



# University of Glasgow

## Research on for-profit provision in Scottish Higher education

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### Executive Summary

- **Role of pathway programmes in Scottish HE:** The core area of growth in the for-profit sector in Scottish HE are pathway programmes between businesses and universities. A number of educational businesses, including Kaplan, Navitas, INTO and Study Group have developed partnerships with Scottish universities via the delivery of International Study Centres (ISCs), such as Glasgow International College.
- **Trends:** In the sense that student numbers on such programmes are on an upward trajectory, the for-profit sector is growing. This growth, however, is within the limits of such partnership programmes - less inroads have been made into traditional HE provision in Scotland, although the most recent development via the University of Stirling may indicate otherwise.
- **Organisation:** The development of private provision is characterised by partnership arrangements with specific institutions, with the emphasis on collaboration as opposed to competition. While other institutions have their own pathways programmes and international student support systems, these in the main do not conflict with the services provided by Kaplan *et al.*
- **Student recruitment:** For-profit provision in the form of ISCs deliver on a key strategic imperative of Scottish HEIs – that of international student recruitment. This imperative is reflected in the unique and exclusive partnership arrangements between HEIs and for-profit providers.
- **Quality of provision:** The quality of provision delivered by international study centres is assured by standard QAA systems, each university ensuring that the services of these centres are accountable to their own regulations and procedures. However, the current research suggests that concerns remain about the quality of provision in some cases and also the capacity of students who come through these programmes to manage their academic work effectively.
- **Perception of international study centres:** The survey results suggest that HE staff remain to be convinced of the efficacy of such programmes in the university sector,

with concerns over their capacity to provide effective articulation to mainstream HE programmes as well as their position vis-a-vis the value and ethics of Scottish HE.

- **Back-door privatisation?** The growth of the sector in Scotland differs considerably from the experience in other countries such as India and Malaysia, which have witnessed a proliferation of private universities. There is no indication as yet that anything similar could happen here. What is evident is the growth of for-profit provision at the margins of higher education as opposed to its centre. Whether or not such growth constitutes a major threat to the values of Scottish HE remain to be seen.

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## Introduction

For-profit providers in higher education have become an increasing presence internationally, with for example the United States having a long established tradition of for-profit institutions as part of its diversified HE sector (Millora, 2010). More recently, Australia has witnessed the spread of this type of education in the sector (Shah & Chenicheri, 2013), a consequence some would argue of its relatively early conversion to the benefits or otherwise of a marketised HE system. For-profit providers have also made some inroads into the UK HE sector, (Middlehurst & Fielden 2011), inviting the response of policy makers as well as inevitably raising a whole set of issues and challenges for the UK sector – for forms of provision, delivery mechanisms, financing, staffing and student support.

It would be remiss not to mention that these issues and challenges come with their own set of concerns about the future direction of UK HE policy and provision, a sector that traditionally has been seen to play an important role in public life as well as offering a vital route for social mobility and opportunity. The kinds of costs associated with for-profit providers in other countries (Cellini, 2012; Cochrane-Smith, 2005; Ruch, 2001; Sepinwall, 2013), could be transferred to the UK context, including that of Scottish HE. It is therefore timely and appropriate that the Education Institute of Scotland has funded a research project into this development in Scotland, conducted by Mark Murphy of the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change, University of Glasgow. This report details the findings of this research, which focuses on the main area of for-profit provision in Scottish HE – *International Study Centres* or ISCs. While such centres have their own specific characteristics, they also represent the changing nature of provision in the Scottish HE sector, and their steady rise is worthy of examination in more detail.

Included in the report are the following sections:

1. Aims of the Research/Methodology
2. The Rise of For-profit Higher Education: National and International Contexts
3. An Overview of the Pathway Model (International Study Centres)
4. An Overview of For-profit Provision in Scottish HE
5. Results from the Survey
6. Freedom of Information Requests
7. Conclusion

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## 1. Aims of the Research/Methodology

The research addressed the following questions:

- What is the presence and coverage of for-profit education providers in the Scottish higher education sector?
- What is the impact on academic staff and HEIs?
- What are the emerging trends within Scotland on the use of for-profit education providers in the HE sector?

### 1:1 Methodology

There were two core parts to the methodology:

- A preliminary scoping exercise of available literature and research on the existence and function of for-profit education providers in Scottish HE, including where possible in-house publications
- A questionnaire survey of HE providers that explored issues relating to presence, coverage, experience and perception of for-profit HE

It was originally intended that case studies using interviews with staff at international study centres would take place, to flesh out some of the findings from the survey. However, despite a number of attempts to make contact with centre representatives, no cooperation was forthcoming, something that was not helped by the fact that there are no staff contact details available online or anywhere else. It therefore proved too difficult to conduct this aspect of the research.

As a result, two further surveys were conducted asking HE staff about their experiences and perceptions of international study centres (one of these via the EIS database).

The combined response rate of the survey was 18 per cent – **82 responses** in total. Most of these participants (51) were randomly generated from Scottish university websites, although subject discipline was taken into account when choosing which directory to generate emails from – this is because some subjects have designated pathways (e.g., business) and staff working within these subjects are more likely to have experience of international study centres. The survey sent via the IES database yielded 31 responses.

**Freedom of information requests (FOIs):** Alongside the above, Freedom of Information requests were sent to the relevant universities – some of the result so these are detailed under section 6.

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## 2. The Rise of For-profit Higher Education: National and International Contexts

### *Background*

In recent years, the emergence of new forms of participation in the provision, monitoring and evaluation of public sector services, has brought new players, voices, values and discourses into the field of higher education policy. Although the nature and strength of its presence varies within different geographical spaces and contexts, the for-profit sector now occupies a range of roles and relationships within the educational state, and this is increasing, whether this be through consultation, advice and research services; or service provision through new models of partnership (Alemu, 2010; Ball, 2007, 2009; Ball & Junemann, 2012; Fried & Hill, 2009; Gilpine *et al*, 2015).

Ball (2010) argues that this has resulted in the ‘blurring’ of boundaries between the public and private sector. Public-sector higher education is becoming increasingly ‘enterprised’ and hybridised, as the values and sensibilities of competition, contracting and income generation are set over and against the values of academic freedom and scholarship. Many countries across the globe have witnessed a decrease in public funding, and this has occurred at the same time as a rise in fee-paying students in higher education and a turn to alternative sources of income for universities. Shah and Nair (2013) suggest that this tendency shows that higher education is fast becoming a ‘business’ rather than ‘public education’. This highlights something of a fundamental shift in the purpose of higher education from meeting the needs of society and providing a moral good to income generation and mass production of university graduates in order to meet the needs of a global economy (Altbach & Levy, 2005).

The presence of private for-profit provision in higher education has increased internationally and it can now be recognised as a global policy trend (Berger *et al*, 2014; Middlehurst & Fielden, 2011; Morey, 2004; Shah & Nair, 2013). Although the emergence of new forms of higher education may work to increase opportunities for students with regard to different modes of access, this trend is often linked to ongoing concerns about the quality assurance and standards of education (Shah & Nair, 2013). The HE sector has traditionally been seen to play an important role in public life as well as offering a vital route for social mobility and opportunity, and this increase in private for-profit provision may be seen to potentially threaten these values.

### *USA and Australia*

In the United States, the higher education sector has been diversified by the introduction of private provision. Although the majority of this provision is not for-profit (Millora, 2010; Sepinwall, 2013), there has been a steady expansion of the for-profit sector over recent decades (Beaver, 2009). The provision of educational services by private for-profit institutions is now considered as a long-standing tradition of US higher education, despite a broad range of concerns around quality and values (Natalie *et al*, 2015; Lutz and Field, 1998), alongside accusations of fraud, accusations that have plagued the for-profit HE sector for decades in the US (Beaver *et al*, 2012; Kinser, 2007: 221). High drop-out rates and a low quality of teaching have become key characteristics of the nature of higher education provision offered by American private providers. Davis (2011) provides an example of this: at the University of Phoenix, which is the largest US based for-profit provider, almost 17 in 20 students fail to finish their undergraduate degree within six years.

