Taught Postgraduate Review: Working Group Final Report

21 December 2015
Contents

Foreword by Professor Bryan MacGregor 4

Executive summary 5

- Background
- Summary of analysis
- Benefits of postgraduate study
- Barriers to postgraduate study
- Summary of identified options

Introduction 11

- Background
- Remit and membership of working group
- The Work of the group
- Benefits of postgraduate study
- Current postgraduate support arrangements in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom
- Progression to postgraduate study
- Access to course information
- Financial barriers to postgraduate study
- Experience of undergraduate/Post 16 education
- Limited course flexibility
- International comparisons
- Conclusion

Data analysis 21

- Taught Postgraduate Students by Domicile at Scottish Higher education institutions
- Taught Postgraduate Students at Scottish Higher education institutions, Proportions by Domicile
- Taught Postgraduate Students by Domicile at English Higher education institutions
- Scottish Domiciled First Degree Qualifiers vs. Scottish Domiciled Taught Postgraduate Entrants
- Protected Characteristics
- Students on a Taught Postgraduate Course in Business Administration at Scottish institution
- Change in Scottish Taught Postgraduate Students at Scottish Higher education institutions Between

Identified options to widen participation 28

- Online information portal
- Student loan support for postgraduate study
- Widening access to postgraduate study
- Closer Engagement between industry and higher education institutions
• Student incentive to undertake postgraduate level study

Other Issues

• Monitoring and Review
• Postgraduate fee regulation
• Qualification inflation

Annexes

• Annex A – Membership of working group
• Annex B - Group Remit
  Annex C - References and Bibliography
Foreword

In November 2014, I was invited by the Scottish Government to chair a review of the barriers to taught postgraduate study for Scottish domiciled students and, along with stakeholders from across the higher education community in Scotland, identify options for how these barriers could be overcome.

I would like to place on record my gratitude to the members of the working group for their dedication and commitment to the task. Throughout their work, the group adopted a collaborative and evidence-based approach which aided the identification of a range of practical options to overcome the barriers to postgraduate study.

From an early stage, the working group was united in its belief that they will have achieved their objective only if there is an increase in the number of Scottish-domiciled students undertaking taught postgraduate study in future years and more postgraduate opportunities for those groups currently underrepresented within the postgraduate population.

To achieve this, the group has undertaken a significant body of statistical analysis and built on existing research in order to understand the true nature of the underlying trends in Scotland. The identified options contained within this report flow directly from the evidence gathered and evaluated.

As the work of the group progressed, it became evident that addressing the underlying trends in an area as diverse and complex as taught postgraduate study across the wide variety of higher education institutions in Scotland, is not a task that is likely to be accomplished through a single policy response.

As chair of the working group, I must stress that the identified options contained in this report should not be thought of as solutions guaranteed to overcome the barriers facing Scottish-domiciled students in relation to postgraduate study, rather these options should be considered as starting points to addressing the barriers identified.

The efficacy of these options in addressing the underlying trends should be closely monitored and reviewed over the coming years and, if significant progress is not forthcoming, further interventions should be considered by stakeholders in the Scottish higher education community and the Scottish Government to increase the number of Scottish-domiciled students undertaking postgraduate study and to increase postgraduate opportunities for those currently unable to undertake study at this level.

I am pleased to present this report to the Scottish Government and hope that the options identified within will deliver the significant and long lasting change required in the area of postgraduate study.

Professor Bryan MacGregor
Vice Principal and Head of the College of Physical Sciences
The University of Aberdeen.
Executive Summary

Background

1. On 19 November 2014, the Scottish Government announced the formation of a short life working group to consider the barriers to participation in taught postgraduate study by Scottish domiciled students.

2. The group, chaired by Professor Bryan MacGregor, Vice Principal and Head of the College of Physical Sciences at the University of Aberdeen, comprised representatives from Scottish higher education institutions and other stakeholders including the Student Awards Agency Scotland [SAAS], the Scottish Funding Council [SFC], the Universities and Colleges Union [UCU], the National Union of Students [NUS] and Universities Scotland.

3. Through the analyses of the barriers facing students, the group identified a range of options to make a lasting and positive impact on participation in and widening access to taught postgraduate study.

Participation in taught postgraduate study in Scotland

4. Through bespoke and disaggregated statistical analysis and a review of previously conducted research, the group sought to understand the pattern and rates of participation in taught postgraduate study in Scotland, the rest of the UK and selected other countries to understand better the barriers to participation in taught postgraduate study.

Key Findings of Statistical Analysis

- The total number of Scottish-domiciled students enrolled in taught postgraduate study at Scottish higher education institutions fell by 2,230 students (a 10% decline) between 2004-05 and 2013-14.
- In academic year 2004-05, Scottish domiciled students comprised 62% of the total taught postgraduate population at Scottish higher education institutions. By academic year 2013-14 Scottish-domiciled students comprised 46% of the total taught postgraduate population.
- Non-EU students now make up 29% of the Taught Postgraduate population at Scottish higher education institutions compared to 21% in 2004-05.
- When Teaching-related CPD courses and PGDE enrolments are excluded from the data, between academic years 2004-05 and 2013-14, a much smaller decline of 2% (250 students) is observed in the number of Scottish-domiciled taught postgraduate enrolments.

---

1 Data analysis was carried out on the HESA Student datasets for 2004-05 to 2013-14. The HESA COURSEAIM field was used to identify students on Taught Postgraduate Courses. Further information on this field can be found on the HESA website: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_studrec&task=show_file&mnl=12051&href=a_~COURSEAIM.html

2 Although the number of PGDE enrolments reduced overall between academic years 2004-05 and 2013-14, this does not indicate reduced demand. In-take targets to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) fluctuate, and were reduced in academic years 2009-10 and 2010-11 and maintained at the 2010-11 level for academic year 2011-12. Similar to PGDE, the decline in CPD enrolments over the period does not reflect the teaching profession’s interest and engagement in taught postgraduate learning. The fluctuating number of students engaged in teacher related CPD education between academic years 2004-05 and 2013-14 can be attributed to the establishment of the Chartered Teacher Scheme in 2003 and the winding down of this programme in 2012.
Benefits of Postgraduate Study

5. Alongside verbal evidence from a small number of current and previous postgraduate students from various academic disciplines at higher education institutions across Scotland, the group undertook analysis of previous research carried out in this area, undertaken by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Universities UK, Universities Scotland, the Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC) and International Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby.

6. This work highlighted a number of benefits to undertaking postgraduate study to students and the wider economy and also identified a number of barriers that may prohibit prospective postgraduate students.

Identified benefits of postgraduate study

- Students with postgraduate level qualifications will, on average, earn more over the course of their career than those with an undergraduate level qualification.
- Undertaking postgraduate level study provides students with a competitive edge in the labour market.
- In addition to benefits for students, increased participation in postgraduate study provides economic benefits for the wider economy.

7. Postgraduate-level study has significant benefits for both the individual and the wider economy/society. The Sutton Trust among others notes a major financial incentive to undertaking PGT study: the ‘postgraduate premium’. On average, those holding Masters-level qualifications earn £5,500 more per year than an individual with a Bachelors’ degree. This amounts to an extra £200,000 over 40 years\(^3\).

8. Competition for jobs is a key concern in light of both the recent economic downturn and expansion of the HE sector. Those obtaining PGT qualifications often have a competitive edge in the labour market, standing out from those educated to Bachelors level\(^4\). A report for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) highlights that female Masters Graduates are approximately 2.5% more likely to be employed than women with an undergraduate qualification\(^5\).

9. A booming postgraduate sector also has positive outcomes for the wider economy and society. The analytical and problem-solving skills held by postgraduates enhance the innovative capacity of the businesses in which they go on to find employment. This, in turn, increases productivity and encourages economic growth\(^6\).

