

Cross-Party Group on Colleges and Universities

26th April 2022, 1pm-2pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Ms Liz Smith MSP

Invited guests

Mr Max Browning, Chairman of One Scotland

Professor Brad Mackay, Senior Vice Principal & Vice Principal (International Strategy and External Relations), University of St Andrews

Ms Lin Shen, International Director, Perth College UHI

Non-MSP Group Members

Ms Aimee Logan, Universities Scotland

Mr Alastair Sim, Universities Scotland

Ms Candice Aldrich, Universities Scotland

Ms Donella Beaton, Robert Gordon University

Mr Duncan McKay, Universities Scotland

Ms Ela Kossakowska, Universities Scotland

Mr Gary Campbell, University of the Highlands and Islands

Mr Gavin McWhinnie, Liz Smith MSP staff

Mr Gregory Lee, University of St Andrews

Ms Hilary Brown, Scottish Government

Mr James Harrison, Quality Assurance Agency

Ms Jane Scott, Queen Margaret University

Ms Jenny Frost, Robert Gordon University

Ms Joanne Buchan, Colleges Scotland

Mr Keith Robson, The Open University

Ms Lindsey Alexander, University of St Andrews

Mr Lorcan Owens, University of Edinburgh

Ms Louise McGurk, Universities and Colleges Union

Mr Mario Avila, Robert Gordon University

Mr Philip Bale, University of Aberdeen

Mr Roy Gardner, City of Glasgow College

Ms Susannah Lane, Universities Scotland

Mr Tom Hall, Colleges Scotland

Ms Veronica Lynch, University of the Highlands and Islands

Mr William Hardie, Robert Gordon University

Apologies

Mr Alastair Delaney, Quality Assurance Agency

Mr Blair Grubb, University of Dundee
Ms Gemma Wilson, Audit Scotland
Mr Grant Jarvie, University of Edinburgh
Dr John Blicharski, University of Dundee
Ms Julie Riach, University of the Highlands and Islands
Ms Kaukab Stewart MSP, Scottish Parliament
Mr Kenny Harrison, University of the Highlands and Islands
Ms Mary Senior, University and College Union
Mr Mathew McIver, University of the Highlands and Islands
Mr Paul Little, City of Glasgow College

Welcome and Introduction

The Convener welcomed everyone to the Cross Party Group meeting and noted apologies from the group. Ms Smith introduced the topic of this meeting as the educational links of Scottish universities and colleges with China. Ms Smith informed members they would hear from three speakers: Mr Max Browning, Professor Brad Mackay and Ms Lin Shen.

Presentations

Mr Max Browning, Chairman of One Scotland

Mr Browning began his presentation by stating that he was standing in for Dr Judith McClure who unfortunately couldn't attend. He said that One Scotland is a charity that works on supporting international students when in Scotland and promoting integration and cultural exchange at universities in Scotland. Mr Browning highlighted issues faced by Chinese students that come to study in Scotland. The main issues affecting closer integration are, use of social media for communication (with the variance in use of social media platforms between China and the UK an obstacle) language and the clustering of nationalities in student accommodation. He encouraged universities to work with One Scotland to overcome these barriers to enhance the experience of Chinese students and to maintain their connections with Scottish education. He concluded his presentation by referring to an example of the University of Edinburgh which is working to translate all of their communications into Mandarin for Chinese students.

Professor Brad Mackay, Vice Principal & Vice Principal (International Strategy and External Relations) at University of St Andrews

Professor Mackay began his presentation by relaying statistics of the number of Chinese students are currently studying in Scotland. There are currently 17,100, with 70% of Chinese students studying at either the University of Edinburgh or the University of Glasgow as per the HESA Student and Staff Data 2020-2021. He further outlined that there are 800 Chinese staff in Scottish universities according to HESA. He stated that these statistics make China Scotland's largest market for student recruitment. Professor Mackay continued by highlighting the partnerships between Scotland's universities and China on an institution level and through transitional education (TNE). Professor Mackay then spoke about Confucius Institutes five of which are in Scotland, with Herriot-Watt University hosting the only business Confucius Institute in Scotland. He went on to state that the Scottish Government has committed to developing an International Education Strategy this year, and it will be important to take a holistic consideration of the relationship between Scotland and China in this year's strategy and

develop an approach where Scotland's higher education does not become reliant on Chinese markets. He concluded his presentation by highlighting how important it is to collaborate with China, particularly in addressing challenges like health and climate change.