In more recent years, Australia has also witnessed the spread of private provision in the higher education sector (Shah & Chenicheri, 2013), with more than 170 private higher education institutions offering some kind of provision (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2011). It is estimated that by 2020, private for-profit higher education will account for 20 per cent of Australian higher education provision. The qualifications that these institutions offer are supported by the Australian Qualifications Framework, which makes them equivalent to qualifications provided by university degrees. However, concerns about quality assurance of this type of provision in Australia have consistently been raised within higher education research (e.g. Shah & Lewis, 2010; Shah & Nair, 2013; Shah & Nair, 2011). These concerns include: systems of accreditation and reporting; the development of a 'compliance-led quality culture'; the use of sessional teachers and the consequent lack of permanent staff; lower criteria for admissions; limited investment in staff professional development; student equity and access to higher education; limited support structures to aid student learning; and, an increase in the reliance on international student income (Shah & Nair, 2013).

### *UK Context*

To varying degrees, each of the four nations of the UK have also been subject to the increasing global trend of for-profit provision in the higher education sector (Middlehurst & Fielden, 2011). The nature of this provision raises a number of issues and challenges for the UK that are not unlike those discussed in the contexts of Australia and the USA. These issues are characterised by concerns around provision, delivery mechanisms, financing, staffing and student support.

Middlehurst & Fielden (2011) conducted a review of degree level for-profit provision in the UK HE sector. They identified the following categories of provider:

1. UK campuses or branches of foreign universities. There are estimated to be around 50 to 90 branch campuses of American universities operating in the UK; however, the majority of these do not enroll UK or EU students. In addition, universities from Poland, Malaysia, Iran and India have established campuses within the UK.
2. There are four not-for-profit private organizations and one for-profit private organisation within the UK which have been granted degree awarding powers: The University of Buckingham, BPP Ltd (a for-profit organization which is a subsidiary of the Apollo Group in the USA), The College of Law, Ashridge Business School and ISF School of Finance.
3. Colleges validated by UK Higher Education Institutes to award their degrees account for the largest group of private providers in the UK. The majority of these are based around London, and its main target group is international students. However, recently there has been a move to actively recruit UK and EU students.

While the majority of private providers in the US higher education context are not for-profit, and are funded mainly through public funds, there appears to be a complicated mixture of for-profit and not for-profit private provision in the UK, as can be seen in Middlehurst and Fielden's outline (2011). According to a large-scale review of private for-profit provision in UK higher education conducted by Universities UK (2010), this type of provision will continue to grow despite a number of concerns around inconsistencies in quality and standards.

It should be noted however, that there is considerable variation between the home countries - the Scottish context is quite different due to some important regulatory differences. There also appears to be less knowledge about the growing private sector among policy-makers in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, when compared to England, which may indicate that there is less of a powerful presence in these countries (Universities UK, 2010).

### ***2:1: Scottish Context***

In Scotland, there is no formal national policy for private providers or provision. Traditionally, Scotland has generally tended to be protective of the publicly-funded HE sector and as a result, there is no private entity in Scotland with degree awarding powers. Unlike the situation in England, only universities can award degrees in Scotland. Historically, the values underpinning Scottish Government policy have been associated with an emphasis on public provision; traditionally, education has been considered a public good, characterised by *egalitarianism* and *meritocracy* (Raffe, 2004). To receive public funding in Scotland, an organisation must be a fundable body under the 'Further and Higher Education Act' (Scotland) 2005. However, the Scottish Qualifications and Credit Framework (SQCF) includes a number of private providers which are recognised as credit-rating bodies such as the Police College, the Institute of Bankers and the Association of Accounting Technicians. Although these bodies do not have degree awarding powers, they can provide credits which count toward degrees.

Despite fundamental differences, the level of activity by the private sector in Scottish HE has some similarities to that in England, if we look specifically at the recruitment and support of international students. In Scotland, the key development of for-profit provision centres on the development of specific services for international students through partnerships between universities and private for-profit providers. To date, seven Scottish universities have signed partnership contracts with four for-profit private providers of preparatory programmes for international students, in the form of collaborative pathway colleges or 'international study centres'. Arguably, this is the biggest area of for-profit provision in Scottish higher education. These centres essentially recruit and prepare international students for study at undergraduate level and masters level. This generally involves the delivery of preparatory courses, which support students to enter a Masters programme or the second year of an undergraduate degree. These centres also provide English language courses, and even preparatory courses for the preparatory courses.

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## **3. An Overview of the Pathway Model (International Study Centres)**

Edu-businesses have become intertwined with higher education policy in a number of different ways, the most pertinent of these being the procurement and support of international students through the development of 'pathway centres'. While the 'rapid growth' of private study centres for international students may have for now 'remained under the radar' (THE, 2014, p.38), there are increasingly becoming a visible part of the HE landscape.

Shah and Nair (2013) argue that public-private collaboration can result in effective governance and quality assurance of private provision by providing university oversight; the overriding idea is that collaboration allows for close monitoring of academic quality and standards by both institutions. Furthermore, they suggest that the pathway model improves the 'credibility' of graduates. They refer to the 'pathway model', which provides access to universities via college for students who may not be able to access university courses in the

traditional manner. They report that international students account for more than 70 per cent of pathway college intake in Australia. It is useful to compare this to the Scottish context, where international students account for 100 per cent of 'pathway course' intake.

Another example of the pathway model in use outside of the UK can be found in Uganda. Ssempebwa *et al* (2012) refer to study centres as 'university-education-bridging' programmes that are tailored to enhance student admissibility to university. Such programmes have been heavily criticised over concerns that the model 'waters down' the quality of student admissions to degree programmes (Hay & Marais, 2010). Ssempebwa *et al* (2012) suggest that the efficacy of these programmes in closing the competence gap between its enrollees and those students who have been admitted to university through the 'conventional' route is relatively unknown. Given the similarity of the Ugandan pathway model with those used elsewhere, the concern over the 'competence gap' may hold relevance for the UK context.

The five biggest private, for-profit companies offering pathway courses in the UK are the following:

- Study Group
- Kaplan International Colleges
- INTO University Partnerships
- Navitas
- Cambridge Education Group

Each of these companies run a number of different 'study centres' across the UK. Their rise coincides with a significant increase in the number of international students study in the UK, yet the pathway model was relatively unknown in the UK until 2005. Despite the dramatic proliferation of this kind of provision into UK higher education institutes, there has been very little detailed research conducted in this area.

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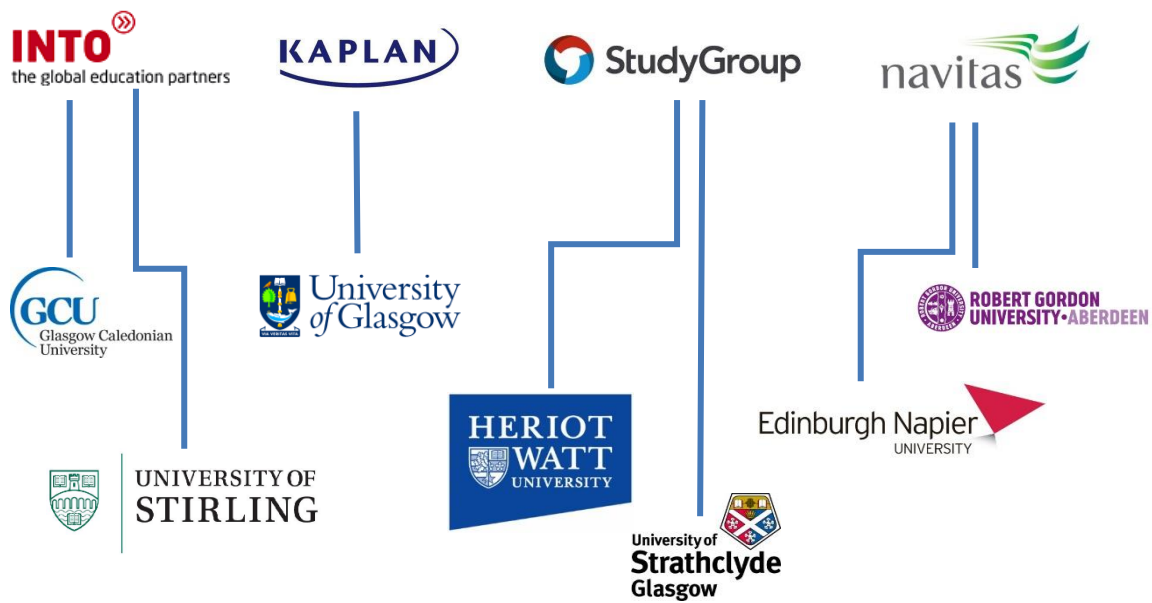
#### **4. An Overview of For-profit Provision in Scottish HE**

In Scotland, the following universities have developed partnerships with private organisations to develop international study centres:

1. University of Glasgow (Kaplan Inc.)
2. Glasgow Caledonian University (INTO University Partnerships Ltd)
3. University of Strathclyde (Study Group)
4. Edinburgh Napier University (Navitas)
5. Robert Gordon University (Navitas)
6. University of Stirling (INTO University Partnerships Ltd)
7. Heriot Watt University (INTO University Partnerships Ltd) (No longer active)

The quality and status of each of the international study centres is assured by 'The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education' (QAAHE). Figure 1 details the relationship between each of these private providers and the universities above.