---


Barriers to Postgraduate Study

Identified Barriers to postgraduate study

- Prospective postgraduate students cannot readily access all of the required information relating to courses and funding.
- Prospective postgraduate students may face financial barriers that prevent them undertaking postgraduate study.
- The desire to undertake postgraduate study may be affected by previous experiences of undergraduate/Post 16 education.
- Limited course flexibility may impact on student applications for postgraduate level study.

10. Access to information related to postgraduate course provision and financial support is of vital importance to prospective postgraduate students and a lack of information in these areas may negatively inform the choices the prospective students make. There is some evidence to suggest that information related to course provision and financial support was harder to obtain for students returning to higher education after a period away.

11. In contrast to undergraduate students who have access to the University and College Admission Service (UCAS), postgraduate students have no comparable resource. As a result, prospective postgraduate students are heavily reliant on the information provided to them by individual higher education institutions rather than using existing portal or aggregation sites. However those students who are aware of the existing portal or aggregation sites considered them to be useful resources.

12. Alongside access to information on course provision, an important barrier to postgraduate participation for many students is related to finance. Unlike undergraduate students, postgraduate students must make their own arrangements to meet the up-front cost of tuition fees. The typical cost in Scotland of PGT tuition – which is both unregulated and varied by subject area – during the academic year 2014/15 was £4,594.

13. Due to the lack of financial support available, many postgraduate students have no option but to fund the costs of their studies from private sources of income. Over 70% of full-time PGT students in Scotland fund their own studies. However, such a situation means that those students unable to access private sources of funding for their postgraduate studies will be unable to participate and will miss out on the career opportunities and economic benefits afforded by a postgraduate qualification.

14. Even when up-front costs of postgraduate study can be met by commercial bank loans or other sources, students must also consider the increasing burden of debt that is associated with another year or two of study on top of undergraduate study. Evidence suggests that the fear of debt often dissuades students – particularly those from a less advantaged socio-economic background – from embarking upon

---

postgraduate study, as does the risk associated with taking out non-income-contingent loans (a common route for self-funding PGT students).8

15. Alongside access to course information and funding concerns, many other factors can impact on prospective students choosing to pursue postgraduate study. Previous experience of Post 16 and undergraduate education may also have an impact on the decisions made. Research considered by the group highlighted various factors including demographical characteristics, such as social class, school and undergraduate institution attended, that can inhibit progression to postgraduate study.

16. There is some evidence to suggest that HE attainment is an issue in regard to progression to postgraduate study. 64% of all university graduates from state schools achieve a first or upper second-class honours degree (typically the prerequisites for postgraduate study) compared to 68% of graduates from independent schools, and levels of attainment for ethnic minority groups are particularly concerning.9

17. The type of institution attended as an undergraduate is also likely to affect postgraduate outcomes. While Russell Group institutions teach just 25% of all undergraduate students in the UK, Russell Group students comprise approximately one third of all PGT students.10

Summary of Identified Options

18. The identified barriers to and benefits of postgraduate study guided the group in the identification of a range of options that may lead to an increase in participation in taught postgraduate study by Scottish domiciled students.

Identified Option 1

- Prospective postgraduate students should have access to a designated online portal providing comprehensive course and funding information.

19. The working group recommends that postgraduate students should have access to a designated online information portal that provides comprehensive information on course provision and available financial support for postgraduate study at all Scottish higher education institutions in one place.

20. There are a number of portals in operation at present and others in development. The effectiveness of these should be reviewed and if none of the existing portals provides the required information, consideration should be given to commissioning a new portal to deliver this.

---


21. The working group recommends that a clear and universal entitlement to student loan support should be implemented for Scottish domiciled students undertaking taught postgraduate study.

22. The financial support available should be equal to the typical postgraduate course tuition fee and eligibility for this entitlement should be consistent with current undergraduate eligibility. Using the current typical Scottish postgraduate course fee (during the academic year 2014/15 this was £4,594) as a guide alongside current available living cost support for eligible students (£4,500), students be able to access a total support package of £9,000.

23. The working group recommends that greater focus should be placed on widening access to postgraduate level study to those currently underrepresented (based on age, gender, socio-economic background and protected characteristics) within the student population and any new support schemes or initiatives considered to improve participation in postgraduate level study should have this inbuilt as a key performance indicator.

24. The working group recommends that the Scottish Government should investigate ways to promote closer working relationships between the higher education sector and industry to stimulate participation in taught postgraduate study. One potential example of best practice relating to the links between higher education and industry is the Innovation Centre Programme, launched in 2012 to support collaboration between academia and business.

---

11 The group recognises the diversity within Masters delivery across the Scottish higher education institutions and that a uniform template for eligibility is not necessarily helpful. In simple terms, support should be offered for advanced level qualifications, normally taken after a Bachelors/Undergraduate Degree (or equivalent). The group makes no comment on the teaching/research proportions. Care should also be taken that financial support should not ‘crowd out’ research funding.

12 http://www.sfc.ac.uk/funding/FundingOutcomes/KnowledgeExchange/InnovationCentres/InnovationCentres.aspx
25. There are currently eight Innovation Centres\textsuperscript{13} drawing on the wealth of research expertise within Scotland and providing opportunities to students through secondments, industrial studentships, spaces for collaborative work and shared access to equipment with the aim of enhancing innovation and entrepreneurship across Scotland’s key economic sectors.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{Identified Option 5}
\end{itemize}

- The Scottish Government should give consideration to the feasibility of implementing an incentive system for students undertaking postgraduate study in Scotland via cancellation or reduction of student loans in return for contribution to the Scottish economy.

26. The working group recommends that the Scottish Government should consider the feasibility of implementing an incentive system where students, in receipt of financial support from the government to fund postgraduate study, pay back a reduced amount or have their student loan debt cancelled on the basis of gaining employment and making a positive contribution to the Scottish economy. Specifically, this relief would be available to those registered as Scottish income tax-payers.

\textsuperscript{13} http://www.sfc.ac.uk/FundingImpact/KnowledgeExchange/InnovationCentres/FundedInnovationCentres.aspx
Introduction

Background

27. On 19 November 2014, following an internal Scottish Government review into support for taught postgraduate study that identified a decline in the number of Scottish-domiciled students undertaking postgraduate level study, the Scottish Government announced formation of a short life working group to consider the barriers to participation by Scottish domiciled students.

Remit and membership of the working group

28. This working group, chaired by Professor Bryan MacGregor, Vice Principal and Head of the College of Physical Sciences at the University of Aberdeen, was asked to:

- build on the work and analysis previously carried out by the Scottish Government and other stakeholders;
- aim to seek a deeper understanding of the barriers facing Scottish domiciled students undertaking taught postgraduate level study; and
- identify options to make long lasting and significant change to overcoming these barriers.

29. A copy of the full remit of the group is contained in Annex A.

30. As part of previous internal reviews of postgraduate study, the Scottish Government has engaged extensively with Scottish higher education institutions and other industry stakeholders (including the Student Awards Agency Scotland [SAAS], the Scottish Funding Council [SFC], the Universities and Colleges Union [UCU], the National Union of Students [NUS] and Universities Scotland) and these same stakeholders and subject experts formed the core membership of the announced working group. See Annex B for full details of the working group membership.

The work of the group

31. Alongside undertaking bespoke statistical analysis, the working group reviewed research by organisations such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Universities UK, Universities Scotland, the Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC) and International Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby.

32. The working group heard verbal evidence from a small number of current and previous postgraduate students from various academic disciplines at higher education institutions across Scotland.