Ms Lin Shen, International Director Perth College UHI

Ms Shen began her presentation by introducing the International Ambitions Report which highlights the effort that the College Development Network have put into working collaboratively with China. She continued by outlining the three stages of internationalisation of education and how this has been happening in Scotland for the last two decades and spoke of the increasing number of Chinese students studying in Scotland, contributing to over 33% of the UK's international student numbers. Ms Shen stated that this expansion will not last forever as China's universities are growing in excellence, reducing the need for Chinese students to study internationally as Chinese students are primarily concerned with the prestige of research and excellence as a motivation to study overseas. Ms Shen highlighted that it can be difficult for colleges such as Perth College to recruit international students and so have explored TNE to partner with Chinese institutions. She concluded her presentation by conveying the successes of Chinese partnerships.

Question and Answer Session

The Convener thanked the speakers and welcomed any questions from the group.

Ms Liz Smith MSP

Ms Smith asked Mr Browning about the initiatives universities are trying to implement to ensure Chinese students feel more comfortable while they are in Scotland. Has there been good response or do challenges remain?

Mr Browning responded by saying this is a difficult question, but One Scotland could use more support from universities on these initiatives to engage with Chinese students.

Ms Smith continued by asking Professor Mackay and Ms Shen whether there has been an increase in demand from Chinese staff to universities and colleges. Professor Mackay was unsure of numbers across the FE & HE sector but would look into this and report back.

Ms Shen replied by highlighting that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed difficulties for international staffing but hopes that staff exchanges and international staffing will recover post pandemic.

Ms Jane Scott, Queen Margaret University

Ms Scott stated that not all universities have the same focus on China as a partner or country for recruitment. She asked Mr Browning on whether the One Scotland initiative supports the integration of Chinese nationals with other international students (as well as Scottish-domiciled students).

Mr Browning responded confirmed that One works with all international students to encourage integration.

Mr Gary Campbell, University of the Highlands and Islands

Mr Campbell asked whether the four-year honours degree in Scotland is a problem or an opportunity in terms of engagement with China.

Ms Shen replied stating that colleges don't feel disadvantaged as China have the similar four-year honours degree so it matches well, but different markets may feel differently.

Professor Mackay noted a recent issue with a mobility scheme between China and Scotland that had encountered difficulties due to the application of an assumed three-year degree model. Universities Scotland was engaged with the Chinese Embassy on this to ensure continued opportunities for students.

Mr Campbell continued by asking Ms Shen what type of vocational training would be offered.

Ms Shen responded by saying they would collaborate with Chinese institutions to find opportunities within the vocational training offered by colleges through TNE.

Mr Gregory Lee, University of St Andrews

Mr Lee asked about the risks working with China given their geopolitical relations and whether relationships will return to the way they were before covid.

Professor Mackay responded by agreeing there has been a lot of changes that have been accelerated by COVID in the relationships with China but important that China remains a key partner for Scottish universities. Universities take due diligence and risk manage appropriately.

Ms Shen agreed with Professor Mackay that China must remain a key partner and highlighted that recently the trend has been more towards more collaborative research papers between China and the West post-COVID due to the importance of Chinese research.

Mr Roy Gardner, City of Glasgow College

Mr Gardner gave a plea for colleges and universities to work collaboratively and to find opportunities to support the Scottish institutions in-country in China to maximise opportunities, not least because of the need for colleges and universities to coordinate with one lead institution at the province level.

Ms Jane Scott, Queen Margaret University

Ms Scott asked if there is there any insight into whether it has become more difficult to set up articulation arrangements with Chinese institutions

Professor Mackay advised that he'd refer this to Universities Scotland to answer as international articulation arrangements is not something that the University of St Andrews is involved in.

Ms Shen stated that there are different agreements you can enter into with Chinese institutions, a government agreement and an institution agreement. This is a decision for the institutions making the agreements, although there is not dedicated cohort to study at a Scottish college or university.

Concluding Remarks

Mr Browning made a concluding remark that he would love to engage with anyone on this call and discuss how to build a partnership, Ms Smith confirmed that the Secretariat would be happy to share the group's contact information with him to support this.

Ms Smith concluded the meeting by thanking the speakers for their time and for their very well detailed presentations and large scope of detail. She continued to inform members that we have now exhausted our list of topics and to let her know if any member has a topic they would like to discuss at future CPG meetings. Ms Smith advised the topic of the next CPG meeting will be maintaining and enhancing academic excellence.