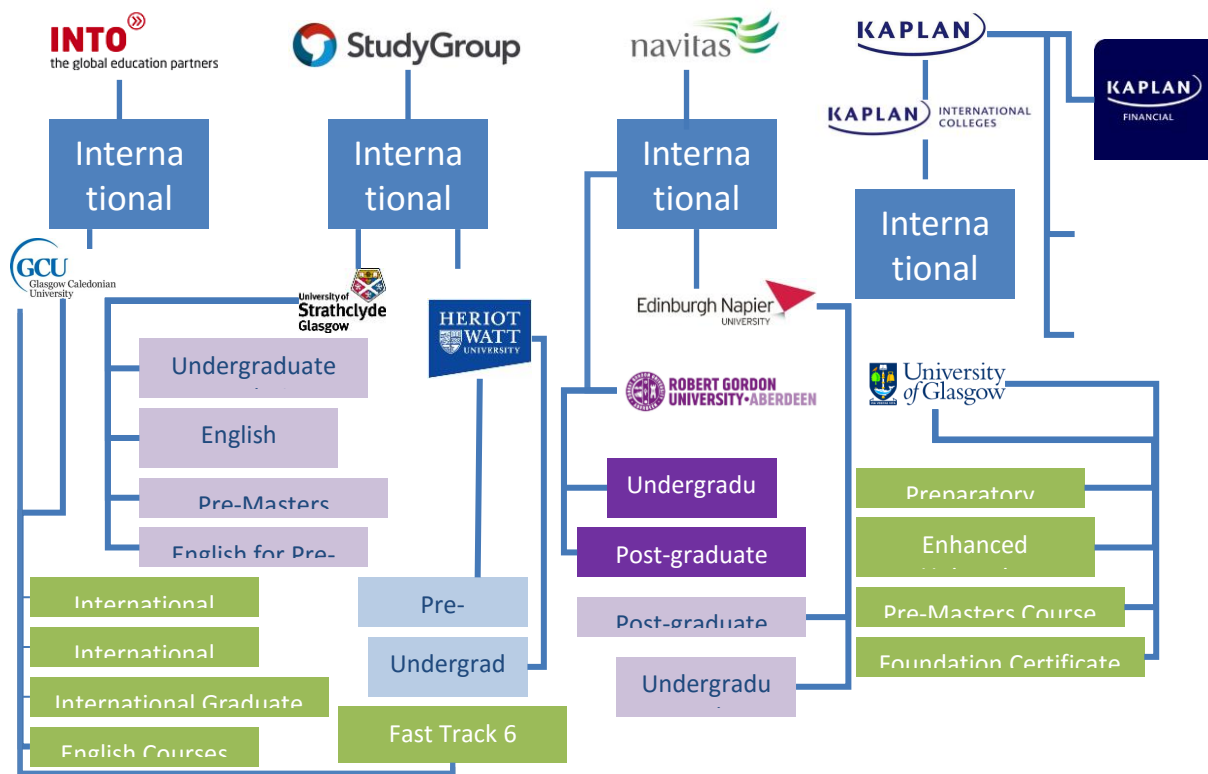
**Figure 1. Partnerships between for-profit providers and Scottish universities**



**4:1 Course provision – International study centres**

Figure 2 details the range of provision on offer by international study centres – it is evident that there are a range of pathways available via the providers and the universities, across both undergraduate and post-graduate provision.

**Figure 2: Course provision – international study centres, Scottish HEIs**



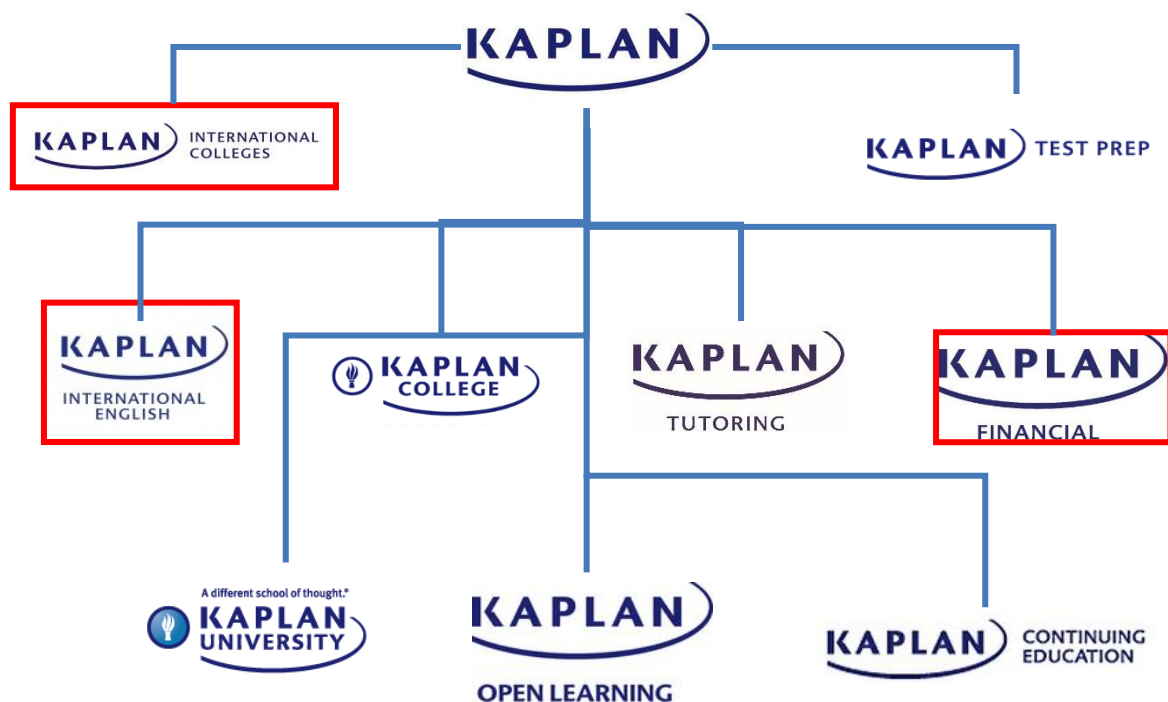


## 4:2 Kaplan International Colleges

### Overview

Kaplan Inc. is a for-profit private edu-business that describes itself as a leading international provider of education and career services, with revenues exceeding US\$2.6 billion. It is a subsidiary of The Washington Post Company, and employs more than 30,000 staff in over 600 locations across the globe. It aims to provide services for more than one million students across the world. Kaplan Inc. has a number of subdivisions, each of which offer private provision in different areas of education.

**Figure 3. Subsidiary organisations of Kaplan Inc. (Red outline identifies provision offered in Scotland)**



Kaplan Financial provides for-profit private education across the UK, which includes ‘home study’, ‘online learning’ and ‘professional on-site training’ for large businesses. In Scotland, ‘Kaplan Financial Glasgow’ awards qualifications for accountancy and management. These qualifications tend to be taken by professionals working within companies and are therefore paid for by employees; however, a number of these qualifications are required to be done post-degree, and therefore individuals who are not in employment, will have to self-fund.

‘Kaplan International English’ has a centre based within Edinburgh, which provides English language classes to international students, some of which are young children. However this provision does not appear to be affiliated with a higher education institution.

Kaplan International Colleges works in partnership with a number of universities across the UK to prepare international students for progression to an undergraduate or postgraduate degree. The only partnership in Scotland is based at the University of Glasgow.