33. Through the course of their work, the group received representations from various organisations and individuals representing different areas of interest related to postgraduate study. The views and issues raised by these correspondents were taken on board and considered by the group when identifying barriers to postgraduate study and options to overcome them.

---

14 Including the RSE Young Academy of Scotland and the Association of Scottish Educational Psychologists.
34. The identified key themes, along with the bespoke analysis undertaken, guided the creation of a series of identified options to overcome the barriers to taught postgraduate study among Scottish domiciled students.

Benefits of postgraduate taught (PGT) study

35. Postgraduate-level study has significant benefits for both the individual and the wider economy/society. The Sutton Trust, among others, notes a major financial incentive to undertaking PGT study: the ‘postgraduate premium’. On average, those holding Masters-level qualifications earn £5,500 more per year than an individual with a Bachelors’ degree. This amounts to an extra £200,000 over 40 years\(^{15}\).

36. Competition for jobs is a key concern in light of both the recent economic downturn and expansion of the HE sector. Those obtaining PGT qualifications often have a competitive edge in the labour market, standing out from those educated to Bachelors level\(^ {16}\). A BIS report highlights that female Masters graduates are approximately 2.5% more likely to be employed than women with an undergraduate qualification\(^ {17}\).

37. A report published by Universities UK also highlighted that graduates from postgraduate courses are less likely to be unemployed and likely to earn more than the average graduate from an undergraduate course, aiding social mobility\(^ {18}\). Any reduction in the number of postgraduate students will have an impact on these factors.

38. A booming postgraduate sector also has positive outcomes for the wider Scottish economy and society. The analytical and problem-solving skills held by postgraduates enhance the innovative capacity of the businesses in which they go on to find employment. This, in turn, increases productivity and encourages economic growth\(^ {19}\).

39. Universities Scotland highlights the strong partnerships between Higher education institutions and key growth industries, with several universities providing Masters courses which are responsive to industry needs and which foster strong links with employers in the oil, gas, renewable energy and IT sectors\(^ {20}\).

40. There are also significant economic benefits derived from cross-border mobility. Students from outside the UK comprised approximately 52% of the PGT student body in Scotland in 2013/14). Scottish students studying abroad – and indeed foreign students studying in Scotland – offer alternative perspectives on key issues faced by Scottish businesses, while at the same time boosting the local economy; full-time

---


\(^{16}\) Sutton Trust, The Postgraduate Premium: Revisiting Trends in Social Mobility and Educational Inequalities in Britain and America (2013), p. 5;


\(^{19}\) Postgraduate Taught Courses: Universities Scotland Policy Proposals to promote participation by Scottish Domiciled Students. Pg 5

\(^{20}\) Universities UK, Postgraduate taught education: the funding challenge (2014), p. 6

PGT Review Group, ‘Additional information from Universities Scotland’ (11 May 2015)
postgraduate students contribute an estimated £2.5 billion to the British economy each year in living costs alone.\(^{21}\)

41. There is a clear link between higher-level qualifications and improved social outcomes. According to the BIS, the social benefits of an HE qualification include: the increased likelihood of voting and of volunteering within local communities, better educational parenting, better levels of general health and thus longer life expectancy, and lower levels of crime.\(^{22}\)

Current postgraduate support arrangements in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom

42. Support for taught postgraduate study in Scotland is available to eligible Scottish and EU students studying a taught postgraduate course (but not up to full Masters level), at a Scottish higher education institution, from a prescribed course list.

43. Under the current support arrangements, eligible Scottish and EU students undertaking these courses at a Scottish university can apply for a tuition fee loan of up to £3,400 and a living cost loan of up to £4,500. Students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) can also access financial support at postgraduate level.

44. In addition to the funding available from the Scottish Government, the Scottish Funding Council administers a postgraduate fund, introduced in academic year 2013-14, which provides 850 fully funded taught postgraduate places in institutions across Scotland, supported by a budget of £30 million over 4 years, until academic year 2016-17.

45. On 25 November 2015, the UK Government announced the introduction of postgraduate loans of up to £10,000 for eligible English and EU students to undertake postgraduate study up to Master’s level in England from academic year 2016-17. The loans will be available to eligible students up to 60 years of age and will be paid back concurrently with undergraduate loans once the borrower reaches the repayment threshold. The £21,000 annual income threshold will be initially frozen until 2021 and subject to review thereafter.

46. Under current arrangements in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, there is no universal financial support available for students undertaking postgraduate study. Students wishing to undertake postgraduate level study are encouraged to seek other sources of funding, for example, studentships and employer funding.

47. However, students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, undertaking the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), are able to apply for financial support. The level of support available for eligible students varies depending upon where the students live and study, the subject being studied and the students’ personal circumstances. Students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) are also eligible for financial support to assist with their postgraduate study.

---


48. Postgraduate students in England studying medicine, dentistry, nursing or a healthcare course can also apply for a grant of £1,000, a maintenance loan and an NHS bursary to support their studies. Students studying Social Work can also apply for a bursary, depending on where they study, whether they study full or part-time and the cost of tuition.

Progression to Postgraduate level study

49. Individuals from challenged socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to pursue postgraduate study than their wealthier peers23. The social class gap in postgraduate-level participation has been exacerbated by the increasing demands of the labour market and appears to be widening24. In Scotland, during the academic year 2011/12, the proportion of PGT students from the 40% most deprived areas (SIMD40) was 30.2%25.

50. This was also noted in an analysis paper provided to the working group by Universities Scotland26 which highlighted how this is likely to limit the fields in which talented students from these backgrounds could achieve their potential:

“People from disadvantaged backgrounds are much less likely to study a postgraduate degree compared to others. These people are at risk of falling further behind in social mobility as more and more employers, particularly in professional careers, seek a postgraduate qualification as a condition for applying”27

51. The Universities Scotland paper draws attention to research contained in the HEFCE paper ‘Transition to higher degrees across the UK: an analysis of national, institutional and individual differences’28 which points to disparities between progression rates to postgraduate study in gender, some ethnic groups and geographical backgrounds:

“There were marked differences in progression rates between ethnic groups (and in some cases these are very low) and men were more likely to study at taught postgraduate level than women across a broad range of subject areas, despite the fact that more women enter university at undergraduate level … Domicile - EU domiciled graduates from UK institutions were significantly more likely to undertake further study than UK domiciled graduates and within the UK, Scottish domiciled graduates have a lower rate of progression to taught postgraduate degrees than students in the rest of the UK”.29

52. It should be noted that the HEFCE report only takes into consideration direct progression from undergraduate to postgraduate study immediately after graduation.

---

25 Note that this figure refers only to those progressing to PGT study within two years of completing their undergraduate degree. PGT Review Group, ‘Additional information from Universities Scotland’ (11 May 2015), p. 17.
26 Postgraduate Taught Courses: Universities Scotland Policy Proposals to promote participation by Scottish Domiciled Students. Pg 3
27 Postgraduate Taught Courses: Universities Scotland Policy Proposals to promote participation by Scottish Domiciled Students. Pg 3
28 https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Transition_to_higher_degree_across_the_UK_0.pdf
29 Postgraduate Taught Courses: Universities Scotland Policy Proposals to promote participation by Scottish Domiciled Students. Pg 3
53. In its policy proposal paper, Universities Scotland highlighted that many other countries including the United States and European nations are steadily increasing the proportion of their population who hold a postgraduate level qualification. Conversely, in Scotland, the proportion of students with a postgraduate level degree is declining and should this trend continue as the international marketplace becomes ever more competitive, Universities Scotland suggests that Scotland’s ability to compete effectively could be reduced in the longer term.

