



Universities – knowledge for Scotland

A manifesto for the 2007 Scottish Parliament election

Introduction

The University and College Union Scotland represents nearly 7,000 academic and related staff in Scottish higher education institutions. As an autonomous part of the University and College Union, we are strong supporters of the Scottish Parliament.

In this document we summarise the importance of universities in developing knowledge for Scotland's economy and society.

Higher education provides the educated workforce that is the base for inward investment, the research for new companies, the professionals in our public services. It both reflects the need to preserve and sustain cultural achievement in Scotland, and contributes crucially to how culture is developed. Above all, it enriches the lives of those who experience it.

Scotland and the Scottish Parliament need a well-supported higher education sector to meet the aspiration to be 'the best small country in the world'.

Funding of Higher Education

Scottish universities have a world-class reputation. But they can only maintain it, and indeed enhance it, if they are well funded.

Since the turn of the new century there have been real-terms increases for higher education. English institutions were given a boost to finances in the latest spending review round and more importantly institutions there will increase their income through the use of top-up fees. We oppose top-up fees and maintain that Scotland should remain top-up free, but there is now a real concern that English institutions will have a considerable funding advantage in the future despite the welcome significant funding arising from the last spending review.

Higher education can only deliver for Scotland and the world if the recent significant funding increases are maintained, and the competitive challenge of additional funding in England met. A truly multicultural, vibrant, and informed society and knowledge-driven economy can only be delivered by well-resourced universities.

Staff the key resource

The key activities of universities – teaching and research – are conducted by exceptionally highly qualified labour. For a typical university lecturer or researcher the personal investment involved is at least four years of undergraduate and three years of doctoral study. This is often followed by many years of contract research. All this constitutes an even longer apprenticeship than for doctors or lawyers.

Higher Education, moreover, relies on all of the academic and related staff it employs. It depends on their highly qualified labour and their roles in teaching, learning and research.

Management

At present, most strategic planning in higher education assumes that good people management is a mechanism for achieving objectives, rather than an objective in itself. As such it is seen as a lower-order issue, often thought of as something for “the employer”, i.e. the university, not the concern of the Minister or the funding council.

University Courts and management must put good people management first, work in partnership with the unions and develop expertise in managing people, resources, and institutional change without conflict or crisis.

Recruitment, retention and motivation

Universities must have reward systems and pay levels which can attract, retain and motivate the exceptionally well-qualified people who are at the heart of their work. Yet universities have reduced the proportion of university expenditure that goes on salaries in recent years as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: HEIs expenditure on all staff as percentage of all current expenditure.

Country	1998-99	2004-05
Scotland	65%	59%
UK	63%	58%

Source Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Further, there is a demographic issue in higher education in Scotland as teaching staff approach retirement. **Figure 1** shows a marked decrease in staff working beyond 60 years of age combined with a relative shortage of staff at the start of their careers. This will severely deplete the profession in ten to twenty years time unless checked. Higher Education needs to be made attractive to academic staff of all ages and career stages.

A significant increase in pay is needed to reward and retain academic and related staff and attract postgraduates to a University career.

Academic freedom and redundancy procedures

UCU Scotland welcomes the protection of academic freedom – under Section 26 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 – for everyone engaged in teaching, the provision of learning or research in all further and higher education institutions in Scotland. We welcome the definition of academic freedom as including freedom (within the law) to hold and express opinion, question and test established ideas and received wisdom and to present controversial or unpopular points of view.