### 4:2a Glasgow International College (GIC)

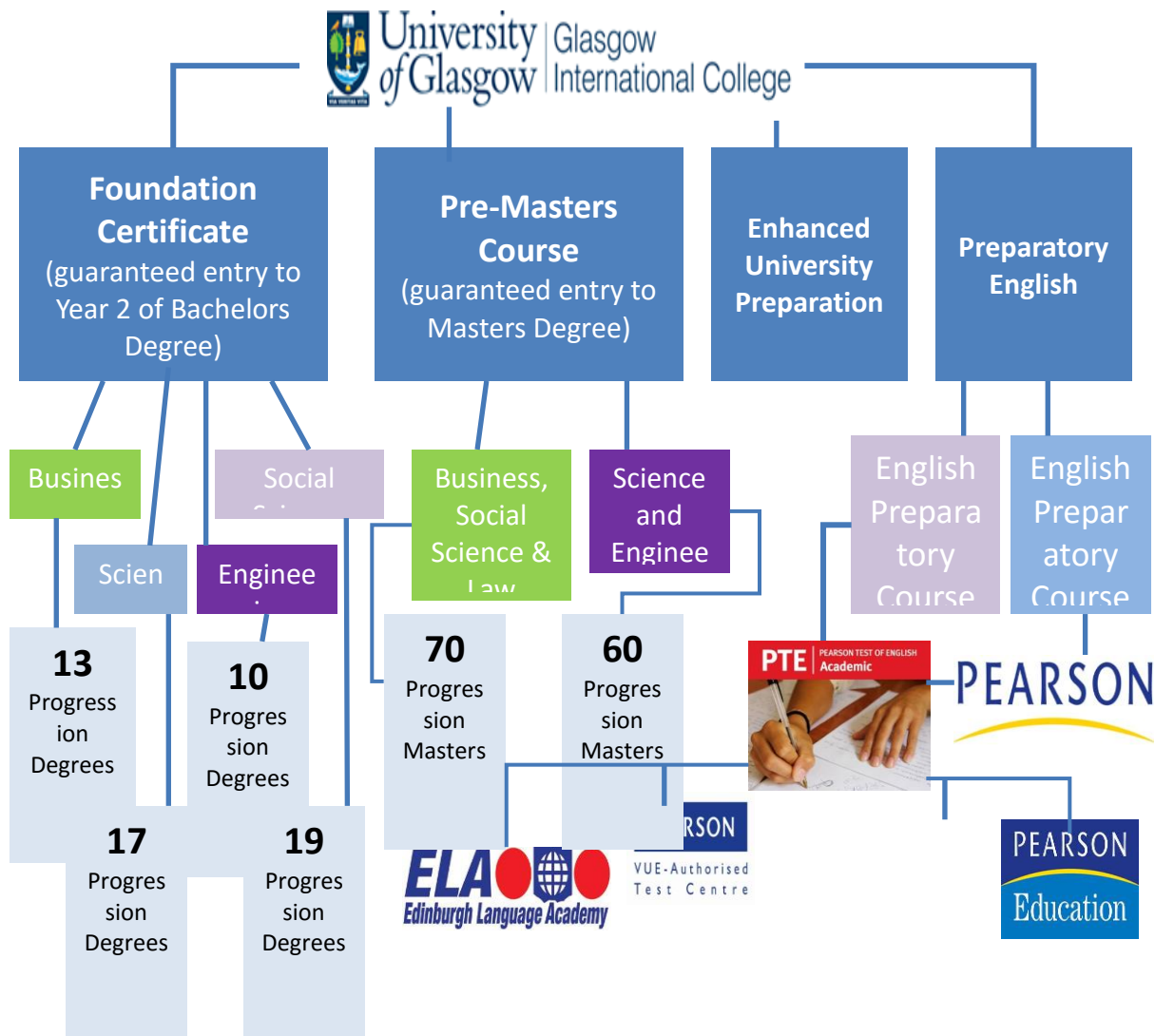
GIC was developed in 2007 in partnership between the University of Glasgow and Kaplan International Colleges. Glasgow International College is an important part of the University

of Glasgow’s internationalization plan. In a recent document that puts forward the University’s vision for 2020, the importance of ‘collaborative degree models’ with partners who have ‘extensive market reach’ was positioned as a priority:

We will build on the range of collaborative degree models agreed during the last planning period to develop a diverse portfolio of high quality collaborative programmes. These programmes will be developed with a range of strategic partners including members of our international networks. We will work with education providers such as Kaplan International Colleges to develop new partnership models of teaching and learning, marrying the strengths of the University’s academic profile with the extensive market reach of our partners (University of Glasgow, 2010, p. 21).

The GIC offer a range of courses including English language programmes, preparatory courses to study at undergraduate level and preparatory courses to study at postgraduate level. Figure 3 provides an overview of the range of provision (see Appendix A for more detail of course provision in academic year 2014/2015).

**Figure 4: Range of provision offered by Glasgow International College**



Between 2007/2008 and 2013/2014 the total number of students studying at GIC increased from 171 to 940 (Fischbacher-Smith *et al*, 2014). Table 2 below shows the increase between 2011 and 2013.

**Table 1: Increase in GIC entrants, 2011-2013**

Course	GIC Entrants (2011-12)	GIC Entrants (2012-13)
<i>Foundation Certificate (Year 2 entry)</i>		
• Science	16	41
• Engineering (Non Electronic/Mechanical)	26	62
• Social Sciences	66	20
• Business	0	146
<b>Total Foundation Programme</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>269</b>
<i>Graduate Diploma (Pre-Masters)</i>		
• Science and Engineering	55	60
• Business, Law and Social Science	291	309
<b>Total Pre-Masters</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>369</b>
<b>Total New Students</b>	<b>460</b>	<b>638</b>

[Source: University of Glasgow/ Glasgow International College Joint Academic Management Board]

An evaluation project (Fischbacher-Smith *et al*, 2014) was conducted to look at how GIC could better support GIC students prior to and during their transition from their preparatory course to the second year of an undergraduate degree. Additional aims of the project were to explore issues around student experience, retention, progression and expectations. The research found that students experienced feelings of isolation on arrival in Glasgow. GIC students expressed anxiety about how to engage with support during the transition from GIC to the University of Glasgow, and commented on the following necessary adjustments: different class sizes; relationships between staff and students; and, weekly contact time.

A relatively high percentage of GIC students not progressing to honours was reported as a concern by the University of Glasgow/ Glasgow International College Joint Academic Management Board in the academic session of 2012/13. However, subsequent data showed a slight increase in the level of progression (University of Glasgow/ Glasgow International College Joint Academic Management Board, 2013). Their annual report also outlined a number of proposed developments, including:

- Multi-pathway provision through the establishment of an international study centre in London (similar approach to INTO University Stirling London)
- Kaplan own two university accommodation developments in Glasgow – these have been built specifically for Kaplan to accommodate international students.
- Kaplan have proposed a pre-doctoral programme to be offered in collaboration with the University of Glasgow. Instead of guaranteeing a place in a university, the GIC insist that students who progress through the pre-doctoral programme would be invited to interview, as part of the normal process of recruiting doctoral students.
- GIC have proposed to offer 15 places per year on a Science and Engineering Pathway

to allow students to progress to programmes offered by other Scottish universities in Oil, Gas or Chemical Engineering related subjects.

**A note on GIC Staffing:** There may be some overlap between the experience and skills of the existing staff profile within the university and those required for working within the GIC, particularly with regard to those university employees working within the ‘Language Centre’. However, the GIC has its own recruitment process and those who are employed by the GIC are not considered as employees of the university. GIC vacancies have their own section within the main University of Glasgow vacancies website. Below is included some information from a recent job advertisement for a sessional tutor in engineering within the GIC. This position was advertised as a fixed term contract at £29.20 per hour.

**Figure 5: Candidate Profile: GIC Sessional Tutor in Engineering**

<b>GIC Sessional Tutor in Engineering - Candidate Profile</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ At least a Bachelor's degree in a relevant subject area</li><li>▪ Teaching experience within a UK higher education context</li><li>▪ Experience of working with international students</li><li>▪ Ability to develop and update teaching material</li><li>▪ Experience of working within a Virtual Learning Environment (desired)</li><li>▪ Competent administrative IT skills (Microsoft Office suite, etc.)</li><li>▪ A student-centred and client-focused approach</li><li>▪ Strong record-keeping skills</li><li>▪ Excellent interpersonal and communication skills</li><li>▪ Flexibility and the ability to work under pressure to deadlines</li><li>▪ Enthusiasm and motivation to be a performance-driven team player</li></ul>

### **4:3 Study Group Pty Ltd**

Study Group Pty Ltd can be considered as one of the more established players in the field of international student recruitment. It was created in 1998, and its first international study centre opened in Sussex in 2006. The same year, Study Group Pty Ltd was sold by the UK-based Daily Mail and General Trust to an Australian private equity firm, CHAMP and Petersen Investments for around £80 million. In 2010, Universities UK reported that 20,000 international students from 120 different countries were recruited to Study Group's educational centres in the UK. Its programmes offer pathways to undergraduate, postgraduate and Master's degrees. They provide a number of different services, including:

- University preparation and placement through foundation years, diploma programmes, pre-Master's preparation programmes and English as a second language transition programmes for international students
- A-levels for entry to UK universities
- English language training (Universities UK, 2010)

#### *University of Strathclyde International Study Centre*

In partnership with Study Group, the University of Strathclyde launched a new International Study Centre in 2013, which offers a number of different routes into undergraduate and postgraduate study at the university, details of which can be found in Appendix A.

