

Postgraduate Review - Postgraduate Study at a Validated Private Provider - Introduction of Financial Support Package

Equality Impact Assessment - Results

August 2023

Equality Impact Assessment – Results

Title of Policy

Postgraduate study at a validated private provider – Introduction of Financial Support Package

Summary of aims and desired outcomes of Policy

Relevant National Outcomes:

- We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination
- We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society

At present, Scottish domiciled students are not eligible for support if they are studying a postgraduate course at a private provider in Scotland or in the rest of the UK (rUK). This policy differs from the arrangement at undergraduate level, where students are eligible for support if they are studying a full-time or part-time course at a designated private provider in Scotland and a full-time course at a private provider in rUK. There is no support currently available to undergraduate students who opt to study a part-time course in rUK.

This policy seeks to align the eligibility for funding between undergraduate and postgraduate study. And therefore looks to extend support to Scottish domiciled students who are studying a full-time or part-time course at a private provider in Scotland and to Scottish domiciled students studying a full-time course at a private provider in rUK.

Directorate: Lifelong Learning & Skills **Division:** Learner Experience Division

Executive summary

A review of postgraduate study at private providers in the UK was undertaken, of which this EQIA forms a part. This EQIA explored the impact extending support to postgraduate courses studied at a private provider has on Scottish domiciled postgraduate students .

The EQIA identified that in general, the introduction of a financial support package for this group of students is seen as a positive change as it expands Scotland's postgraduate support package and creates opportunities for Scottish domiciled students to further their education through postgraduate study. However, the EQIA also highlighted the potential indirect discrimination this change has on part-time students who would not be eligible to apply for this support if they are studying a part-time course at a private provider in the rUK.

Background

The Scottish Government committed to review the funding provision for postgraduate students as part of their Programme for Government in 2021/22. This review is being conducted in conjunction with the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) who administer the financial support to students. The review itself is comprised of three components: student financial support, course eligibility and widening access.

As part of the course eligibility research, it was identified that Scottish domiciled students who wished to study a postgraduate course at a private provider in Scotland or in the rUK were not eligible for any student support. This contradicts the position for undergraduate students who are able to study at a private provider and receive the standard undergraduate package. However, it should be noted that undergraduate support is available to Scottish domiciled students who are studying full-time and part-time at a private provider in Scotland but is limited to full-time students only, studying at a private provider in the rUK.

By extending eligibility to postgraduate courses studied at a private provider in Scotland and the rUK, this means that any eligible full-time and part-time students domiciled in Scotland will be able to receive support for postgraduate study at a private provider in Scotland. This also means that any eligible full-time students domiciled in Scotland will be able to receive support for postgraduate study at a private provider in the rUK.

The Scope of the EQIA

As the change to introduce a financial support package for postgraduate study at a private provider in Scotland and the rUK is intended as a positive change for all prospective full-time students, it is considered a concise and focused EQIA is proportionate in these circumstances.

The policy will affect all eligible Scottish domiciled students undertaking an eligible full-time or part-time postgraduate course at a private provider in Scotland. The policy will also affect all eligible Scottish domiciled students undertaking an eligible full-time postgraduate course at a private provider in the rUK. Funding is not being made available for part-time study in the rUK.

HESA and SAAS do not hold data on the number of Scottish domiciled students studying a postgraduate course at a validated private provider in Scotland and the rUK.

Therefore, the following data has been used as a proxy:

1. The number of Scottish domiciled students studying a postgraduate courses at a Scottish HEI (by protected characteristic and study mode)
2. The number of English domiciled students studying a postgraduate course at an approved provider in England (by protected characteristic and study mode)

Key Findings

The EQIA identified that there are a few gaps in the information available relating to the characteristics of gender reassignment, sexual orientation and pregnancy and maternity in postgraduate students studying a postgraduate course at a Scottish HEI and at an approved provider in England and therefore the full impact that the introduction of a financial support package for this group of students will have on these protected characteristics is not known.

However, the remaining proxy data available indicates that the introduction of a financial support package for this group of students could be seen as a positive change as it expands Scotland's postgraduate support package and creates opportunities for full-time Scottish domiciled students (and part-time Scottish domiciled students studying in Scotland) to further their education through postgraduate study.

As there is no data to illustrate the number of part-time Scottish domiciled students studying at a private provider in rUK, the impact of this policy decision on this student cohort is not known.

We identify that this policy will not extend to part-time students who choose to study a part-time course in rUK which differs in comparison to the position of full-time students. However, the same approach is taken at undergraduate level and operates effectively in practice. This policy creates an equal position for those studying the same way at undergraduate level.

It would be difficult for many Scottish students to study part time in rUK whilst living in Scotland due to the distance and length of commute time, therefore we do not anticipate many students would take up this option of study.

The discrepancy in support for part-time study has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of hybrid learning and flexible working options. Therefore we recognise that part-time support will need to be reviewed holistically. We would not want to extend support to part-time postgraduate courses at private providers in rUK without due consideration to the funding provision for part-time courses more generally. Therefore, a wider review of part-time study should be conducted to mitigate the findings from this EQIA.

Data from HESA highlighted that of the 35,545 Scottish domiciled students studying a postgraduate course at a Scottish HEI in 2021/22, 22,395 were female (8,985 full-time and 13,415 part-time) and 11,930 were male (5,430 full-time and 6,500 part-time). This would suggest that a higher proportion of females opt to study part-time.

The policy change will apply to part-time students who choose to study a course at a designated private provider in Scotland, irrespective of gender and is therefore seen

as a positive change for all part-time students choosing to study in Scotland. However, not extending this policy change to part-time students studying at a private provider in rUK could be seen to disadvantage students of the female sex and therefore have a negative impact on these students.

In terms of the data for part-time Scottish domiciled students enrolled on a postgraduate course at a public HEI, the majority of students are 30 and over (78%). In England, 50% of English domiciled students studying a part-time postgraduate course at an Approved English Provider are 30 and over.

The policy change will apply to part-time students who choose to study a course at a designated private provider in Scotland, irrespective of age and is therefore seen as a positive change for all part-time students choosing to study in Scotland. However, not extending this policy change to part-time students studying at a private provider in rUK could be seen to disadvantage students from an older age category and therefore have a negative impact on these students.

Recommendations and Conclusion

As a result of this EQIA, it is recommended that Scotland's postgraduate support package be extended (a) to full-time and part-time courses being studied at a private provider in Scotland and (b) to full-time courses being studied at a private provider in the rUK. This will create opportunities for full-time and part-time Scottish domiciled students to further their education through postgraduate study.

SAAS gather statistical data on student applications which will therefore provide us with the ability to monitor the impact of this policy change on relevant groups going forward.

It is recommended that support is not extended to part-time study at a private provider in the rUK at this time, on the basis that part-time support for Scottish domiciled students does not extend to any undergraduate or postgraduate courses in the rUK. This policy creates an equal position for those studying the same way at undergraduate level and at a publicly funded institution.

The EQIA recommended a review of part-time study. As a first step, the Student Income and Expenditure Survey (SIES) will be used to help build an evidence base on the financial situation of part-time students.



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