

OECD THEMATIC REVIEW OF TERTIARY EDUCATION

UPDATE OF COUNTRY BACKGROUND REPORT FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM

January 2008

United Kingdom: Update of Country Background Report (December 2007)

Introduction

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) working in conjunction with the devolved administrations for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales commissioned Mr Tony Clark to prepare a Country Background Report as part of the OECD thematic review of tertiary education. The United Kingdom Country Background Report was published in June 2006.

This update provides brief details of the main policy changes in tertiary education which have been announced since the Country Background Report was published. The sections referred to below are references to the relevant sections of the Country Background Report.

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Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
December 2007

Authors Note (Page 2)

1. On 28 June 2007, the Prime Minister announced a series of changes to the structure of Government to help tackle the challenges that Britain faces in the year ahead. The key changes were the creation of:-
 - a. A new Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) championing investment in science and skills from within government, as part of the Government's strategy to make the country more competitive.
 - b. A new Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), improving the focus on all aspects of policy affecting children and young people, as part of the Government's aim to deliver educational excellence.
 - c. A new Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) to promote productivity, enterprise, competition and trade – vital for thriving British business.
2. The functions of the former Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) have been distributed across these three Departments as have the staff who worked in those Departments. Policy responsibility for tertiary education for England now rests with DIUS.

Chapter 2: Tertiary Education System in the UK

Section 2.6 Qualifications, Paragraph 44 (Page 24)

3. The Framework for Qualification of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland has been successfully self-certificated against the Bologna Framework for Qualification of the European Higher Education Area.

http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/QF-Scotland_en.pdf

Chapter 3: The Tertiary Education System and the Labour Market

Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy

4. On 10 September 2007 the Scottish Government published their new skills strategy, *Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy*. The skills strategy provides a new agenda for skills and learning in Scotland – developing both Scotland’s skills policies and its skills landscape in tandem, crafting them into a more coherent structure designed to address Scottish requirements.

5. The skills strategy sets out the Scottish Government’s ambitions for skills, in a lifelong learning context, from cradle to the grave. It outlines their aims, ambitions and plans for making Scotland’s skills base truly world class, ensuring Scotland develops the skills required for the 21st Century.

6. The strategy is also Scotland’s response to the vision outlined in the Leitch Review of Skills in the UK. The strategy details what Ministers want from the Government’s skills investment and how that is going to be achieved across the whole of the education and lifelong learning portfolio. It articulates potential priorities, choices and options for further discussion for all key stakeholders seeking to challenge and encourage debate. It is a working document to build consensus and act as a tool for delivery of actions for skills development in Scotland.

Chapter 5: The Role of Tertiary education in Research and Innovation

Section 5.3 (Page 45) – Funding Council allocations for research

Proposals for more metrics-based arrangements for research funding and assessment:

7. Plans were announced in November 2007 to replace the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) with a simpler and more transparent system, but one which does not lead to profound changes in the distribution of resources. The creation of DIUS has brought together policy responsibility for both the research funding distributed by HEFCE and that which is allocated by the Research Councils. This provides the opportunity for greater coherence in strategic direction of research funding.

8. HEFCE are developing new metrics-based arrangements for research assessment. They published a consultation document focussing on bibliometrics on 22 November 2007, to obtain the views of the HE sector. After the consultation, HEFCE will run a pilot to test new arrangements in practice. Final decisions on new arrangements are expected towards end of 2008. DIUS is committed to introducing the new system (for science, technology and engineering, including medicine) progressively with effect from AY 2010/11. For all other subjects HEFCE will be looking to develop a light-touch peer review system. The new arrangements will apply in the first instance to England with the devolved administrations to decide whether they wish to adopt the same arrangements.

Section 5.5 (Page 46) - Collaborative Initiatives, Paragraph 96

9. Work to develop research pooling is continuing in Scotland. To date eight pooling initiatives have been funded in physics, chemistry, engineering and mathematics, geosciences/environment and society, economics, life sciences and brain imaging. Several more collaborations are under consideration.