### *Heriot-Watt University International Study Centre*

According to its website, the partnership agreement between Study Group and Heriot-Watt International Study Centre (Heriot-Watt ISC) expired at the end of 2013/2014 academic year (August 2014).

## **4:4 INTO University Partnerships Ltd**

INTO University Partnerships Ltd was established in 2003 and has partnerships across the United States and Europe. Its services vary in each institution, but its model is not dissimilar to the other three private providers. It aims to recruit international students and prepare them for university study through providing English language training, and delivering foundation programmes, first year programmes and pre-Master's courses. However, one feature that sets it apart from the likes of Kaplan, Navitas and Study Group is its focus on the integration of joint venture and university recruitment, which impacts on the university's level of international development.

### ***4:4a INTO University Stirling (London)***

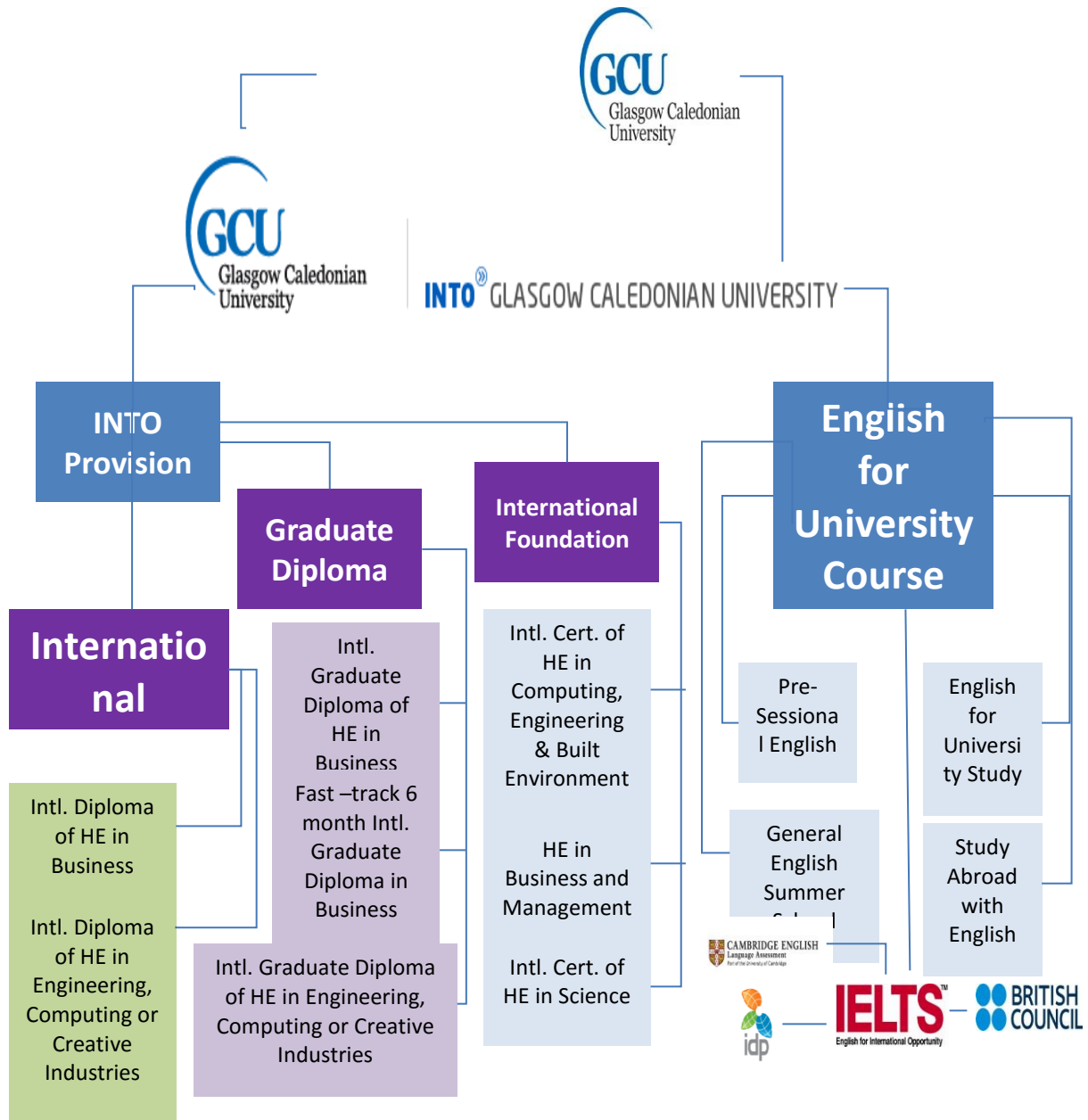
The University of Stirling has partnered with INTO to develop two different international study centres: one based at the University of Stirling (INTO University of Stirling), and one in central London (INTO University of Stirling London). Evidence suggests that the University of Stirling is the only Scottish university to provide part of its international study support outside of Scotland. One interesting difference between the two centres is that INTO University of Stirling London has degree awarding powers, because of its geographical location, and awards degrees in partnership with the London Academy of Diplomacy. As previously discussed, international study centres based in Scotland do not have degree awarding powers as regulations from the Scottish Government ensure that degrees can only be awarded by HEIs. The development of an international study centre by a Scottish university south of the border, indicates a shift in the nature of private provision in Scottish HE. At this stage it is unknown whether other Scottish universities will make a similar move; however, this is a possibility, given the predicted increase in this type of provision (Universities UK, 2010). More information about the kind of provision offered by INTO University Stirling London can be found in Appendix A, which shows that the starting cost for each Master's degree ranges from £14,500 to £15,500.

### ***4:4b INTO Glasgow Caledonian University***

INTO Glasgow Caledonian University was developed in partnership between Glasgow Caledonian University and INTO. It provides a number of courses to support the progress of international students to undergraduate and postgraduate study, as well as a number of general English courses. The international study centre has also recently become an IELTS examination centre. IELTS is an example of another for-profit provider that operates in the Scottish higher education context. IELTS provides the most widely used English language test for education, and is used by most universities as a selection criteria for international student admission.

Figure 4 below provides an overview of the kind of provision offered by INTO Glasgow Caledonian University. The International Certificates in Higher Education have been designed to lead into year two of an undergraduate degree; the International Diploma of Higher Education has been designed to lead into year three of an undergraduate degree; the Graduate Diplomas have been designed to lead directly into a postgraduate degree (see Appendix A for more detail).

**Figure 6: Range of provision – INTO Glasgow Caledonian University**



#### 4:5 Navitas

Navitas is an Australian global education corporation, which provides a number of different educational services. In the UK, it provides English language preparation, pre-university

preparation programmes, first-year-degree transfer programmes and pre-Masters preparation programmes. On their website they state that:

Navitas works in collaboration with reputable key partners in various places around the world to deliver in-country programs that help students prepare for life in another country and university studies overseas before they leave home. These programs can consist of English language preparation, pre-university preparation programs, first-year-degree transfer programs and pre-Masters preparation programs.

Navitas has three subdivisions, which offer provision in different areas of education:

- Navitas University Programs (32 university programmes across Australia, UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore and Sri Lanka)
- SAE Institute (54 schools around the world that offer Higher Education and vocational education in audio production, film production and creative media)
- Navitas Professional and English Programmes (vocational training and higher education in health, criminology, counselling, psychology and social work; as well as English as second language courses and ‘English language, settlement and work preparation programs’ for migrants and refugees)

NAVITAS offer programmes in international student preparation and also professional programmes such as Applied Psychology and Criminal Justice (in Australia). The only programmes that operate in Scotland are ‘Navitas University Programmes’, via which they have developed partnerships with Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen and Edinburgh Napier University.

