

## CROSS PARTY GROUP (CPG) ON SCOTLAND'S UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

13.00-14.00 on 8 March 2012, Committee Room 6, Scottish Parliament

### Note of Meeting

#### Present:

##### Elizabeth Smith MSP

Tony Axon  
Lesley Balfour  
Emma Beeby  
Christine Bovis-Crossen  
Terry Brotherstone  
Michele Findlay  
Neil Findlay  
Louisa Freeman  
Moira Gibson  
Michelle Grimley  
Hugh Henry  
Johanna Holton  
Dominic Houlihan  
Grant Jarvie  
Charlie Jeffrey  
Simon Jennings  
David Kyle  
Susannah Lane  
Brian Lister  
Liam McArthur  
Judith McClure  
Matt McPherson  
John Mills  
Helen O'Shea  
Robin Parker  
Ulrike Peter  
Sue Pinder  
Keith Robson  
Jennifer Ross  
Jane Scott  
Heather Sloan  
Colin Taylor  
James Wilson

##### Convener

UCU Scotland  
University of Abertay, Dundee  
Scotland's Colleges  
Queen Margaret University  
UCU Scotland  
Scotland's Colleges  
MSP  
Scottish Parliament  
University of Edinburgh  
Scotland's Colleges  
MSP  
Edinburgh University Students Association (EUSA)  
University of Aberdeen  
University of Stirling  
University of Edinburgh  
Universities Scotland  
University of the West of Scotland  
Universities Scotland  
Scotland's Colleges  
MSP  
Scotland-China Education Network (SCEN)  
Edinburgh University Students Association (EUSA)  
Heriot-Watt University  
NUS Scotland  
NUS Scotland  
Universities Scotland  
James Watt College  
ATL Scotland  
Scottish Parliament  
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh  
Universities Scotland  
Scottish Parliament  
Universities Scotland

#### Apologies:

Claire Baker  
Una Bartley  
Marco Biagi  
John Burt  
Geoff Fenlon  
Kenneth Fleming  
Wendy Groome-Vine

MSP  
OU in Scotland  
MSP  
Angus College  
Carnegie College  
Glasgow Caledonian University  
Jewel & Esk College

Russell Gunson  
John Henderson  
Paul Little  
Matthew MacIver  
Malcolm MacLeod  
Stewart Maxwell  
James Miller  
Alastair Sim  
Susan Stewart  
Rob Wallen  
Grahame Wright

NUS Scotland  
Scotland's Colleges  
City of Glasgow College  
  
University of St Andrews  
MSP  
OU in Scotland  
Universities Scotland  
University of Glasgow  
Angus College  
University of Abertay, Dundee

## **1. Welcome and Introduction from the Convener**

Ms Smith welcomed everyone to the fourth meeting of the CPG and thanked Ulrike Peter and the International Committee of Universities Scotland for sponsoring the lunch.

## **2. Apologies**

Apologies were noted

## **3. Election of Deputy Convener**

Members were informed that Claire Baker MSP had stepped down from her role as Deputy Convener of the CPG following a change of portfolio within the Scottish Labour Party, but would remain as a member of the group. Neil Findlay MSP had been nominated for the role and this was seconded and agreed by the group.

## **4. Introduction to the topic of Internationalisation**

In her introduction, the Convener commented on the increasing success of internationalisation in both the higher and further education sectors and then invited the speakers to give their presentations;

### **Presentations:**

#### **Brian Lister, Principal, Stevenson College**

- Mr Lister gave an overview of Stevenson College – it is one of Scotland's key colleges actively engaged in strategic international projects with over 1,500 international (EU and non-EU) students from all over the world studying across all five faculties. He described the scale and size of the college, courses available and that they were accredited by the British Council for the teaching of English and are a UK Borders Agency (UKBA) Highly Trusted Sponsor.
- Members were informed of the key reasons for internationalisation in colleges and reasons why internationalisation is important including diversification of the wide-ranging college student body; offering international students courses and skills not available in their home country; breadth of experience and development for staff, sharing of best practice and cultures for students and staff alike.
- Mr Lister commented on the value of international education to the city of Edinburgh and the country as a whole both in terms of income and participation in a globally connected world.

- Members were informed of the wide-ranging activity Stevenson College is involved in internationally including key opportunities for student recruitment in growth markets such as Russia, Brunei, UAE and Saudi Arabia to name only a few and established markets including China and India. He commented on the positive ways in which the college sector prepares international students for study and employment.
- Mr Lister raised the issue of visas stating the importance of having a student visa system that does not differentiate negatively between colleges and universities. He warned that competition from overseas is fierce and there is a need to ensure that a clear message of welcome is sent from this country to overseas students. In relation to this he compared the restrictions of post-study work visas in the UK to those of other countries (i.e. closed in UK but are for two years in Australia, three years in Canada) and commented that the sector would like to challenge UKBA on issues relating to part-time work allowance stating that in colleges it is ten hours part-time but 20 hours in universities, He also commented on the damaging issue of 'bogus colleges' which risked devaluing the college brand and some student experiences causing bad press overseas. However, he felt this had been successfully addressed.
- In closing Mr Lister commented on the importance for Scotland's colleges to be dynamic and equal partners.