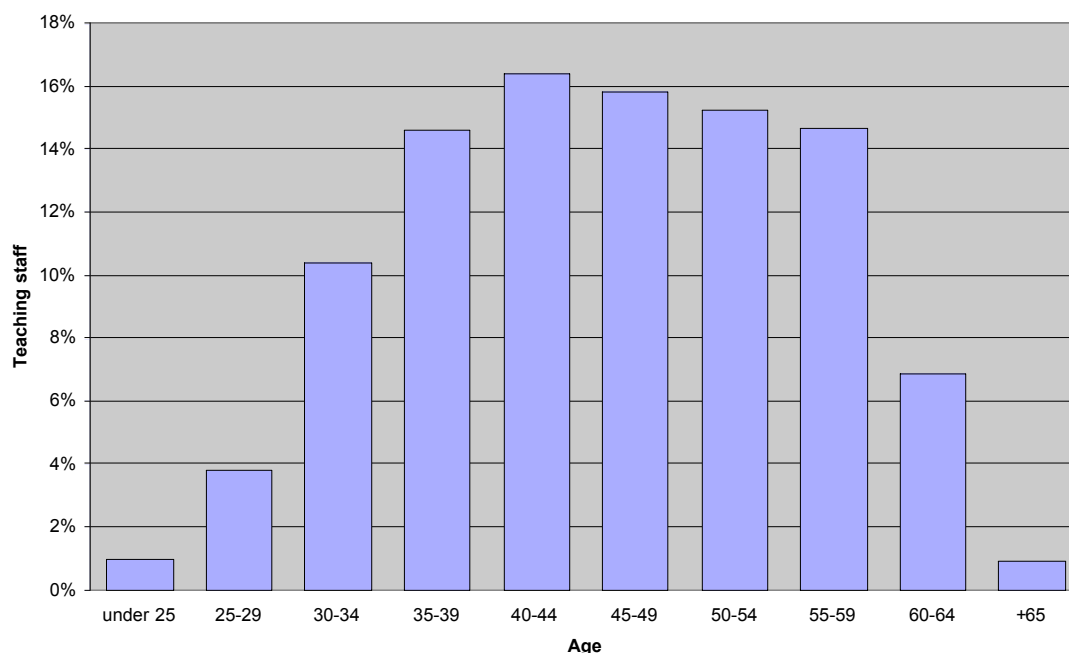
Academic freedom is a good in itself, a necessary element in any civilised society. It is the best guarantee of good science and sound scholarship and as a secure basis for maintaining the success of our universities in attracting overseas students and providing an open and welcoming environment for students of all backgrounds and beliefs.

Free and informed academic debate can also make a significant contribution to the resolution of difficult issues facing modern society, of which the danger, origins of and response to terrorism is one of the most challenging.

We were therefore deeply concerned that the Westminster government’s Terrorism Bill as initially conceived and drafted threatened to criminalise legitimate academic teaching, study and research such as chemistry teaching and the normal work of librarians in supplying primary source material for students and researchers.

We call on the political parties to ensure that the academic freedom provided by a Scottish Parliament Act is not undermined by any future Westminster legislation.

Figure 1: Age profile of teaching staff



Casualisation

UCU Scotland welcomes the widespread conversion of fixed term employment contracts to permanent contracts, in the light of the right of many fixed term employees with qualifying service to be deemed permanent after 10 July 2006. However, we are concerned that in the Scottish University sector, fixed term employment remains prevalent, despite longstanding Ministerial guidance to reduce the use of fixed term contracts, 92% of research staff are still employed on fixed term contracts. We urge the Scottish Executive to ensure the requirements that came into force on 10 July 2006 are met by promoting good practice in the mass conversion of fixed term to permanent contracts throughout the Scottish workforce and, in particular by requiring employers throughout the public sector or subject to public funding and/or public procurement, to adopt good employment practice in addressing this issue. Universities are now multi-million pound operations with funding from a plethora of sources and it is time this funding was managed professionally. The excessive use of fixed-term and hourly paid contracts has no match in any other profession. We wish to work in partnership with universities to achieve job security.

In line with the European directive, permanent employment should be the norm.

Hourly paid staff

The highest priority should be given to the continuing precarious situation of hourly paid staff and particularly to ensure that pay modernisation throughout Scottish universities includes the assimilation of hourly paid academic and related staff to the new pay and grading structures.

Equal opportunities for staff

All HEIs are already obliged to develop and implement Race Equality Policies and assess the impact of policies and practices such as new pay structures, use of fixed term contracts and selection of staff for inclusion in the RAE. Similar duties will shortly arise in relation to the preparation of a disability equality scheme and a gender equality scheme. In addition, employment equality regulations protect staff and students from direct and indirect discrimination, harassment or victimisation on grounds of sexual orientation, religious faith or belief and age.

According to UCU analysis of HESA data the average salary in Scotland for full-time female academic staff in 2004-5 was £33,035, compared with £39,378 for male staff, with women earning 84 % of male pay. This is worse than both the UK average of 85.6 % for higher education staff and the Scottish average of 85 % for women's pay across all sectors. All universities should be required to undertake equal pay audits to check whether the new pay framework has reduced these iniquitous pay gaps between the sexes.