On their website they provide five reasons for studying with NAVITAS:

- Improve your English language skills, which is critical to your success at university overseas.
- Save costs by completing part of your Navitas studies in your country before you continue studying with Navitas overseas.
- Be better prepared for your life overseas and university in Australia, the UK, Canada, USA and Singapore before you leave home.
- Navitas’ various University Preparation Programs provide pathways into Navitas pre-university and first-year-degree programs in Australia, the UK, Canada, USA and Singapore.
- The University Preparation Program pathways allow entry into a range of leading universities in Australia, the UK, Canada, USA and Singapore.

Each partnership allows international students direct access to the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a Bachelors degree or a Masters degree – once they complete the course.

#### ***4:5a International College Robert Gordon University (ICRGU)***

ICRGU was developed in partnership between Navitas University Programs and Robert Gordon University, and offers alternative pathways for international students to enter programmes at Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels. In order to attract international

students, ICRGU outline a number of advantages of studying in their centre, the most notable of which include:

- Combined offer of admission (students do not need to re-apply for the course that they would like to progress to)
- Single visa for the duration of studies
- ‘Guaranteed progression’ to each stage of studies
- Small classes and a personalised teaching approach
- Dedicated student support services

See Appendix A for more detail of programmes offered by Navitas in partnership with Robert Gordon University

#### ***4:5b Edinburgh International Centre (EIC)***

EIC was developed in partnership between ‘Navitas University Programs’ and Edinburgh Napier University. Similar to ICRGU, it offers pathways that lead to Undergraduate and Master’s degrees (see Appendix A for more details).

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## **5. Results from the Survey**

As section 2 indicated, there were three surveys sent to HEI staff in Scotland – the results below comprise a combined set of responses to the questions. Please note also that the survey questions in some cases were designed to mirror some of those used by Universities UK in their report from 2010 (Universities UK, 2010), in order that some form of comparison with the rest of the UK could be made.

### ***5:1 Reach of for-profit provision in Scottish HE***

This comparative aspect was useful as it confirmed what the scoping exercise had already suggested – that for-profit higher education has not made extensive inroads into the Scottish university sector (apart from the international study centres). For example, the response to the following set of questions was an unambiguous ‘no’ across the surveys:

- *Does any private provider (e.g. Kaplan) provide you with academic modules or part-module content?*
- *Do you use any private providers for assessment purposes?*
- *Do any of the private providers (Kaplan, INTO, Study Group, Navitas) deliver tutorial support to your current students?*
- *Do you use any private providers to provide you with accreditation or quality assurance services?*

These findings can be taken to support the notion that the growth of for-profit HE in Scotland is limited mostly to the kinds of institutional partnerships detailed earlier in this report.

### ***5:2 Sub-contracting of course production***



The situation gets slightly more complicated when sub-contracting of course production is introduced into the discussion. Although, as evidenced in the findings, sub-contracting is a marginal activity – of those who replied, 8 respondents said subcontracting took place on their programmes, while 42 replied in the negative. The comments indicate that this subcontracting can take various forms, while suggesting that this form of provision is not core department activity:

- *Moving and handling patients delivered by contractors*
- *We hire adjuncts (retired business people / academics) to deliver some lectures and professional skills sessions - they send us an invoice*
- *I think lecturing staff are paid to provide the course module materials.*

### 5:3 Student recruitment

A more significant area of growth relates to the recruitment of students onto HE programmes – respondents were asked:

- *Do any of these private providers help you to recruit students?*

28 stated yes, while 41 stated no (see Figure 7)

**Figure 7: Student recruitment, International Study Centres (n = 82)**



Understandably this reflects to some extent the rise of international student centres and their role as de facto recruiting agents onto Scottish HE programmes. See for example the following responses to the above question:

- *Via the joint programmes and through their own sales centres*
- *Only in the sense that their students feed into our programmes*

- *Students are recruited by provider with the aim of entering our programmes.*
- *Clearly, students they have recruited articulate into GU. Also, if they have an applicant who would qualify for direct entry, they pass on that connection.*
- *Indirectly as they have articulation routes to our degrees*
- *A very small number*
- *More international students than we would have without but quality is questionable*
- *They do bring students to our programmes who would not otherwise have the qualification for entry. They, in theory, bring them up to our minimum entry requirements.*
- *They recruit them and pass some of them to us after they have done their programme*
- *The claim is that they help recruit students - I am not privy to numbers however I am aware they are low - mainly because they have been told they cannot offer pre-session English provision.*

The findings also however reflect the increasing significance of international student agents and recruitment firms alongside and sometimes in cooperation with ISCs. See the following survey comments that indicate the rise of such types of contracted out for-profit provision in the sector:

- *International student agents make a fortune from us (we give them about 10 per cent of the international student fee for every student who pays) - mostly, they are poor quality students and they just flood us with applications - it costs them nothing to do this (flood us with crap applicants) and costs us so much time to go through them and find good ones*
- *They go to the other countries and sell themselves via selling our courses. This inevitably brings students to us.*
- *In a limited way, recruitment firms*
- *The ELTC at Edinburgh University work with marketing agencies in various countries*
- *Navitas target international students who do not meet university entrance requirements (academic or language). University uses a number of agents to recruit international students too.*
- *International students, mainly in China*
- *overseas recruitment utilise agents I believe.*

#### ***5:4 other forms of for-profit provision***

In order to ensure that the survey covered as many bases as possible, participants were also asked:

- ***Are there any other ways in which a private for-profit provider contributes to your programmes?***

Of those who replied to this question, 4 respondents replied yes, while 36 said no. The comments of the positive responses suggest that, apart from the use of IELTS providers, there are no other significant forms of for-profit provision that have not been detailed in the report:

- *Use of Google Plus for pre-tutorial student community discussions.*
- *Guest Speakers*
- *Offering IELTS examinations*
- *Provide English-language provision before starting study - e.g. PGT*

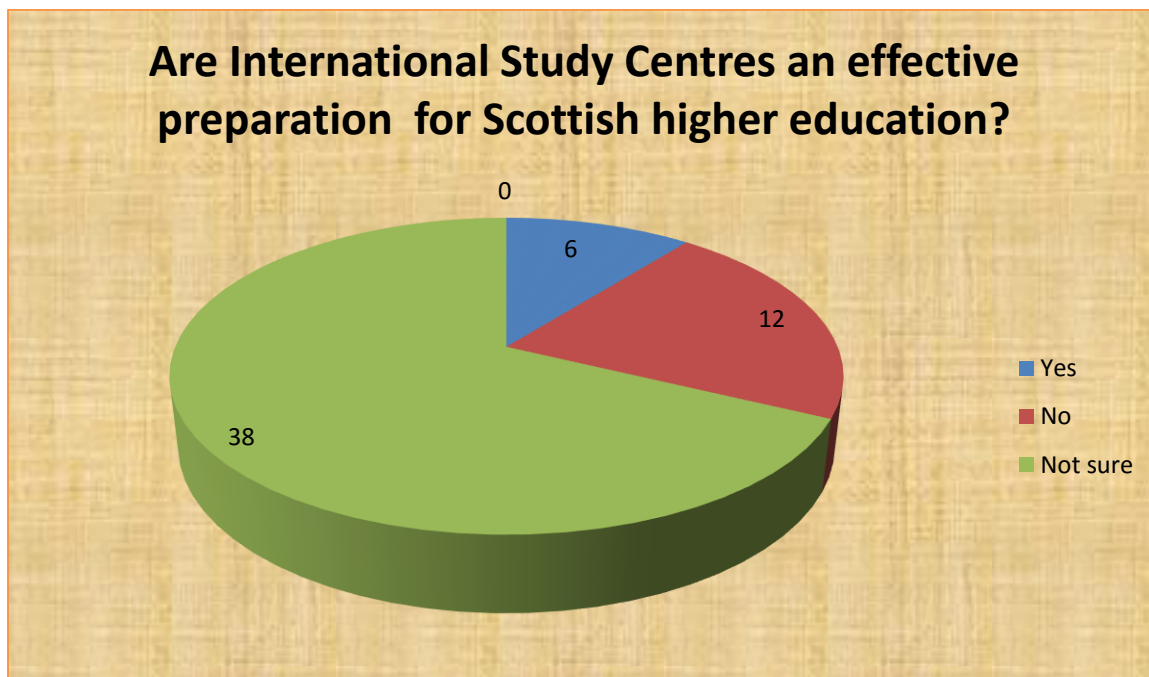
### **5:5 Quality and Standards: Perceptions of HEI staff**

Survey participants were asked to respond to the following question about the effectiveness of ISCs:

- *Do you think International Study Centres are effective at preparing international students for Scottish higher education?*

Out of **56** respondents (those who completed this question), 6 responded positively, while double the number (12) responded negatively to the question.