#### **Robin Parker, NUS Scotland: year of student mobility**

- Mr Parker discussed NUS Scotland's joint work with the Scottish Government on the "year of mobility". The initiative is aimed at increasing student awareness of the benefits and opportunities for Scottish students to study overseas.
- He explained that the opportunity to study abroad helps students in their personal development and employability. NUS Scotland had recently undertaken some research with employers on the link between mobility and employability.
- Helen O'Shea (International Education Officer, NUS Scotland) informed members that less than one per cent of students experience outward mobility and that the aim of the 2012-13 year of mobility is to increase this number to 20 per cent, commenting that Scotland is a long way behind other European countries in this respect.
- Members were informed that NUS Scotland was working across the sector to improve this situation. It was thought that shorter "mobility windows" of two/three weeks abroad would make opportunities more accessible to a wider range of students from all backgrounds.
- Factors such as lack of information and financial issues contributed to the low numbers of outward mobility, as well as issues around language skills. Mr Parker expressed his view that a collaborative rather than competitive approach to international student recruitment would be preferable.

#### **Christine Bovis-Crossen, Dean of Arts, Social Sciences and Management and Dean of Internationalisation, Queen Margaret University**

- Dr Bovis-Crossen informed the group that universities international activity is far more than just bringing international students to Scotland. Internationalisation should be seen as holistic. All universities are engaged in: development work; work with funded NGOs; International collaboration in learning and teaching and trans-national education.
- Trans-national education (TNE) takes many forms including twinning programmes, articulation programmes and branches. Dr Bovis-Crossen advised that all TNE delivered should be of a comparable quality to that delivered in Scotland. Staff development is a key factor in delivering a good student experience. Scottish universities had rejected the franchise model of education overseas whereby degrees delivered by another provider are validated by a UK-university.

- Dr Bovis–Cnossen discussed the success of the branch campuses of Scotland's universities i.e. Queen Margaret University's campus in Singapore, Heriot-Watt University's campus in Dubai and the University of Strathclyde's business school in India.
- In terms of international markets for Scottish universities, not all the focus is on BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) or CIVETS (Columbia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa).
- Although the ERASMUS programme exists for student mobility within Europe more work to be done to encourage more outward student mobility and on further discussion of the student experience. Dr Bovis–Cnossen also raised the issues of funding and work, carer and other responsibilities as factors which can act as a deterrent to outward mobility.
- Dr Bovis-Cnossen commented on the universal appeal of the four-year undergraduate degree model which is aligned to the USA and Canada. She also noted that Hong Kong had just recently moved toward this model. The four-year degree is compatible with the Bologna process in Europe. This also makes it easier to arrange staff and student exchanges.
- Dr Bovis-Cnossen cautioned that changes regarding visa and immigration issues by the UK Government were making it increasingly difficult for students and staff.

### **Dominic Houlihan, Vice- Principal, Internationalisation, University of Aberdeen**

- Professor Houlihan advised that having a strategic direction was key in international work. Partnering is a key aspects but it is not something that comes easy. Universities' offices overseas are not primarily for international student recruitment but for establishing other connections and opportunities.
- Excellence should drive everything in internationalisation of higher education. The cost to the sector in lost reputation would be massive. He agreed with Dr Bovis-Cnossen that franchising brought risks.
- He estimated that over half a million UK degrees are delivered overseas; 50 per cent of which are at undergraduate level. He felt was a tremendous story of the sector's entrepreneurialism which was largely overlooked. This has been achieved almost entirely without help from the Government.
- Members were informed that amongst universities' strengths was the fact their research excellence links to the Government's economic strategy and priority sectors such as creative industries, energy with a strong focus on renewables, life sciences; food and drink; financial services, tourism.
- Professor Houlihan talked about inward investment into Scotland as a result of universities' world-leading research and development in our universities. He cited, the Translational Medicine Research Collaboration (TMRC) as an example of inward investment in the area of health sciences. This is a collaborative research project between the universities of Aberdeen Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow, Wyeth Pharmaceutical Co, Scottish Enterprise and NHS Scotland.
- A further example of collaboration and breakthrough research into the treatment of Alzheimer's disease was the development of a drug developed by the University of Aberdeen and one of its spin-out companies TAuRx based in Singapore. He commented that it had not been possible to get the necessary venture capital within Scotland.
- In closing Professor Houlihan noted that he had not had the opportunity to cover international development as part of his presentation but he believed that Scotland has a duty and a responsibility to get involved in international development. He felt that actions in this area to date had not been joined-up enough.

