

## Universities Scotland briefing on: Immigration

### Universities Scotland's position & key messages:

- The Home Secretary has promised to reduce international student numbers by differentiating by quality of the course and quality of institution. A UK Government consultation is expected before the end of the calendar year. Scotland's 19 higher education institutions reject the introduction of any restriction on their ability to recruit international students on the basis of a supposed differentiation in 'quality'. All 19 of Scotland's higher education institutions provide consistently high quality education which is rigorously and externally assessed by the Quality Assurance Agency. Every higher education institution is closely assessed by the Home Office to ensure that international students are fully compliant with its visa requirements.
- We believe there is a strong economic case for a more competitive post study work visa route, based on evidenced demand for highly-skilled people in key sectors in Scotland. The skills gaps projected cannot be met by our UK-domiciled graduates alone.
- There is cross-party political support in Scotland for a change to immigration policy for international students. A wide coalition of business groups, industry sectors, university leaders and further and higher education staff and student unions all want to see positive change to existing immigration policy for international students. In November last year 257 organisations signed up to a statement to this effect in Scotland including 64 businesses.
- The UK Government often cites 'abuse' of the visa system by international students as the basis for tightening immigration rules. This was the case in the UK Government's October 2016 response to the Scottish Affairs Committee's recommendation to re-introduce a more competitive post study visa in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> The implication has always been that tens of thousands of international students break visa rules and remain in the UK after their study. The Times newspaper published a leaked document from the UK Government showing that 99% of international students comply with their visa conditions and return home after study.<sup>2</sup>

### Scottish facts and figures:

- Scottish higher education is home to 31,000 international students from 180 countries.
- Non-EU students contribute an estimated £444 million every year in fees and an estimated £488 million in off-campus expenditure.
- Beyond their positive economic impact, international students add immeasurably to the quality of the educational experience for all students. Their presence helps to internationalise the student experience and different perspectives and world views develops critical thinking. 73 per cent of undergraduates in Scotland think they have an international outlook. Employers are increasingly seeking a global outlook in their recruits. 79 per cent want new hires with awareness of the wider world.<sup>3</sup>
- Scotland gains from a vast network of global ambassadors in our international alumni. Higher education is a key determinant of a nation's 'soft power'. The ComRes 2015 global ranking of soft power puts the UK second only to the US on the education sub-indices.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cm Scotaf/787/78702.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ministers-hide-report-on-migrant-numbers-dv8dbj7cz>

<sup>3</sup> Richer for It (2013) Universities Scotland

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Report\\_Final-published.pdf](http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Report_Final-published.pdf)