Chapter 6: Achieving Equity in and through Tertiary Education

Section 6.5 (Page 53/54) – Adult Students, Paragraph 121 – Last paragraph

10. The Scottish Government has recently amended the support available to adult learners. The new arrangements are described below.

11. From the academic year 2008-09, Scottish students in higher education (up to SCQF level 10, i.e. HNC, HND and undergraduate), who are working towards at least 50% of a qualification and whose individual income is less than/equal to £18,000, will be eligible for a £500 part-time HE fee grant. This will be delivered by a simplified Individual Learning Account model. In addition students on a low income or who are receiving certain benefits may be eligible for free tuition. Students with disabilities can also claim Disabled Student's Allowance which is not income assessed. If students are experiencing financial difficulty they can also apply for help from their institution's Hardship Fund.

Chapter 7: Resourcing the Tertiary Education System

Section 7.1 (Page 61) – Income for Institutions, Paragraph 139 (to be added)

12. The Scottish Government has announced plans to abolish the Graduate Endowment. The Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Bill was published on 22 October 2007 outlining the Scottish Government's plans to abolish this fee for students who graduated from 1 April 2007 onwards. Legislation will apply to students who graduate or would be entitled to graduate on or after 1 April 2007 and have to pay the endowment fee on 1 April 2008, and those in subsequent years. This means that those graduates who become liable to pay the graduate endowment fee on 1 April 2005, 2006 and 2007 will still be legally obliged to pay it.

Section 7.2 (Page 62) – Support for students

New Student Support from 2008

13. In July 2007, an improved package of financial support for students in England was announced. This includes:-

- a. From September 2008, more students will be entitled to non repayable maintenance grants as a result of increases to the income thresholds against which the grants are assessed.
- b. 16 years olds who qualify for an Education Maintenance Allowance will, from September 2008, be guaranteed a minimum level of maintenance support if they choose to go on to participate in higher education.
- c. Graduates will be offered increased choice over how they repay their student loans. They will have the option of taking 'repayment holidays' at a time of their choosing, for up to 5 years in total. This will apply to those who become liable to repay their Student Loans in April 2012 or later.
- d. A new emphasis to students acting as role models and mentors for young people who might not otherwise go on to higher education. The Student Associate Scheme will be expanded – doubling the number of opportunities by 2010/11.
- e. From September 2008 the maximum amounts of Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) for non-medical helpers and for postgraduates will be increased by around 60%.

Details are contained in the press notice available through the link below.

<http://www.dius.gov.uk/press/05-07-07.html>

Section 7.4 (Page 63) – Allocation of public funds

Equivalent or Lower Qualifications (ELQ) funding

14. DIUS announced in September 2007 that students who are studying for a second higher education qualification at the same or lower level than a qualification they have already received should no longer attract the institutional funding distributed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Accordingly HEFCE has been advised to phase out the funding given to institutions for ELQ students starting in academic year 2008/09. The intention is that the £100m per annum that would be saved would be targeted on those who are entering higher education for the first time. Similar adjustments will be made to the Student Support arrangements from AY 2009/10, where currently holding only equivalent UK qualifications preclude students from support for a further degree course (there is a small list of exempted courses, which is under review). This change applies to England only.

15. HEFCE are consulting on the basis that no institution should lose grant in cash terms as these changes are introduced. They are consulting on how the policy should be implemented, including questions of exceptions, phasing, transitional protection and data requirements. This change applies to England only.

Chapter 9: Assuring and Improving the Quality of Tertiary Education

Section 9.1 (Page 75) – Quality assurance framework

National Student Forum

16. On 18 October, DIUS Ministers announced an ambitious student listening programme to enable students to make their views and ideas heard. A new independent National Student Forum, reflecting the diverse student population, will be created to inform Government policy and publish an annual report to Ministers and Parliament. Five 'student juries' made up of students from across the country will be held looking at high profile issues that matter to them such as student finance, widening participation and learning support. Further details are contained in the press release available through the link below. This change applies to England only.

<http://www.dius.gov.uk/press/18-10-07.html>