## **5. Discussion following presentations**

The discussion following the presentations centred on the following issues:

### **Cross Border Agency and Visa Issues**

Gordon Watson (UCU) stated that his organisation was of the opinion that UKBA regulations are a hindrance to international staff and students and blocks them from coming to this country stating that 16,000 fewer students had applied to Scottish universities. He also raised concern for staff in Scotland's satellite campuses given the real possibility of two-tier working conditions. He felt lack of integration between international students and home students in colleges and universities in Scotland was a problem.

### **Widening Participation as it relates to student mobility**

Neil Findlay MSP questioned whether widening participation was an issue when it came to opportunities for mobility. It was acknowledged by universities and by NUS Scotland that it was. Queen Margaret University commented that as 60 per cent of their students are women over the age of 25, student exchanges for a whole semester were real obstacles for many students because of cost or care considerations. Even shorter field trips could cause problems for those with dependents. Christine Bovis Crossen stated that the university looked into funding for shorter trips.

### **International Development**

Grant Jarvie, University of Stirling echoed Professor Houlihan's comments that international development is a national responsibility and should not just be up to individual universities. Scotland has a moral obligation to help. He informed members of a long-term, collaborative initiative that the University of Stirling is involved in which uses sport as a vehicle for international development. Led by the Wallace Group each one of six UK universities is partnered with a particular country. The initiative focuses on the positive impact that sport can have on communities. In his view, commitment is key—universities need to be in it for the long-term but there was much to be gained in terms of good will and friendship for Scotland and the UK.

### **Collaboration and an international strategy for Scotland**

Michelle Grimley of Scotland's Colleges commented that she would like to see more collaboration between universities and colleges on international activity. In relation to UKBA she stated that there should be a "Team Scotland" approach which she felt would be a strong marketing message.

Ulrike Peter from Universities Scotland responded that there was a high-level of collaboration between universities when it came to international activity including several cross-sector networks and committees. She also pointed to recent joint visits abroad involving colleges and to memorandums of understanding that had been agreed between the entire Scottish university sector with India and Rwanda. However, she did note that an element of competition would be inevitable. She stated that universities are more than happy to working more closely with colleges.

Lesley Balfour, University of Abertay Dundee also echoed this stating that her institution is involved in a European working group in partnership with Scottish Universities, and also works closely with other Dundee institutions. She commented that the group go out as "Team Dundee", "Team Scotland" and as well as the university. They have many links with other colleges and would welcome the opportunity to do more.

Brian Lister of Scotland's Colleges commented that it would be helpful to have a view from Government on, "where, when opportunities existed and how to go about maximising them. He felt this was an issue that should be looked at by the Education Secretary.

### **International students – Fees and a good student experience**

Matt McPherson, President of Edinburgh University Students Association (EUSA) commented that there was much positive international work being done but he felt it important to raise the issue of international students being seen as "cash cows" by colleges and universities. He felt there should be

more investment in the student experience. This was refuted by Charlie Jeffrey of the University of Edinburgh who also stated that institutions want to attract the best students in the world. Mr Jeffrey commented that universities attached a great deal of importance to the experience international students have at university not least because, as graduates they are ambassadors for Scotland all around the world. He also suggested that global Scots spread the message that Scotland is a good place to come and study and that a positive message needs to be given out. He informed the group that the University of Edinburgh now had an EUSA officer involved in work on the international student experience. Mr McPherson acknowledged the point made by Mr Jeffrey regarding the EUSA International officer and commented that word of mouth was very important in international student recruitment and more generally, the growing significance of social media in international student recruitment was noted.

## **6. Date and topic of next meeting**

Members were informed that the next meeting will be held on Thursday 19 April 2012 13:00-14:00 in Committee Room 4 in the Scottish Parliament. The topic for this meeting will be part-time study at the request of the Open University in Scotland. The organisation will make a presentation at the meeting and have also kindly agreed to sponsor lunch.

The convener reminded members that a number of topics for discussion have already been suggested by members of the group for future meetings and commented that it would be useful to know if people have any preference as to which order they should be addressed – suggestions have included: the learner journey; entrepreneurialism: the experience offered by colleges and universities; and the employability agenda.

Members were also asked for suggestions as to who might be invited to make presentations/formal contributions to future meeting and for volunteers to sponsor the lunch for future meetings.

The Convener advised that dates for meetings beyond April will be organised in consultation with her office, Universities Scotland and Scotland's Colleges and will then be circulated by email.

## **7. Close**

The meeting was closed with thanks to all for attending.