**Figure 8: Effectiveness of International Study Centres (n = 56)**



The responses to this question on the surface were mixed, and most were ‘not sure’. Some of the comments reflected a level of scepticism among the respondents:

- *Mixed. Some are excellent, others offer too much hand holding which doesn't prepare students for independent study. Also some appear to take students in at too low an academic level so [it's] much harder to get students to right standard in short time.*

- *I've had experience of 2 students who have come onto my course after completing 1 year at INTO. The first was very good, the second is a current student and appears to be quite good. Based on this limited experience it seems fine.*
- *There is inevitable quality variation and we are regularly keeping an eye on the progression of GIC students. GIC is enthusiastic for any feedback on where they could make adjustments to do a better job.*
- *Some students seem to do well; for others there is more of a transition and challenge in transferring*
- *A minority of students appear to be good, most are below the standard of the rest of the cohort once they join us. We've had problems with academic misconduct. Practical skills are lacking.*

The survey comments help to flesh out these responses in more detail, illustrating a level of concern among staff as to the effectiveness of such programmes. These concerns tend to revolve around two core issues: *language preparation* and *failure rates*:

**Language preparation:** A key concern relates to the language preparedness of international students on these programmes:

- *Students coming out of Kaplan are generally weaker, especially in English language skills*
- *Poor standards make students ill equipped for university, ISC under pressure to pass students and poor standard of English Language provision*
- *From what I hear from colleagues working with international study centres, language remains the most significant problem.*
- *Poor standards make students ill equipped for university, ISC under pressure to pass students and poor standard of English Language provision*
- *[ISCs] may have limited links to University; centrally controlled materials mean content not always specifically academic English; very exam (IELTS) oriented at times; progression rates/expectations appear unrealistic - in 1 year (for UG), students are expected to not only upgrade academic content knowledge but also English level (in most other places they would do one or the other)*
- *Some do not seem to have the high level of language skill their paper qualifications suggest they should have. The ELTC at Edinburgh University provide courses for enrolled students to help bridge the gap.*
- *The language skills are very mixed. This is obviously impacting on their performance. Our external examiners (without knowledge of the students) have commented on poor English and this then reflects badly on us... They think it is our admissions procedures that are weak but we have no control over the admissions to ICRGU and transfer is automatic if they pass their course.*

**Failure rates:** Some respondents expressed alarm at the failure rate among students who come through the ISC route:

- *Failure rates are high: difference in class-contact regimes is an issue*
- *INTO students coming onto our programmes generally fail multiple modules and many in fact I would say most do not gain a qualification. This is known but seldom*

*recorded. A minute was taken though after persistent staff concerns but they are just an income stream at the end of the day as far as management are concerned.*

Alongside language and failure rates, respondents expressed more general concerns about the articulation arrangements and progression of students between the ISCs and the 'mainstream' university programmes, suggesting that, to some extent at least, there is a mismatch between the two different forms of provision:

- *Cordoned off, ghettoized and irrelevant generic course 'materials'*
- *From colleagues at other Universities anecdotal evidence, ISCs are 'crammer' institutions who rely on getting places for their students to make a profit. I don't think this approach serves the students or the HEIs they enter*
- *I was doing pre-Masters work, not sure some were ready to go in and do Masters level stuff even after this bridging programme.*
- *My experience (whilst anecdotal) is that the management and organisation of the Foundation programmes is 'variable' and so the students when we do get them are similarly 'variable'.*
- *Can't comment on this, but if in the future I was asked to accept students from such programmes, I would have some strong reservations.*

**Preference for in-house provision:** This level of mismatch has resulted in some of our respondents questioning the efficacy of contracting out preparatory services such as these, suggesting that in-house forms of provision (hence, not for-profit) are in a better position to understand the specific articulation and progression issues that manifest themselves in such arrangements:

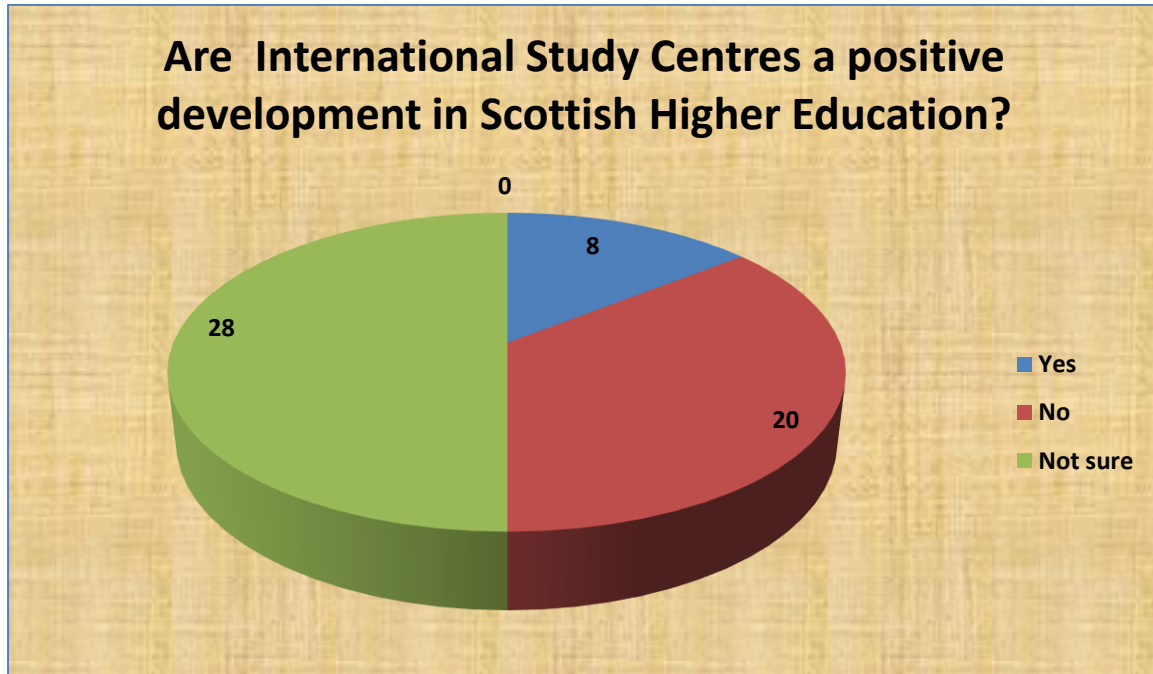
- *In my experience of one ISC, its programme of study is very 'lightweight' compared to our own. Hence, it may not prepare students well enough for 2nd year entry. My institution does not seem to welcome such feedback and did not consult staff on the decision to enrol students from ISCs.*
- *Individual students can clearly benefit from intensive preparation (provided they can afford this), but the right to transfer to our courses means there is not always sufficient control whether they can successfully participate in their programmes - I don't see why this is necessary, especially in places where good in-house pre-sessional provision exists (as in Glasgow, for example)*
- *I think they are almost always profit focussed and offer confusing information to students. I have no idea who is responsible for auditing the services they offer - which is crazy! They offer staff poor contracts (zero hours) and conditions. In short I see no reason why the University I work for could not offer the same service at a higher standard.*
- *We have started our own university programme which is tailored to meet the educational standards and requirements of our programmes.*

### **5:6 Are international study centres a positive development in Scottish HE?**

A final question asked of respondents related to whether or not for-profit provision in the shape of international study centres was a positive development in Scottish HE. This question

elicited a more negative response, in that only 8 participants responded positively (See Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Perception of International Study Centres (n = 56)**



Of those who replied to this question, eight respondents believed that ISCs are a positive development in Scottish HE, while twenty did not (28 were 'unsure'). The comments of the eight respondents suggest they believe space exists for such programmes:

- *If they are properly set up, accredited and the programmes align to those of the universities they feed.*
- *In principle, they are a positive development. However, the quality of their 'graduates' is generally poor.*
- *They are particularly helpful in ensuring students are ready for the programme they join at the point they join it.*

However, by far the most common concern among respondents was that international study centres put financial considerations first and considerations over quality second – i.e., that they are driven by profit as opposed to educational motives:

- *They are rent-seekers*
- *More focused on money than education.*
- *ISCs are detached from higher education and seem to have a profit motive.*
- *I am against using resources that could be better used for students who have the appropriate entry qualifications. What I see here is a private 'hothousing' of weaker students purely to make money*
- *Focus is on international fees not quality of students.*

