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Cross-border study within the UK: a new dimension of inequality? (0059)

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The proportion of full-time undergraduate students who study in another home country of the UK has declined over the past two decades, while continuing to vary widely across the four UK nations. Cross-border study also varies with student background and institutional characteristics. Those who study in another home country have tended to come from more favourable social and educational backgrounds and to enter higher status institutions. However, the detailed patterns have been complex, shaped by the intersecting influences of ethnicity, subject preference and the balance of supply and demand. The largest category of receiving institutions has been post-1992 universities in England. A study of trends up to 2010 did not find evidence of a 'two-tier structure in which advantaged students and elite universities inhabit a UK-wide system and other students and institutions inhabit more narrowly bounded systems' (Authors 2013, 132). This paper asks whether more recent changes, and especially the new fee regimes introduced in 2012, have affected this conclusion.

A priori, we might expect to see most change among students domiciled in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Since 2007 Scotland has been the only country of the UK where home-domiciled students pay no tuition fees or graduate contributions. However, Scots studying elsewhere in the UK have had to pay higher fees than those studying in Scotland, and in 2012 this fee differential increased to an annual maximum of £9,000. A relatively small proportion of Scottish-domiciled students (around 6% of full-time undergraduates in HE institutions in recent years) have studied elsewhere in the UK, but they have been drawn disproportionately from ethnic minorities, from middle-class families and from the top and bottom quintiles of the attainment distribution (Raffe and Croxford 2013). Has the increased fee differential influenced the types as well as the numbers of students who study elsewhere?

From 2012 students domiciled in Northern Ireland have also faced a fee differential, as NI-domiciled students pay fees at the pre-2012 level at institutions within the territory but face a maximum of £9,000 elsewhere. In recent years around one in three NI-domiciled students have studied elsewhere in the UK, and these have comprised two main groups: the 'determined leavers' who study by choice and the 'reluctant leavers' who do not meet the high entry qualifications required by institutions in Northern Ireland, where the supply of places has not matched the demand (Gallagher et al., 1999; Cormack et al., 2006). As in Scotland, the new fee differential this may have had an impact on the types of students who study elsewhere, and on the types of institutions where they study.

This paper will analyse datasets supplied by HESA to examine the social, educational and demographic characteristics associated with study in another country of the UK among students domiciled in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the types of institutions where they study. It will compare the pattern in 2012 with 2010-11 and earlier years (before 2012 there was no such fee differential for NI students, and the differential for Scottish students was smaller). It will also compare these two home countries with England and Wales, whose students do not face a fee differential linked to the home country of study, although in all four jurisdictions the picture is

complicated by the diverse array of national and institutional student support arrangements, which may affect the actual or perceived costs of study in different locations for different categories of students (Chowdry et al. 2012). It is further complicated by the possibility of displacement effects, if institutions prioritise students from whom higher fees can be charged (Rees and Taylor 2006).

These questions are important, not only because they concern a possible dimension of inequality of access, but also because they touch on questions of citizenship and statehood. The Scottish Government (2010) argues that fees would create barriers to wider access and would undermine 'the social contract that citizens in Scotland have with the state'. However, this view assumes that Scotland and not the UK is the state, and that Scottish citizenship does not confer right of equal access to all of the UK's HE institutions. By contrast, when the Welsh Government introduced a grant to offset the 2012 fee increases, it made this available to Welsh-domiciled students studying in any part of the UK. The European Union, whose rules would restrict the ability of an independent Scotland to charge differential fees from citizens from the rest of the current UK, represents a further level of statehood.

References

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