

Challenge Fund Seminar Report

This seminar was held on 26 November 2008, with 32 attendees from universities, colleges and careers services. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who took the time to attend the event and contribute their views on the support for international students.

Aims of Seminar

The aims of the seminar were as follows:

- To share learning and best practice for the support and retention of international students in Scotland.
- To develop proposals for how we can work together to meet our aims for international graduates in support of the population growth target.

Background

International students have always been a key target under the Fresh Talent initiative, and we have taken forward a number of initiatives aimed at students. These include the Fresh Talent: Working in Scotland Scheme which has now been subsumed into Tier 1: Post Study of the points based system and applies across the UK, and the Fresh Talent: Supporting International Students Challenge Fund which was launched in April 2005.

The challenge fund is a competitive fund open to all further and higher education institutions in Scotland and is intended to kick-start activity which will be funded by the institution and other partners in subsequent years. To date there have been three full rounds of funding, the third round of projects finished in September 2008, with the 2008/09 projects starting in September 2008. Aims for the 2008/09 round of funding are:

- to enhance **employability support** and mentoring available to international students in Scotland;
- to encourage institutions to work collaboratively, both within and outwith the sector, to develop innovative and effective ways of supporting international students to **access the Scottish jobs market**.

Following four rounds of funding it was felt that now would be a suitable time to review the funding, to ensure not only that it meets the aims of the fund itself, but also to review whether those aims are still relevant.

Presentations

The following presentations were given:

Setting the Scene – Ian Kernohan, Head of the Fresh Talent initiative.

International Talent in the Labour Market – Barbara Graham and Hazel McAllister, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services Scotland.

Three projects which have received challenge fund support gave their views on what had worked for them in supporting international students, and their experience of working with challenge fund support.

International Student Alliance - Alastair Christie, Napier University / Linknet Mentoring

Tandem Language Exchange - Guy Bromley, University of Edinburgh

Opportunities to Work in Scotland - Barbara Graham, University of Strathclyde

We would like to take this opportunity to once again thank all those who presented their experiences with the challenge fund and their projects. The presentations raised a number of issues, both positive and negative, around student expectations, support services and practicalities of challenge funding which helped stimulate debate in the workshops which followed.

Copies of the presentations, and case studies of other challenge fund projects, are available at www.scotlandistheplace.com/challengefund

Workshops.

Following the presentations two workshops were held looking at 'What is best practice?' and 'What next?'. Participants were asked to think about the things that made a project successful and how challenge funding worked to support (or hinder) this. The key themes emerging from these were:

It was felt that projects worked best where there was

- A dedicated project officer. This gave more focused and personal expertise to the project and for the students participating.
- Employer participation. Although this could be difficult to secure.
- A social element to encourage cultural exchange within different international cultures and UK students.
- Realistic information about expectations of students and employment prospects.

Positives of the Challenge Fund

- Partnerships/collaborations with institutes,
- Employer engagement (when occurs),
- Giving students perspectives on various employment opportunities.

Negatives of the Challenge Fund

- Short-term limited funding,
- Neglects social aspect of support,
- Lack of buy in from employers.

The following were given as areas to improve the Challenge Fund:

- Longer term funding, present one year funding is too short and the aim that institutes should take up the project if successful is not being realised.
- Timing of the application process, to fit with the academic year.
- Research on what the international students would like to participate in, what they are looking for when coming to Scotland to study, their expectations of their time spent in Scotland.
- Follow up from Fresh Talent Team to projects to assess if there are any problems they could help with, or knowledge that other projects facing the same problems.
- More flexibilities within the bids.
- More employer engagement was felt to be important although difficult.

Conclusion

The event provided a number of different view points of what constitutes successful support for international students and highlighted some of the pros and cons of the challenge fund. The challenge fund is intended to provide short-term funding to kick start projects which would then be mainstreamed by the institutions. It was clear from participants that while the additional funding provided was welcomed, these aims were not necessarily being met and many projects were either not continued once funding ceased, or were expected to be continued with no additional resources. Many participants felt this placed them under increased pressure to deliver additional projects in addition to their core tasks.

Participants evaluation of the day is included at Annex A.

Next Steps

The Fresh Talent Policy team will carry out a review of the fund, looking at the aims and objectives of the fund, the type of support for international students that is required and the mechanism through which that support can be provided. The conclusion of this review will be announced by April 2009.

Challenge Event - Evaluation Form

The aim of this event is to:

- To share learning and best practice for the support and retention of international students in Scotland.
- To develop proposals for how we can work together to meet our aims for international graduates in support of the population growth target.

The Event:

Please circle your rating (5 scores high - 1 scores low)

1. **How well do you feel the objectives of the event were met?**

5	4
4	14
2	1

2. **How useful was the event to you?**

5	7
4	11
3	1

3. **What part of the programme did you find most useful? Please circle.**

Speakers	1
Workshops	6
Both	12

4. **Please comment on the content of the Workshops and the method used.**

- We were able to discuss how best to move on.
- Good interactivity and opportunity to learn from others.
- Good ideas but not easy to pull apart good/bad/suggestion and not easy to work out proposals in time given. Good start on this though.
- Lack of time. Well constructed and facilitated.
- Informal, friendly, productive.
- Good, perhaps we could have done with more time.
- Pairing up was good idea – got more suggestions Workshop 1 seemed a bit too long – lost focus perhaps.
- Workshops very useful.
- Excellent – good mix of institutions – large/small. HE/FE.
- Good to have a chance to consider impact of Challenge Fund to debate on how to improve going forward.
- Interactive and enough time for in-depth discussion.
- Small group and facilitator worked well. Everyone spoke.
- Well moderated – especially given our enthusiastic and strong options. Some excellent ideas generated and consolidated.

5. Please rate this event in terms of:

Content of the Event

5 – 5
4 – 13
3 – 1

Format of the Event

5 - 7
4 - 11
3 - 1

Accessibility of location

5 – 12
4 – 7

The Venue and arrangements

6. Please rate the venue and the arrangements individually (5 scores highest).

Reception Arrangements

5 - 9
4 - 6
3 - 1
2 - 1
0 - 2

Delegate Packs

5 – 4
4 - 12
3 - 1
0 – 2

Venue

5 - 8
4 - 6
3 – 2
2 - 1
0 - 2

Catering

5 - 5
4 - 8
3 – 4
0 - 2

Presentations

5 - 8
4 - 8
3 - 1
0 - 2

Please comment here on any aspect of the event:

- Very useful – good to share ideas/concerns/experiences and also very good to see the genuine interest in practitioners' ideas and problems and the willingness to change and consider changes to the challenge Fund.
- Good to meet people with experience of other projects. Good that people didn't pretend that everything is perfect. Frank discussion. Chance to adopt a problems solving approach.
- Please do again. Thanks for this opportunity
- Networking excellent – disappointment not all institutions attended.