- *They represent the worst infringements of neo-liberalism and are toxic to the morale of staff in the institution. They are a cynical money-minded move with total disregard for the students or the staff.*
- *I think at strategic levels they are not interested in quality and standards. They just want the money.*
- *My experience (again anecdotal) is that management in the University see it as a potential solution to bring in significant student numbers to then obtain significant additional funding as the students progress to the degree programmes and pay the required full fees as International Students.*
- *It seems ISCs are profit driven. This can never be good for HE.*
- *We need the fee income, but quality has to be jealously guarded.*
- *Staff in the University are sceptical of the actual financial benefits which this brings when compared with the costs to the university of the running of the study centre.*
- *From my limited experience INTO seems a very mercenary organisation and I do question whether my institution gets a good return on its investment in space and time.*

A number of respondents made direct links between the profit motive and the quality of the student intake (hence concerns over language skills and failure rates):

- *They are commercial enterprises who recruit students without the necessary skills.*
- *They simply recruit students who could not get into a university and educate them a little and give them one of their own qualifications then they come to us and usually fail. Often they are Chinese and cannot understand English.*
- *I'm not convinced students who attended a study centre course are in a position to benefit when they enter 'traditional' higher education. I'm also not really happy about Scottish universities linking up with private HE suppliers.*
- *They are poorly placed to equip students for university. Profit motive conflicts with maintenance of educational and academic standards*
- *Answer based purely on reputation, not direct experience with them, but they are certainly not improving the reputation of the sector.*

Such a negative response is probably to be expected given the position of ISCs in relation to the international student 'market'. However, they do suggest at the very least a high degree of ambivalence among staff when it comes to the benefits of such programmes, particularly as they often have to deal directly with the outcomes of articulation and progression arrangements themselves.

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## **6: Freedom of Information requests**

Freedom of Information requests were sent to the relevant universities – some of the results of these are detailed below:

*Provision of facilities:* All universities stated that ISC students were allowed access to similar facilities as per the general student population

*Whether or not the University offers guaranteed place for ISC students:* Two institutions, University of Glasgow and Glasgow Caledonian University, stated that they offered guaranteed places on University course for successful ISC students.

*Retention rates of ISC students, relative to student body:* Most institutions stated that they did not have access to this information. However, the University of Glasgow indicated that retention rates for Glasgow International college students were ‘lower than for conventional students’. Glasgow Caledonian University also delivered information on this topic, which was more mixed:

*‘We have looked at the three years 2011-2014 to identify an average for retention (defined as eligible to be on course or to graduate). For INTO students this is slightly lower than for all undergraduates excluding INTO, but the same as for all international students.’*

*At postgraduate level, the figure for INTO students is slightly higher than for all postgraduate students excluding INTO, and slightly higher than for all international students.’*

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## 7. Conclusion

The growth of for-profit provision in Scottish higher education, specifically in the form of international study centres, constitutes a significant development that raises a significant set of questions. These questions relates to issues such as

- Values and ethics of Scottish higher education
- How we understand issues of quality and academic standards
- The role of international student recruitment as a strategic institutional imperative
- The future of contracted out services in HE
- The funding of HE, implications for staff and students

The findings of this study suggest that, while the growth of for-profit HE in Scotland has limits, its presence in the sector should be taken seriously – seriously in the sense that it provides opportunities for alternative models of provision while also offering a potential threat to traditional academic values and work practices. The survey results in particular suggest that academic staff in Scottish higher education are not convinced of the merits of for-profit forms of HE, the results indicating a strong level of resistance to such partnership models. The concerns detailed here around academic preparedness, quality of outcome and experience and, not least, value systems, should be taken seriously by institutions which are seeking efficiency gains in the current prolonged period of austerity.

This is all the more important given that for-profit higher education internationally has recently attracted negative press attention. For example, for-profit institutions of higher education in the USA have recently been the subject of sustained criticism from several quarters, with US news suggesting that the future of these forms of HE is ‘uncertain’ (Bidwell 2015), while another commentator asks whether such institutions are ‘on their way out’ in the US (Jackson, 2015). Other commentators indicate real problems at the heart of for-



profit industry, predicting its ‘downfall’ as the industry faces ‘numerous investigations, widespread closures, and serious threats to federal funding’ (Wong, 2015). This media coverage is unsurprising, given that, since ‘since the election of President Barack Obama in November 2008, media portrayals of for-profits have seen violent swings among neutral, positive, and even intensely negative views’ (Gramling, 2011: 1),

While the level of for-profit activity is low in Scotland compared to the USA, such concerns should not be ignored, and it is hoped that the findings in this report provide food for thought in relation to future planning and activity in this area. This report also points to further work that can be carried out in attempting to understand the sector. This further work can take the form of recommendations regarding research on, for example:

- the changing nature of contracted out services
- international student destinations
- the use of recruitment firms by Scottish HEIs
- The role of transnational forms of education in Scottish HE

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## Appendix A: Forms of provision – International Study Centres

**Table 1: Range of provision offered by Glasgow International College 2014/2015**

Level	Title
Foundation Certificate	Business
	Engineering
	Science
	Science/Engineering
	Social Sciences
Pre-masters	Business, Social Sciences and Law
	Science and Engineering
English Language Courses	Preparatory English
	Pre-masters preparatory English
	Integrated English studies for foundation students

**Table 2: Provision, University of Strathclyde International Study Centre (2014/15)**

Title	Cost (£) (starting from)	IELTS Score
English Language Preparation	3,950 (1 term)	4.0 (2 term) 4.5 (1 term)
Undergraduate Foundation Programme Business and Social Studies	11,550	Not Provided
Undergraduate Foundation Programme Engineering and Sciences	13,755	Not Provided
Advanced Foundation Programme in Business Administration	11,745	5.5
Pre-Masters Programme Business and Social Studies	8,380	5.5
Pre-Masters Programme Science and Engineering	8,380	5.5

English for Pre-Masters	4,230	Not Provided
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**Table 3: Provision - INTO University Stirling London 2014/15**

Level	Title(s)	Cost (£) (starting from)	IELTS Score
MSc	Business, International Trade and Diplomatic Studies	14,500	6.5
MSc	International Banking and Finance	15,500	6.0
MSc	International Business and Finance	15,500	6.0
MSc	International Sports Business	15,500	6.0
MSc	Investment and Finance	15,500	6.0
MSc	Management	15,500	6.0
MSc	Marketing and Management for Retailing	15,500	6.0
MSc	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages	15,500	6.5
Grad Diploma	Business, Finance and Sport	15,500	5.5
Preparatory Course	English for University Study	4,150 per term (up to 3 terms)	3.0

**Table 4. Provision - INTO Glasgow Caledonian University 2014/15**

Level	Title(s)	Cost (£) (starting from)	IELTS Score
International Certificate of Higher Education	Business and Management	11,250	4.0
	Science	13,250	4.0
	Engineering and Built Environment	11,250	4.0
International Diploma of Higher Education	Business	11,250	4.5
	Engineering, Computing or Creative Industries	11,250	5.5
International Graduate Diploma of Higher Education	Business	11,250	4.5
	Fast Track Six-Month - Business	8,550	5.5
	Engineering, Computing or Creative Industries	11,250	4.5
English Language Courses	Study Abroad with English	3,800 per term (6-18 month course)	4.5
	English for University Study	3,950 (minimum 1 term)	3.0
	Pre-sessional	2,279 (for 5 weeks;	5.0

	English	maximum course is 10 weeks)	
	General English Summer School	175 per week (minimum 2 weeks)	Elementary English

**Table 5. Provision - offered by ICRGU (Navitas)**

Level	Course	Fee (£)
Undergraduate Pathway	Accounting and Finance	10,100
	Business and Management	10,100
	Engineering	12,800
	Health and Life Sciences	11,700
	Pharmacy	12,800
Postgraduate Pathway (Pre-Masters)	Business and Management	6,100

**Table 6: Provision offered by Edinburgh International Centre (Navitas)**

Level	Course	Fee (£)
Undergraduate Pathway	Business	9,900
	Computing	11,300
	Engineering and Built Environment	11,300
	Life Sciences	11,300
	Tourism	9,900
Postgraduate Pathway (Pre-Masters)	Accounting and Finance	6,100
	Business and Management	6,100
	Tourism, Hospitality, Festival and Events Management	6,100
	Film	6,100