54. In May 2014, Universities UK published its report entitled ‘Postgraduate Taught Education; the Funding Challenge’. \(^3\)

“The number of students starting a PGT course at a UK university fell by 10% in two years between 2010–11 and 2012–13. The biggest declines have been among UK-domiciled students”\(^3\)

55. This decline is contrasted with a rise in the number of EU students over the same period. The Universities UK report noted that higher education benefited the UK economy to the tune of £73 billion\(^3\) in 2011-12 with postgraduate level study making a significant contribution to this figure.

Barriers to postgraduate study

Access to course information

56. There was some evidence to suggest that those students returning to higher education after a period away find the information they seek harder to obtain than those already in the HE system. The prospective returning students are heavily reliant on the information provided to them by individual higher education institutions.

57. The type of information most desired by prospective students is related to course content and academic staff. Fewer prospective postgraduate students (particularly those outside the higher education system) seek or are able to make contact with current students or recent graduates who could potentially provide much of the qualitative information prospective students require.

58. Few prospective returning students use existing portal or aggregation sites, although these information portals are considered useful to the students who are aware of them.

59. Some PGT students (both prospective and formally-enrolled) possess an informational deficit insofar as the economic, academic and social aspects of their postgraduate education are concerned. A recent PGT experience survey found that when making course and institution choices, only 79.6% of students believed that institutions provided them with sufficient information about the course, whilst 79.7% did not believe this information was accurate\(^3\). These findings are limited to those who did pursue PGT study but still suggest that some might not enrol due to a lack of information.

---

\(^3\) The Funding Environment for Universities 2014: Postgraduate Taught Education: The Funding Challenge. Pg 3
\(^3\) The Funding Environment for Universities 2014: Postgraduate Taught Education: The Funding Challenge. Pg 3
\(^3\) Postgraduate Taught Courses: Universities Scotland Policy Proposals to promote participation by Scottish Domiciled Students. Pg 6
60. Unlike undergraduates who have access to UCAS, there exists no single, comprehensive and unbiased source of course information for potential postgraduates. While the information does exist, it is scattered and often out-of-date. Research shows that students seek qualitative information (such as student experiences) about courses in addition to quantitative information (such as rates of progression)\(^\text{34}\). This type of information is often not provided.

61. Those not in the HE system when considering postgraduate study (such as mature learners) are particularly disadvantaged because of their lack of contacts within the sector, that is HE staff and careers advisers\(^\text{35}\).

**Financial barriers**

62. A number of reports into taught postgraduate study have highlighted that, due to a lack of financial support available, many postgraduate students are required to fund the costs of their studies from private sources of income.

“Students fund their PGT studies from a wide range of sources, and current evidence suggests most meet some or all of the costs from private sources”. \(^\text{36}\)

63. The corollary of such a situation is that those students without access to private incomes from which to fund postgraduate study will miss out on the career opportunities and economic benefits afforded by a postgraduate qualification. The wider impact of a reduced postgraduate student population is a reduction in the number of people with postgraduate skills contributing to the wider economy.

64. The Universities UK research acknowledges that there is unlikely to be a single solution to an issue as complex as sustainable funding for postgraduate level study but argues that improved funding for postgraduate study would have a positive impact on individuals through improved social mobility and the wider economy.

65. The Higher Education Academy: The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2014\(^\text{37}\) also found that funding issues related to postgraduate study were a key concern. For many students, the main sources of funding utilised to pay for taught postgraduate study came from private means:

“*The main sources of funding cited by students were family or friends, personal income and savings – this was applicable for course fees and even more so in respect of living costs. This raises questions about the affordability of entry to many professions and especially progression onto a PhD (and possible academic career) in many subject areas.*” \(^\text{38}\)

66. In April 2014, the Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC) and International Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby published the research paper

---


\(^{36}\) The Funding Environment for Universities 2014: Postgraduate Taught Education: The Funding Challenge. Pg 3

\(^{37}\) The Higher Education Academy - Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) 2014

\(^{38}\) The Higher Education Academy - Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) 2014. Pg 6
‘Understanding how people choose to pursue taught postgraduate study’. Similar to the other papers considered, this report highlighted that funding issues are a key consideration for prospective postgraduate students and are considered from the very start of the exploration of prospective study.

67. For most prospective postgraduate students, funding issues play a key role in the decision making process:

“Funding issues are considered from the very start of exploration. Only when funding and personal circumstances are assured do most progress to more detailed examination of options.”

68. Institutional and external funding options at postgraduate level are limited. Over 70% of full-time PGT students in Scotland fund their own studies. The cost of study and lack of financial support are factors which particularly affect prospective Masters students. Prospective students must consider – and not be dissuaded by – the ‘complex landscape of varied fees and different funding sources … each with distinct requirements’.

69. Even when up-front costs can be met by commercial bank loans or other sources, students must also consider the increasing burden of debt that is associated with another year or two of study on top of at least three years as an undergraduate. Evidence suggests that the fear of debt often dissuades students – particularly those from a less advantaged socio-economic background – from embarking upon postgraduate study, as does the risk associated with taking out non-income-contingent loans (a common route for self-funding PGT students).

Experience of undergraduate/Post 16 education

70. Progression to PGT study is also often hampered by educational experiences during the post-16/undergraduate phase, experiences which, according to the Sutton Trust, are also often constrained by demographical characteristics (such as social class):

‘… the social composition of the postgraduate population … is largely driven by the social make-up of undergraduate intakes to begin with, coupled with factors such as undergraduate degree attainment and university choice’.

71. There is some evidence to suggest that HE attainment is an issue. 64% of all university graduates from state schools achieve a first or upper second-class honours degree (typically the prerequisites for postgraduate study) compared to 68%
of graduates from independent schools, and levels of attainment for ethnic minority groups are particularly concerning\(^{46}\).

72. Yet, when comparing like with like (that is students with same subject of choice and similar prior attainment), those from state schools are 4% more likely to achieve a 2.1 or above than their private-schooled counterparts\(^{47}\).

73. The type of institution attended as an undergraduate is likely to affect postgraduate outcomes. While Russell Group institutions teach just 25% of all undergraduate students in the UK, Russell Group students comprise approximately one third of all PGT students\(^{48}\). This may be due to the symbolic capital attached to a first degree from these institutions, with such capital providing an ‘entrée to social networks which support progression to postgraduate study’\(^{49}\).

74. Given that non-traditional students are already underrepresented at top universities at undergraduate level and that these universities award a significant number of places to their own alumni (roughly 40% of graduates progressing to postgraduate study remain at their first-degree institution)\(^{50}\), it is inevitable that lower proportions of disadvantaged groups will progress to PGT study.

**Limited course flexibility**

75. Over 50% of all postgraduates study part-time, with many doing so due to financial constraints, the need to work and caring responsibilities. Yet the often inflexible nature of postgraduate study can deter non-traditional students when options for part-time study are limited. According to Open University Vice-Chancellor Professor Alan Tait, many Higher education institutions have only a marginal commitment to flexible learning\(^{51}\). Moreover, it is believed that many institutions – particularly the more prestigious institutions – are reluctant to change due to the lack of any financial incentive to provide more opportunities for part-time study\(^{52}\).

**International Comparisons**

76. In line with the remit of the group, investigation was undertaken to confirm if any meaningful comparisons could be drawn from international experience of postgraduate education. Due to variance in circumstances and the differing models of higher education in countries around the world, accurate international comparisons between postgraduate study in the UK and other countries are difficult to ascertain.

---


\(^{49}\) PBJ Wakeling, *Social class and access to postgraduate education in the UK: a sociological analysis*, PhD thesis (University of Manchester, 2009), pp. 188, 292.


