

PE1395/U

Universities Scotland Letter of 14 March 2013

How the sector markets its courses in the UK and overseas to effectively meet demand

Every higher education institution in Scotland publishes an annual prospectus. Alongside a traditional printed prospectus all institutions publish a detailed, searchable prospectus online. Institutions will also advertise in the press, usually to raise awareness of the institution rather than at subject level. They will also be engaged in considerable outreach work with schools and colleges.

For most UK students the UCAS website is a main source of information on course availability, <http://www.ucas.com/> alongside the prospectus for each individual institution.

UCAS is also a significant source of information for international students. This is complemented by institutions' significant international marketing activity. The sector also partners with agencies to raise awareness of the opportunities for study in Scotland, for example the British Council and Scottish Development International. Direct missions and links are complemented by resources such as <http://studyinScotland.org/> and <http://www.educationuk.org/>

How does the university sector respond to changes in demand, and assess emerging demand, from UK and international students for courses on offer?

Institutions will consider their provision in the context of demand matched against their existing strengths and the opportunity to build capacity in any given subject. The establishment of new courses would be a major strategic decision for a department or the institution as a whole and would be taken not only on the basis of information on demand but also the match to existing academic strengths and the opportunities and risks in establishing new capacity. Changes in planned numbers in any given subject must also be made in the context of the institution's planned numbers overall to ensure that it does not breach SFC funded numbers for Scottish and EU students.

Therefore, in the context of this petition, if an institution received high demand for an existing language course it might consider increasing the number of funded places for that course but would have to consider concomitant reductions in its portfolio elsewhere. If an institution wished to create provision in a wholly new area it would have to assure itself that a sustained demand would be likely to be present and would wish to assure itself that the quality of its provision would be such that students would choose to study the course. For instance, in the case of languages, the institution may wish to consider its research portfolio and links to countries to be able to enhance provision for instance through student placements.

What policy has Universities Scotland developed to ensure that the university sector is able to meet demand for language courses or subjects that are not available?

Universities Scotland is the representative body of Scotland's 19 higher education institutions. It develops policy on behalf of the university sector and campaigns publicly on higher education issues.

Universities Scotland's role is therefore to ensure that institutions have the resources and freedom to succeed within a market where Scottish, UK, EU and international students have considerable choice over the subject and location of their studies.

Universities Scotland has an International Committee, with representation from across the sector, which provides a forum for discussion of policy and the implementation of collaborative projects. For example, in partnership with British Council (Scotland) and Scottish Development International, International Committee members have shaped the creation of Study in Scotland marketing materials and have considered opportunities for outward missions.

Universities Scotland's Learning and Teaching Committee and its International Committee have an interest in the development of the outward mobility of students studying in Scotland so that study abroad is a part of their course.

If Scottish Government were to identify a subject of strategic importance it might ask the Scottish Funding Council to engage with the sector as to how this provision might be developed or secured. In such a situation the Council would most likely engage with the sector through Universities Scotland to ensure that all institutions with the interest and potential to contribute can engage in discussion.