We welcome the formation of Equality Forward, the SFC Equality Unit, which should address equality legislation for all staff and students in colleges and universities. We urge

it to work with all higher education institutions in Scotland to aid them to carry out their key role in promoting equality and diversity and eliminating discrimination both within their organisations and more widely within Scottish society.

We recommend that the SFC works to eliminate sex and race discrimination at all levels and particularly in terms of staff pay.

Knowledge for Scotland

Universities provide the professionals working in every aspect of Scottish society including public services, manufacturing, research and development. They also provide independent experts and research in every field. In addition the universities are the gatekeepers for all the professions, providing the first line of assurance. By doing these things, Scotland's universities provide the knowledge for Scotland and the UK, and they make an essential contribution to the wider world.

Workforce

According to the Scottish Executive¹ about 80% of the Scottish working age population are educated to at least SVQ level 2 – one of the highest levels internationally. In terms of low-level qualifications Scotland ranks very highly in terms of international comparators with only 10% of the working age population having less than a standard grade and similarly for intermediate qualifications where 53% of the working age population have at least SVQ 3 level – making Scotland fourth among 16 nations. However, for degree level qualifications, Scotland ranks 15th with Finland among 31 countries. To have reached the upper quartile of OECD nations in 2001, Scotland would have needed an additional 160,000 graduates aged 25-64. In terms of the UK position Scotland fares well with only the South East and London having a greater percentage of the population with degrees but Scotland is ranked first in the UK for the number of intermediate qualifications. Therefore, Scotland has a well qualified workforce but in terms of the OECD nations it does not yet have the highly skilled workforce. If the knowledge economy is to be a reality, then Scotland must train and retain more graduates in the workforce.

Commercialisation

The figures in Table 2, show that spend on Scottish Business Enterprise Research and Development, BERD, is half of that for the UK as a whole and whereas the Scottish figure is comparable to Italy it is much less than most of its other competitor nations. Hence in Scotland there is a very low base of BERD and this makes it difficult to build links between researchers based in universities and those in industry. This lessens the scope for research to be developed by existing business in Scotland resulting in a downward spiral unless there is a significant intervention to break the trend.

¹ Scottish Executive, Lifelong Learning Statistics 2005: 2005 Astron ISBN: 0-7559-4628-6

Scotland needs a national strategy for science and skills that addresses the issues of lack of BERD funding and skill shortages whilst encouraging the development of high technology and knowledge based industries. If Scotland is to emulate the economic prosperity and growth in those countries that have thriving knowledge economies then the level of funding in research and development has to increase.

UCU Scotland believes it will be impossible to grow a knowledge economy without a significant improvement in industrial research spending.

Table 2 International Comparisons 1997 to 2003: BERD as a percentage of GDP

Country	1997(%)	1999(%)	2001(%)	2003(%)
Scotland	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6
UK	1.18	1.25	1.28	1.24
Germany	1.54	1.70	1.76	1.78
France	1.39	1.38	1.37	1.36
Italy	0.52	0.51	0.56	0.55
Japan	2.04	2.08	2.28	2.36
Canada	1.01	1.06	1.11	1.03
USA	1.91	1.98	2.10	1.79
Ireland	0.91	0.87	0.80	0.8
Finland	1.79	2.20	2.42	2.46
Sweden	2.65	2.74	3.31	2.95
EU	1.13	1.19	1.24	1.17
OECD	1.48	1.53	1.62	1.51

Source: Business Enterprise Research and Development in Scotland 2003

The SFC has now introduced a knowledge transfer and commercialisation funding stream which encourages knowledge transfer in its broadest sense and not just for direct economic gains. This is a welcome extension of research funding but it can only be further extended with the input of resources from Scottish Enterprise. The development of Scotland as a prosperous cultured nation in which citizens enjoy a good quality of life can only occur if research – and nationally relevant collaborations – are promoted in our universities.

The Intermediary Technology Institutes (ITIs) were envisaged as a conduit between university research and business development. In their first annual report, the ITIs reported better than expected progress in membership and programme take up. The initial work seems to be producing results but it is too early to predict if this will add value and increase research and development in Scotland and this funding is also limited to energy, technological media and life sciences.

We recommend that Scottish Enterprise and the SFC use their funding and expertise in facilitating links between industry, research establishments and the researchers themselves.