77. In September 2014, Gillian Clarke and Ingrid Lunt of the University of Oxford published a report for HEFCE\(^53\) highlighting the pressures facing higher education and compared postgraduate education in eight countries (Australia, England, Germany, India, Norway, Scotland, Spain and the United States). The pressures focussed on 3 key areas:

(a) Quality of postgraduate education

78. All eight countries examined in the report place a high emphasis on the quality of education delivered at postgraduate level and worked to ensure that the expansion of postgraduate numbers does not undermine the quality of entrants to postgraduate degrees (as evidenced by the different quality assurance frameworks available the different countries).

(b) Funding a growing postgraduate system

79. The scope of the report did not include the funding of postgraduate level education, however this emerged as a key concern for those involved in the countries studied:

“Although the issue of funding of higher education fell outside the remit of the study, the question of how to finance a growing postgraduate system, and, in particular, how to ensure access was inevitably a focus in both the literature and interviews. With the exception of India and Norway, there has been a steady reduction in the proportion of state funding for higher education and a greater dependence on other sources of funding, for example, shifting the cost of tuition to students”\(^54\).

(c) Widening access

80. Although progress has been slow, all eight countries examined seem committed to widening access to postgraduate level study and have considered how to remove the barriers (notably the financial constraints facing students).

81. The report also discusses the employment outcomes for those undertaking postgraduate level study and highlights that in most countries within the study, students with masters and doctoral degrees have, on average, higher earnings than those with only undergraduate level degrees.

Conclusion

82. As well as providing benefits to students in terms of increased earning potential and improved labour market competitiveness, participation in postgraduate level study provides wider economic benefits. The advanced level skills arising from postgraduate study enhances the innovative capacity of the businesses in which they go on to find employment and in turn, this leads to an increase in productivity and wider economic growth.

\(^{53}\) Clarke and Lunt: International comparisons in postgraduate education: quality, access and employment outcomes Pg 4

\(^{54}\) Clarke and Lunt: International comparisons in postgraduate education: quality, access and employment outcomes. Pg 4
83. A wide range of barriers to participation in postgraduate level study was identified in both the research considered and the oral testimony of existing and past postgraduate students. These barriers may inhibit progression to and participation in postgraduate study.

84. Financial issues and constraints were viewed as a considerable barrier to participation in postgraduate study. A lack of access to private sources of funding could limit participation in postgraduate level study and it was highlighted that this could negatively impact on the career plans and social mobility of students without access to funding.

85. The research highlighted that students in many cases are unable to access the required information they need to make informed choices regarding appropriate postgraduate study. It was noted that information on courses, institutions and sources of funding were disparate and this could negatively impact on postgraduate participation.

86. The analysis suggests a need for improvements to information provision for prospective postgraduate students, including more consistency on higher education institution websites and giving prospective students the ability to access widely the different information types they require at the same time (perhaps via a site or sites that aggregate the required information).

87. Previous experience of Post 16 and undergraduate education may also impact on progression to postgraduate study. Research highlighted factors including demographic characteristics, such as social class, school and undergraduate institution attended, that can inhibit progression to postgraduate study.

88. Inflexibility of course provision may prove a barrier to students with outside commitments, such as family or work commitments and this is noted as a particular concern for students undertaking part time study.

89. The identified benefits of postgraduate study for individuals and the wider economy, coupled with the identified barriers to participation in postgraduate study, guided the work of the group in producing a range of identified options that may make a significant and long lasting change to postgraduate participation among Scottish domiciled students.
Data Analysis

Summary

90. Between 2004-05 and 2013-14 the number of Scottish domiciled students on taught postgraduate (PGT) courses at Scottish Higher education institutions decreased by 10% (a reduction of 2,230 students) [Chart 1].

Chart 1: Taught postgraduate students by domicile at Scottish Higher education institutions

Source: HESA

91. The decrease over this period is largely attributed to a decline in the number of students enrolled on Education courses (down 2,605 students). Two thirds (76 per cent) of this decline is due to a drop in taught postgraduate enrolments to teacher training courses. The majority of these (56 per cent) are teaching related CPD course enrolments (down 1,450 students). Enrolments to PGDE courses have fallen by 20 per cent (down 530 students). The remaining decline in Education enrolments is not teaching-related but for courses in research skills and academic studies in Education (down 625 students).

92. Although the number of PGDE enrolments reduced overall between academic years 2004-05 and 2013-14, this does not indicate reduced demand. In-take targets to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) fluctuate from year to year in line with demographic changes and government policies. In-takes were reduced in academic years 2009-10 and 2010-11 and maintained at the 2010-11 level for academic year 2011-12. In subsequent academic years the Scottish Government has gradually increased the number of ITE students and in-take targets for academic year 2015-16 are comparable with academic year 2004-05.

93. The fluctuating number of students engaged in teacher related CPD education between academic years 2004-05 and 2013-14 can be attributed to the establishment of the Chartered Teacher Scheme in 2003 and the winding down of
this programme in 2012. Similar to PGDE, the decline in CPD enrolments over the period does not reflect the teaching profession’s interest and engagement in taught postgraduate learning. 55

94. Once teacher training students are excluded, a much smaller decrease of 2% (250 students) is observed in the number of Scottish domiciled students undertaking taught postgraduate study between 2004-05 and 2013-14. (Chart 1)

95. Enrolments for students from the rest of the UK (RUK), EU and Non-EU countries on taught postgraduate courses at Scottish institutions have increased (Chart 2). In 2004-05 (top bar on Chart 2), 62% of the total taught postgraduate student population at Scottish institutions was made up of Scottish domiciled students. In 2013-14 this had fallen to 46%, while the proportion of RUK, EU and Non-EU students all increased (Chart 2).

96. Non-EU students now make up 29% of the Taught Postgraduate population at Scottish Higher education institutions compared to 21% in 2004-05. Similar trends are observed in data for English higher education institutions, where home student enrolments have fallen and international student enrolments have increased.

---

**Chart 2: PGT students at Scottish Higher education institutions, proportions by domicile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Scottish</th>
<th>RUK</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>Non-EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** HESA

---

55 The available statistics do not take into account recent Scottish Government investment in this area. From financial year 2012-2013 the Scottish Government has invested £4 million in providing more opportunities for teachers to learn at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 11 and would expect this to be reflected in any future analysis as approximately 3,500 teachers have benefited from this investment.
97. The number of English-domiciled students on a taught postgraduate course at English institutions decreased by 6% between 2004-05 and 2013-14 (down 14,725 students). When teacher training courses were excluded, this drop was 5% (down 10,130 students) (Chart 3). Over the same period, the number of English-domiciled students choosing to go to other RUK countries to study a taught postgraduate course increased by 47% (up 3400 students).

98. While the number of English-domiciled students choosing to study a taught postgraduate course elsewhere in the UK has increased, the number of Scottish-domiciled students on a taught postgraduate course at English institutions decreased by 9% between 2004-05 and 2013-14 (down 265 students).

99. The reduction in enrolments by Scottish-domiciled students on taught postgraduate courses does not appear to be due to a lack of ‘supply’ of undergraduate qualifiers.

100. Although not all students go directly from undergraduate to taught postgraduate study, the figures show the number of first degree qualifiers increasing over a period when taught postgraduate enrolments have remained relatively stable (Chart 4).
101. Scottish domiciled enrolments to taught postgraduate courses at Scottish institutions for students aged 19-29 and those aged 60+ increased between 2004-05 and 2013-14. However, enrolments from those aged 30-59 decreased, with the largest effect observed in 40-49 year olds.

102. More Scottish domiciled females than males are enrolled in taught postgraduate study at Scottish institutions. The gender split was 60/40 in 2004-05. In 2013-14, female enrolments had increased to 62% of the taught postgraduate population, with males decreasing to 38%.

