them from the worst and ‘shield them from the negativity’?
- How credibility has returned us to the ‘bad old days of an Entry Clearance Officer opinion’ – when we had all hoped we had moved to an objective system
- The word ‘credibility’ in itself is problematic – students feel they are not trusted (esp now there are interviews for in-country applications)
- Students have expressed feeling that they are made to feel like criminals – what can be done to mitigate against this?
- How the whole concept (and name) of ‘credibility’ when wishing to extend a visa in the UK is confusing and insulting, having already invested in and successfully studied one course and wishing to do another
- Damaging impact of maximum years of study rule
- How the immigration system appears to assume that education is still based on attendance in classrooms (chalk and talk) and takes no account of new and innovative delivery models
- Danger therefore that the immigration system is inhibiting creativity and development within the FE and HE sectors.
- However Home Office support appreciated and acknowledged in some circumstances – such as complex recent amalgamation of FE colleges originally with separate licences

References:

- British Council Report *Integration of International Students - a UK perspective*
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/education/ihe/knowledge-centre/student-mobility/report-integration-international-students>
- British Council GREAT campaign
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/facts/programmes-and-initiatives/great-campaign>
- Article. *Economist How to ruin a global brand*
<http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21600129-foreign-students-are-going-english-universities-how-ruin-global-brand>
- <http://www.studyinScotland.org/>
- British Council and Universities Scotland initiative: Connected Scotland
<http://connectedscotland.org/>

- Guardian series on global students - <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/oct/13/-sp-international-students-in-the-uk-who-are-they>
- British Council research in Scotland - <https://sco.live.solas.britishcouncil.net/sites/britishcouncil.sco/files/scotland-report-a-strategic-analysis-of-the-scottish-higher-education-sectors-distinctive-assets.pdf>

Non-UK campaigns

Sweden - <https://studyinsweden.se/news/7-steps-to-studying-in-sweden/>

Australia - Future Unlimited <http://www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/>

Germany - Make it in Germany <http://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/for-qualified-professionals/make-it-in-germany>

Canada-

<http://international.gc.ca/global-markets-marches-mondiaux/education/index.aspx?lang=eng>

Scholarships

- **Saltire Scholarships** (inward mobility to Scotland from USA, Canada, China, India) – applications now open until 31 March 2015
<http://www.scotland.org/study-in-scotland/scholarships/saltire-scholarships/>
- **IAESTE** (The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience, inward and outward work experience, managed by British Council) – closes 27 November for student applications
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/iaeste/students/outgoing-uk-trainees/apply>

With many thanks to our speakers and panellists:

- Euan Fergusson, Head of International Student Support, University of Edinburgh
- Naomi Graham, Deputy Head of International Recruitment, University of Glasgow (Scottish Universities International Group – SUIG)
- Joy Grenyer, Head of Compliance, Northumbria University (Immigration Compliance Network – ICN)
- Alan Mackay, Director International Office and Deputy Vice Principal International, University of Edinburgh
- Ian MacLellan, Chair, UKCISA Services and Representation Committee, and Student Support and Wellbeing Manager, University of Strathclyde (Chair)
- Emma Meredith, Edinburgh College, International Director
- Steph Niven, Head of International Affairs, University of Stirling
- Ulrike Peter, Senior Policy Officer (International), Universities Scotland
- Rebecca Robinson, Scottish Government
- Melanie Sangha, Senior Student Adviser, University of Strathclyde (Co-Chair of Scotland's Advisers to International Students – STRATOS)
- Teodora Teodorescu, NEC Executive Representative of European Students, Aberdeen University Students' Union (NUS Scotland)
- Lucy Young, Head of Education, British Council Scotland

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