Direct economic benefits

In addition to the expertise provided by HEIs to Scottish economic development, there is also the direct impact on the economy of HE funding. According to a report on finances in 2003 by McNicoll et al. the output multiplier for higher education is 1.60 and for every full-time equivalent (FTE) job in the higher education sector, another 0.42 FTE jobs were created. Both these figures are greater than those for the non-tertiary education sector.

Funds for higher education are an investment in future job and wealth creation and are also effective in creating jobs today.

Broadening participation in Higher Education

Widening access is an objective we have supported for many years. The SFC has recently published a report into widening participation, Learning for All, which highlights the efforts and funding the SFC is making in the recruitment of under-represented groups.

Student Finance

We believe Scotland should stay top-up free and with levels of bursaries which benefit students from low household incomes. Many students will benefit financially from their studies and will repay that benefit through income, capital and expenditure taxes as well as the graduate endowment and student loan. We recognise and welcome that the graduate endowment and indeed fees from English students will only be used for student bursaries but graduates contribute significantly to the public purse and in turn public funding and not private fees should be used to finance Scottish higher education.

UCU Scotland is opposed to the use of top-up fees or student quotas. Public funding is required to maintain the competitive position of our universities.

Part-time students

The part-time student supplement was introduced to encourage wider access, as part-time study is considered to be more attractive to students from the lower social classes. However, part-time undergraduate students cannot access the same level of student support as full-time undergraduates and are often liable for fees, despite the fee waiver for students from low-income backgrounds.

We argue that the Scottish Parliament should:

- Implement fee payments for part-time undergraduate students on the same basis as full-time undergraduate students.
- Extend the student loans scheme to all part-time students on a similar basis to full-time undergraduate students.
- Extend eligibility for the Mature Students' Bursary Fund to mature part-time students.

We recommend that all students should be treated equally whether they are studying part or full time.

Articulation

Scotland is one of the first countries in Europe to develop formal articulation routes through the Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework, SCQF, and is relatively successful in recruiting further education students into higher education with advanced standing. However, the SFC should do more to build and facilitate links on a national basis rather than leaving each institution to develop their own schemes. In particular the easy transition from level to level on SCQF should be clarified for all HEIs, so that those students who wish to continue their studies are encouraged to find an appropriate course. However, such articulation routes will still only be used by a minority of students. We therefore remain committed to the distinctive nature of the four year Honours degree and the value of the HND as a qualification in its own right for the majority of students.

There should be increased articulation between further education and higher education with the encouragement of the funding councils including the full implementation of the SCQF.

Accountability to stakeholders

We have a democratic mechanism whereby universities are accountable, through the SFC, to a Scottish Parliament with significant and distinctive roles for the Minister and the Enterprise and Culture Committee. An appropriate method to address the balance between autonomy and accountability is by introducing a more rigorous condition of grant as recently developed by the SFC. Higher education institutions, as recipients of substantial public funding from the Scottish Parliament's budget, should be broadly accountable for the use of these funds in accordance with Scotland's needs for higher education and research. We believe that institutions should be required to show how they will respond to government policies in their strategic plans whilst maintaining their distinctive institutional mission and fully involving internal stakeholders – notably staff and students.

We recommend that the SFC further develops capacity and methodology for monitoring the implementation (as well as the adequacy) of institutions' strategic plans.

Devolution

The SFC works with the other UK funding bodies in providing quality and research assessment systems but HEFCE, as the largest funding body, tends to dominate and lead the agenda. This includes those aspects of research funding that are not devolved issues and in particular the announcement of a replacement for the RAE by the UK treasury even though SFC research funding is a devolved issue. The SFC is often more enlightened in its approach but can be forced to follow the lead of HEFCE in some areas. A properly informed SFC engagement with the improvement of people management, with sensitivity to the fact and constraints of UK bargaining, would help to achieve a better balance. Universities Scotland, the SFC and the campus unions will need to work in partnership to ensure that Scotland's universities meet Scotland's distinctive needs.

Conclusion

All the political parties have expressed their backing for Scotland's world class universities and have acknowledged their importance for the future of Scotland. However, their role will be diminished if the concerns expressed in this manifesto are not addressed. In particular, the issue of adequate funding is crucial, as increased funding benefits the rest of the UK.

If these issues are addressed then Higher Education can contribute crucially to the way in which advances in knowledge serve the economy. It will help to ensure the health of civil society. It will play its part in creating the best possible conditions for human fulfilment in later life for its students.

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