103. For taught postgraduate enrolments, excluding teaching related courses, male enrolments declined by 6% between 2004-05 and 2013-14 while female enrolments have increased by 1% over this period. However, full-time taught postgraduate enrolments for both genders increased over the period (up 10% for males and up 14% for females) while part-time enrolments declined for both genders (males down 13% and females down 3%).

104. The number of full-time students receiving Disabled Students Allowance through the SAAS Postgraduate Student Allowances Scheme increased. In 2013-14, 195 students received DSA, which is more than double the number in 2004-05 (85 students).
105. The numbers of Scottish-domiciled taught postgraduate students from the 20% most deprived areas as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) (and based on the student’s postcode when entering postgraduate study) increased by 1% between academic years 2004-05 and 2013-14. Enrolments from non-deprived areas decreased by 10% over the same period. In 2013-14, 9% of the total taught postgraduate Scottish domiciled population were from SIMD20 areas compared to 8% in 2004-05.

**Subject summary**

106. In some subject areas, most notably Business Admin courses, the numbers of RUK, EU and Non-EU student enrolments have increased significantly while the number of Scottish student enrolments has declined (Chart 5).

![Chart 5: Students on a PGT course in Business Admin at Scottish institutions by domicile](chart5.png)

*Source: HESA*

107. The decreasing numbers of Scottish domiciles in these subject areas is wholly accounted for by those enrolled on part-time courses, including MBA courses paid for by employers and CPD modules. The drop in Business Admin enrolments has been observed in males (down 38%) more than females (down 21%)

---

56 SIMD uses the postcode of the student’s home address to classify deprivation categories. For PGT students this is their postcode at the time of entering PGT study.
108. This trend has also been observed at English institutions: part-time Business Admin home student enrolments are decreasing while full-time international Business Admin student enrolments are increasing.

109. The overall increases and decreases in Scottish domiciled enrolments for each subject area between 2004-05 and 2013-14 can be observed in Chart 6 below.

110. Education courses show the largest total decrease, however, when the total is disaggregated, it is mostly accounted for by Teaching-related CPD course enrolments.

111. The decreases observed in Business Administration, Mathematics and Social Studies are mostly due to a drop in Scottish part-time enrolments; in contrast, there have been increases in full-time international student enrolments. Information Technology enrolments have decreased at both full-time and part-time level for all domiciles.
112. These trends are also observed at English institutions. However, English institutions have also experienced a decrease in home student enrolments to Engineering and Technology courses and Law courses; whereas Scottish-domiciled enrolments to these courses at Scottish institutions have increased.
Identified Options to widen participation

Option 1 – Online Information portal

The working group recommends that postgraduate students should have access to a designated online information portal that provides comprehensive information on course provision and available financial support for postgraduate study at all Scottish higher education institutions in one place.

113. Consideration should be given to greater use of existing online student resources before any new portal is commissioned, as adding to the number of online resources available without a good reason for doing so would add complexity rather than reduce it.

114. UCAS currently maintains an online portal (UKPASS) that provides information related to postgraduate level study at all Scottish higher education institutions. The UKPASS system provides a summary of postgraduate course information that allows students to link directly to the higher education institutions for further information and to submit an online application.

115. The key consideration for the success of any online postgraduate resource is the quality and comprehensiveness of the information contained. To ensure that students are able to access high quality information, the Scottish Government, the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) and all Scottish higher education institutions should work together to ensure the relevant taught postgraduate course provision and financial support information for all courses at all institutions is available to prospective students through an appropriate system.

116. The four UK Funding Councils are also working on the development of an online resource to aid prospective postgraduate students. The Funding Councils have undertaken significant research and this resource should encourage prospective students to seek the necessary information they need to make informed decisions regarding postgraduate study but will not host the information directly on the website.

117. The effectiveness of these different approaches to online information provision should be monitored and reviewed after a period of three years. If it appears that none of the existing online resources offers the comprehensive information related to postgraduate course provision and financial support, a bespoke online portal should be considered for delivery of the required information.

118. In the longer term, implementation of a central postgraduate application system in Scotland could potentially provide benefits in terms of participation in postgraduate study. However, the group noted that, as higher education institutions are autonomous and have their own admission processes for postgraduate study, requiring all institutions to take part would be problematic. Such an approach would

---

57. [https://www.ucas.com/ucas/postgraduate](https://www.ucas.com/ucas/postgraduate)
59. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland and the Scottish Funding Council
require to be explored in much more depth and comprehensive stakeholder consultation undertaken before implementation. While the group recognises the potential benefits of such an approach, no recommendation is made at this stage regarding it.

119. In the short term, it would be better to have a centralised information portal that allows students to gain the course and financial information they require and then link to institutions to apply directly. If such a model proved successful, and higher education institutions were in favour of such an approach, the information portal might evolve towards or be replaced by a central application system in time.

Option 2 – Student loan support for postgraduate study

The working group recommends that a clear and universal entitlement to student loan support should be implemented for Scottish domiciled students undertaking taught postgraduate study.

120. A clear and universal entitlement to student loan support equal to the typical postgraduate course tuition fee should be implemented for Scottish domiciled students. Eligibility for this entitlement should be consistent with current undergraduate eligibility and it should be available for students up to Masters Level for postgraduate courses where the taught element is equal to 50% or above.\(^{60}\)

121. Using the current typical Scottish postgraduate course fee (during the academic year 2014/15 this was £4,594) as a guide alongside current available living cost support for eligible students (£4,500), students be able to access a total support package of £9,000.

122. Implementation of a universal student loan entitlement will remove the need for the current prescribed list of postgraduate diploma courses eligible for financial support and this list should be removed.

123. To maximise access to appropriate postgraduate level study and ensure a mix of students from Scotland and the rest of the UK, postgraduate loans provided in Scotland should have the same portability as the scheme of postgraduate loans being implemented in England from academic year 2016-17.

124. Such a consistent approach would raise the number of Scottish-domiciled students undertaking postgraduate level study and remove the barriers preventing students without private sources of income from accessing postgraduate study.

125. If it is not within the constraints of the available public finances to provide a universal entitlement for tuition fee and living cost maintenance, a universal entitlement to student loans for tuition fee support should be coupled with a system of ‘means testing’ for maintenance support, as for undergraduate awards, to ensure that those students in the greatest need of financial support are able to access it.

---

\(^{60}\)The group recognises the diversity within Masters delivery across the Scottish higher education institutions and that a uniform template for eligibility is not necessarily helpful. In simple terms, support should be offered for advanced level qualifications, normally taken after a Bachelors/Undergraduate Degree (or equivalent). The group makes no comment on the teaching/research proportions. Care should also be taken that financial support should not ‘crowd out’ research funding.
However, the group does not recommend a return to the current arrangement of a list of courses eligible for support to facilitate this.

126. The working group acknowledges that introduction of means testing brings resource implications in terms of administration and this should be factored into any consideration about implementation.

127. Within the current support system, The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) also administers a postgraduate fund, introduced in academic year 2013-14, which provides 850 fully funded taught postgraduate places. Removal of current support arrangements and the implementation of a universal student loan entitlement would allow these funds to be more specifically targeted to meet specific economic areas in line with the government's economic strategies.

128. The existing 850 taught postgraduate places should be reviewed and, if a universal loan scheme is introduced, some of this funding could be used to underpin widening access to taught postgraduate places.'

129. Under the current repayment arrangements in Scotland, postgraduate tuition fee and living cost loans are simply added to a student's existing undergraduate student loan balance. The group recommends that this system remains in place once a universal postgraduate loan entitlement is implemented and students should pay off their loan as a single consolidated amount rather than paying their undergraduate and postgraduate loans concurrently. It is anticipated that requiring students to repay postgraduate and undergraduate loans concurrently is likely to inhibit participation in postgraduate study and should be avoided.

