

Postgraduate Review - Postgraduate Study in the Rest of the United Kingdom - Introduction of Financial Support Package

Equality Impact Assessment – Results

August 2023

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Title of Policy

Postgraduate study in rUK – 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, eligible full-time students domiciled in Scotland who are studying a postgraduate course in England, Wales or Northern Ireland are currently only eligible for support if their course is not available in Scotland.

This policy seeks to remove the requirement that the course be unavailable in Scotland, meaning that any eligible full-time student domiciled in Scotland will be able to receive support for postgraduate study in the rest of the UK (rUK).

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

Executive summary

Scottish domiciled students who wish to study a postgraduate course in another part of the UK (outside of Scotland) are currently not eligible for any student support unless there is no equivalent course available in Scotland. This demonstrates a disparity in support when comparing the support available to undergraduate students studying a course in the rest of the UK. This EQIA explored the impact the removal of this restriction would have 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 highlights the potential indirect discrimination this change has on part-time students who would not be eligible to apply for this support.

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 in another part of the UK (outside of Scotland) were not eligible for any student support unless there was no equivalent course available in Scotland. This contradicts the position for undergraduate students who are able to study in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and receive the standard undergraduate package. This also prevents students studying an undergraduate degree in the rUK to continue their studies at postgraduate level at the same university, if there is an equivalent course in Scotland available.

By removing the requirement that the course be unavailable in Scotland to be eligible for financial support, this means that any eligible full-time student domiciled in Scotland will be able to receive support for postgraduate study in rUK.

The Scope of the EQIA

As the proposal to introduce a financial support package for postgraduate study in 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) postgraduate course in the rUK. Funding is not being made available for part-time study.

Data provided by HESA shows that in the 2020/2021 Academic Year (AY) there were 2,020 full-time Scottish domiciled postgraduate enrolments at rUK Higher Education (HE) Providers.

Key Findings

The EQIA identified that there are a few gaps in the information available relating to the characteristics of gender reassignment and pregnancy and maternity in postgraduate students studying in the rUK and therefore the 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 data is available and 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 full-time Scottish domiciled students to further their education through postgraduate study.

This EQIA recognises the significant number of part-time students who will not benefit from this support. However, it should be noted that part-time support does not extend to any undergraduate course in the rUK at this time. Therefore this policy creates an equal position for those studying the same way at undergraduate level. This currently operates effectively in practice.

Of the 4,580 Scottish domiciled students studying a postgraduate course at a higher education provider in the rUK, 2,560 of these (56%) are studying on a part-time basis. The data also highlights that students aged 30 and over and female students are more likely to undertake postgraduate study in the rUK on a part-time basis.

This policy refers to full-time study only and therefore could be seen to disadvantage those choosing to study part-time due to their personal circumstances. However, the data does not allow for conclusions to be made on the number of students who choose not to undertake postgraduate study in rUK due to the lack of funding available to them.

The introduction of a financial support package will be available to all full-time students in this category, irrespective of age and gender. This would therefore be seen as a positive change for all full-time students. However, this could be regarded as indirectly discriminatory on the basis of age and gender, for those who opt to study part-time.

A wider review of part-time study should be conducted to mitigate the findings from this EQIA.

Recommendations and Conclusion

As a result of this EQIA, it is recommended that Scotland's postgraduate support package be extended to full-time courses being studied in the rUK regardless of whether or not an equivalent course is available in Scotland. This will create opportunities for full-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 this be extended to full-time study only 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.

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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