130. The impact of a universal postgraduate loan entitlement should be monitored and reviewed after a period of three years to measure participation rates and postgraduate course fees. Should the universal loan entitlement have led to postgraduate tuition fee inflation or failed to improve participation in postgraduate study, the Scottish Government should consider methods to rectify this, such as through the mechanisms contained within the University Outcome Agreements process or fee regulation.

**Option 3 – Widening access to postgraduate study**

The working group recommends that greater focus should be placed on widening access to postgraduate level study to those currently underrepresented (based on age, gender, socio-economic background and protected characteristics) within the student population and this should be reflected in the University Outcome Agreement process.

131. Far greater focus should be placed on widening access\(^{61}\) to postgraduate level study to those currently underrepresented (based on age, gender, socio-economic background and protected characteristics) within the student population and any new

---

\(^{61}\) The group recognises that defining what constitutes a widening access student at postgraduate level is a challenge and existing definitions such as SIMD20/40 do not necessarily accurately capture the necessary information.
support schemes or initiatives considered to improve participation in postgraduate level study should have this inbuilt as a key performance indicator.

132. An increase in the number of widening access students undertaking postgraduate level study should be considered a key performance indicator of the postgraduate education system in future. The numbers of widening access students (in absolute and proportional terms) should be included in institutions’ Outcome Agreements, and in negotiations to agree an Outcome Agreement, with clear ambitions for progress in this area agreed with the SFC, and annual monitoring to track progress towards these ambitions. This would bring widening access at taught postgraduate level into the Outcome Agreement process, in line with undergraduate study.

133. The Commission on Widening Access announced by the Scottish Government in 2014 is undertaking work to review the barriers to participation in higher education and how these might best be overcome, while the Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland, NUS Scotland and the Scottish Government are undertaking preliminary work on consideration of widening access at postgraduate level.

134. Bespoke work should be carried out, building on the findings of the Widening Access Commission and the work undertaken by the Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland, NUS Scotland and the Scottish Government to define more accurately, monitor and ultimately increase the number of Scottish domiciled students from widening access backgrounds undertaking postgraduate study.

Option 4 – Closer Engagement between industry and higher education institutions.

The working group recommends that the Scottish Government should investigate ways to promote closer working relationships between the higher education sector and industry to stimulate participation in taught postgraduate study.

135. The working group recommends that the Scottish Government should investigate ways to promote closer working relationships between the higher education sector and industry to stimulate participation in taught postgraduate study, particularly in areas of economic priority or in line with the Scottish Government’s Economic Strategy.

136. The group notes that the current discussions regarding changes to the devolution settlement could present an opportunity to investigate incentives (perhaps through the tax system) to stimulate participation in postgraduate study.

137. One potential example of best practice relating to the links between higher education and industry is the Innovation Centre Programme62, launched in 2012 to support collaboration between academia and business.

138. There are currently eight Innovation Centres63 drawing on the wealth of research expertise within Scotland and providing opportunities to students through secondments, industrial studentships, spaces for collaborative work and shared

62 http://www.sfc.ac.uk/funding/FundingOutcomes/KnowledgeExchange/InnovationCentres/InnovationCentres.aspx
63 http://www.sfc.ac.uk/FundingImpact/KnowledgeExchange/InnovationCentres/FundedInnovationCentres.aspx
access to equipment. The aim of the Innovation Centres is to enhance innovation and entrepreneurship across Scotland’s key economic sectors, creating jobs and benefitting the wider Scottish economy.

139. For academic year 2015/16, the Scottish Funding Council has allocated around 200 taught postgraduate places across the eight innovation centres to enhance further the development of links between higher education and industry and provide the skills and training needs of industry relevant to vision, aims and objectives of the Innovation Centres.

140. This provision of taught postgraduate places also aims to stimulate the provision of new higher education courses designed with industry (or with other public or third sector bodies) and encourage student placements, where these are appropriate to the acquisition of additional relevant skills.

141. As increased participation in postgraduate study and investment in high skills would bring benefits to employers as well as postgraduate students, consideration should also be given to greater promotion of models such as Innovation Centres and other models which provide work placements, internships, postgraduate apprenticeship for students and ‘earn while you learn’ models where employers contribute to the cost of postgraduate level tuition for postgraduate students.

142. Adoption of such approaches would provide postgraduate students with experience of applying their knowledge and research-based skills in work environments. Employers would benefit from a supply of qualified future employees, work-ready, easy to assimilate and able to address identified skills shortages as well making a positive statement regarding the employers’ commitment to corporate social responsibility.

Option 5 – Student incentive to undertake postgraduate level study

The Scottish Government should consider the feasibility of implementing an incentive system where students, in receipt of financial support from the government to fund postgraduate study, pay back a reduced amount or have their student loan debt cancelled on the basis of gaining employment and making a positive contribution to the Scottish economy.

143. The Scottish Government should consider the feasibility of implementing an incentive system where students, in receipt of financial support from the government to fund postgraduate study, pay back a reduced amount or have their student loan debt cancelled on the basis of gaining employment and making a positive contribution to the Scottish economy. Specifically, this relief would be available to those registered as Scottish income tax-payers.

144. Consideration of such an approach would incentivise students to undertake postgraduate level study and then seek employment within the Scottish economy. Participation in postgraduate study provides benefits to students in terms of increased earning potential and improved labour market competitiveness. It also provides wider economic benefits and, if such a scheme were adopted, although
there would be a cost in terms of cancelling student loans, this would be offset by wider economic benefits of high earning tax payers living and working in Scotland.

145. The working group acknowledged that such a proposal could be considered a radical solution and raises a number of questions including whether such an approach should only be reserved for students at postgraduate level or a wider precedent that could impact on undergraduate study? It could also be argued that, in practical terms, such an approach of cancelling loan repayments was akin to provision of grants for postgraduate study.

146. Financially incentivising students to remain in Scotland may have an adverse effect on the outward mobility for Scottish postgraduate students and those who work for employers based around the world. However, as referred previously, the original objective of the working group was to increase the Scottish-domiciled taught postgraduate population and benefit the Scottish economy. To address these concerns, eligible students for this incentive would be Scottish tax payers and would make a positive contribution to the Scottish economy.

147. The group recognises that it could be argued that implementation of a measure that sees the loan cancellation or reduction for Scottish-domiciled postgraduate students may be preferentially advantaging one particular cohort of students over their peers. However, it sees a general scheme with specific relief as entirely consistent with support for the Scottish economy.

148. The group also recognises that financial incentive schemes to increase participation in particular subject areas or geographical locations are not without precedent. The group notes that such incentives have been successfully implemented via the provision of NHS bursaries for trainee dentists.

149. Incentive schemes have also been implemented successfully in other nations. An example of this is the ‘Science without Borders’ initiative in which students from Brazil are sponsored to study at institutions around the world to develop their expertise before returning home to complete their study and benefit the Brazilian economy.

150. If a universal cancellation of postgraduate loans is considered unworkable or unaffordable within the constraints of the available public finances, consideration should be given to targeted incentives aimed at students undertaking postgraduate study in areas of economic importance.

64 http://sciencewithoutborders.international.ac.uk/about.aspx
Other Issues

Monitoring and Review

151. All the identified options to improve Scottish-domiciled participation in taught postgraduate study should be monitored and reviewed after a period of three years. The Scottish Government should bring stakeholders together and monitor progress with the aims of:

- ensuring increased numbers and proportions of Scottish-domiciled students studying taught postgraduate level in Scotland;
- ensuring increased numbers and proportions of students from widening access backgrounds studying taught postgraduate level in Scotland; and
- avoiding significant fee inflation for taught postgraduate courses in Scotland.

152. If all three of these aims are not met, policymakers should consider alternative or further actions.

Postgraduate Fee Regulation

153. One area of potential risk noted by the group was that implementation of a universal entitlement to student loan support, to an area where tuition fees are unregulated, could lead to the unintended consequence of postgraduate fee inflation.

154. Fee inflation would be an additional barrier for prospective postgraduate students (particularly those students from poorer backgrounds) and would be directly contrary to the objectives of this group.

155. The working group representative from NUS Scotland suggested that one mechanism to prevent this risk arising was the introduction of fee regulation. The group discussed this issue in depth and, while it recognises and has taken into account the NUS representative’s concerns, the group did not recommend the introduction of fee regulation for postgraduate courses.

156. The group agreed that any new policy introduced as a result of its recommendations should not drive fee inflation for Scottish-domiciled students. For that reason, the group recommended that fee loans reflect the typical level of fee paid by Scottish-domiciled PGT students at Scottish Higher education institutions. The group’s expectation is that higher education institutions would not raise their fees beyond this as a result of the new universal support arrangements.

157. The group recognised that significant fee inflation as a result of the introduction of any scheme would be counterproductive and therefore any evidence in either the annual monitoring or the first three-yearly review is likely to result in further or alternative policy options being considered.

158. To guard further against the potential risk of fee inflation, the group also recommended that tuition fee loans are paid separately to living cost loans. Tuition fee loans should be paid in a single lump sum at the beginning of the academic year and living cost support staggered over the academic year and paid in monthly instalments.
159. Complementarity with the postgraduate loans being introduced in England from academic year 2016-17 is desirable. The issue of fee inflation was addressed in the published consultation documents related to the proposed implementation of postgraduate loans in England and, while it is noted that it is theoretically possible that some institutions may respond to the increased availability of support by increasing the cost of tuition for students, this would be contrary to the policy.

160. The UK Government proposals for England contain no intention of implementing fee regulation as it considers that such an approach would be impractical to deliver across a sector as diverse as postgraduate study.

161. Although higher education is a devolved matter in Scotland, the outcome of this consultation should be monitored and any measures to prevent fee inflation considered to be good practice should be considered for adoption in Scotland.

162. A wider review should also be undertaken into the effectiveness of the options of this group after a period of three years and, if fee inflation has occurred, measures to address this put in place. One potential mechanism that could be used to address this is through the University Outcome Agreements process.

**Qualification inflation**

163. The group noted that, in line with the objectives to increase Scottish-domiciled participation in postgraduate level study, a potential risk that should be considered and guarded against was ‘credential inflation’, that is, a devaluation of the status and employment benefits of an undergraduate or further education qualification as a result of increased participation in postgraduate level study.

164. This should be monitored and reviewed alongside the other identified options and, if any evidence emerges that this is taking place, measures should be implemented to redress this.
Annex A: Membership of the working group

- Professor Bryan MacGregor, The University of Aberdeen (Chair)
- Professor Lesley Yellowlees, The University of Edinburgh
- Russell Gunson, National Union of Student (NUS) Scotland
- Ann Gow, University and College Union (UCU) Scotland
- Alastair Sim, Universities Scotland
- Professor Malcolm MacLeod, The University of Stirling
- Dr James Miller, The Open University in Scotland
- Professor Paul Hagan, The Scottish Funding Council
- David Wallace, The Student Awards Agency Scotland [SAAS]

- The Scottish Government provided secretarial support to the working group
Annex B: Full remit of the working group

Aim

The aim of this working group is to consider the barriers to participation by Scottish-domiciled students in taught postgraduate study and identify options for how these might be overcome.

The working group will:

- Seek to understand the patterns and rates of participation in taught postgraduate study in Scotland, the rest of the UK and in selected other countries to aid the Group’s work.
- Seek to better understand the barriers to participation by Scottish-domiciled students in taught postgraduate study in Scotland; and
- Identify options that will have the potential to make a lasting and positive impact on participation rates by this group and to widen access to postgraduate study.

Output

Building on work to date by individual stakeholders, the group will produce a final report for the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning by June 2015. The report will identify potential mechanisms to increase participation in taught postgraduate study by Scottish domiciled students, acknowledging the constraints on public funding and wider implications on the higher education sector of any change to support for taught postgraduate study.

Context

In the period between the academic years of 2004-05 and 2012-13, the number of Scottish domiciled taught postgraduate students reduced by 15% from 20,315 to 17,325. The largest decline was in those studying on a part-time basis. Scottish-domiciled part time postgraduate student numbers dropped from 13,515 in 2004-05 to 11,305 in 2012-13 (a reduction of 16%) with Scottish domiciled full time postgraduate student numbers reducing from 6,805 to 6,020 (a reduction of 11%) over the same period (HESA Figures).

The UK Government announced on 3 December 2014 that, from academic year 2016-2017, students up to the age of 30 in England will be able to access student loans of up to £10,000 to support taught postgraduate courses in any subject. Prior to the UK Government Autumn Statement announcement, the Scottish Government announced the formation of a working group to review support for postgraduate education in Scotland.

Terms of Reference

Relationship with Scottish Ministers

- The Working Group is an advisory group whose role is to identify options that have the potential to improve participation rates in taught postgraduate study by Scottish domiciled students;
- The group will agree the draft remit and timetable for its work and report to Scottish Ministers on those actions and activities having the potential to encourage growth in taught postgraduate study – including by those candidates from widening access backgrounds;
It is anticipated that the group will meet 4 times over a 6 month period.

Membership

- The group will be chaired by Professor Bryan MacGregor, Vice Principal and Head of the College of Physical Sciences at the University of Aberdeen and core membership will include the Scottish Government, the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS), Universities Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council and NUS Scotland.
- The group will review its membership to ensure that it has wide expertise and is inclusive.
- The group may co-opt members with specific expertise to attend meetings on an ad hoc basis.
- In the event of the Chair being unavailable to attend meetings, Scottish Government officials will assume the role of chair.

Secretariat

- The secretariat function will be provided by Scottish Government officials;
- Minutes of meetings will be published on the Scottish Government website;
- The Scottish Government will seek to provide venues and refreshments for meetings. Where possible, meetings will be held in Scottish Government premises or in members’ premises.

Timetable

The working group will convene in February 2015. The proposed timetable of meetings and focus of dialogue and activity will be as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 2014</td>
<td>Draft remit finalised, invitations issued to group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2015</td>
<td>First Group Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agreeing the remit;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consideration of the existing evidence base and discussion of any additional evidence required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2015</td>
<td>Group Meeting 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consideration of any new evidence available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussing the key challenges/barriers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifying and sifting possible mechanisms to increase participation for further consideration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2015</td>
<td>Group Meeting 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion and refinement of identified options including pros and cons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early May 2015</td>
<td>Group Meeting 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree mechanisms that will best help drive up participation in taught postgraduate study in Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of May 2015</td>
<td>Final draft report agreed by the Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2015</td>
<td>Final report submitted to the Cabinet Secretary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex C: References and Bibliography


The Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) and the University of Derby International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) report to The Higher Education Funding Council for England: Understanding how people choose to pursue taught postgraduate study: Published April 2014: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/pubs/indirreports/2014/Understanding%20how%20people%20choose%20to%20pursue%20taught%20postgraduate%20study.pdf

Universities UK: The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2014: Ioannis Soilemetzidis, Paul Bennett and Jason Leman: Published 2014: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/10081


The Higher Education Academy: Transition to higher degrees across the UK: an analysis of national, institutional and individual differences, Wakeling and Hamden-Thomson. Published April 2013 https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/site/default/files/Transition_to_higher_degree_across_the_UK_0.pdf