

BUILDING THE BEST SMALL COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

Attracting fresh talent to Scotland

Scotland has a great future. We have one of the best educated workforces in the world with 50 per cent of our young people going into higher education. We are world leaders in many modern industries including financial services, life sciences, oil and gas. We have some of the world's most breathtaking landscapes and a quality of life that is hard to beat.

But if we are to compete in the global economy and secure our future prosperity, we need to tackle urgently the single biggest challenge to our future success.

Scotland's population is declining. It is at its lowest level since the first half of the 20th century, and despite a recent slight increase in the birth rate, it is still projected to fall below 5 million by 2017.

A year ago, the First Minister, Jack McConnell, set out the Scottish government's plans for reversing population decline by attracting fresh talent to Scotland.

On 25 February 2004 in a statement to parliament he said:

"We want to grow our economy and we want our country to grow too – in profile, image and stature.

"Nurturing and retaining home-grown talent, encouraging ex-Scots back home and attracting fresh talent to our country sends a very strong signal to the world – that Scotland is back on the map and making her mark.

"It is a bold step for a small devolved country like ours to take, but one I am confident our people will rise to. For centuries we have been welcomed overseas. Now it is time for Scotland to be as welcoming in return.

"Our message is clear. If you have ambitions and you want to live and work in a dynamic country with a good quality of life, then this is the time, and Scotland is the place."

Since then we have taken some significant steps towards making Scotland one of the world's most welcoming countries.

Attracting the world's brightest and best

Scotland's universities and colleges are first-class, with a global reputation for excellence in research and teaching. Little wonder then that an increasing number of international students are choosing to study here. We want to encourage some of the 50,000 non-Scots who study here each year to stay on after they graduate and help share in our success.

- 1 From summer 2005 any non-EEA student graduating from a Scottish higher or further education institution with an HND, degree, masters or PHD will be eligible to apply for leave to remain for up to two years without requiring a work permit.
- 2 Students who graduated for up to a year before the scheme comes into force will also be eligible to apply for leave to remain.
- 3 At any time during their two years, leave to remain, it is open to people to switch to other managed migration categories, such as the highly-skilled migrants scheme, or to apply for a work permit.
- 4 The government is funding 22 scholarships for students from overseas who want to study for a Masters degree in Scotland. The Scottish International Scholarship Programme will start in 2005/06 and there will be nine scholarships for students from China, six for Indian students, and two each for students from South Africa, Australia and Singapore as well as one for a student from New Zealand. The scheme will be administered by the British Council on our behalf.
- 5 We are also providing funding of £35,000 to sponsor scholarship places for students from Asia to attend the 10-week "Dare to be Digital" summer programme promoted by the University of Abertay.
- 6 We are keen to give international postgraduates experience of working in Scotland, so we have granted Scottish Networks International £225,000 over the next three years to provide a total of 20 work placements. The funding will also be used to enhance the experience of a further 200 overseas postgraduates.

Helping people settle

Scotland has a global reputation for being a welcoming country, but even the friendliest country can be daunting when you first arrive. We want to make sure that settling in Scotland is as easy and stress-free as possible.

- 7 In October 2004 the government set up a relocation advisory service for people considering settling in Scotland. This one-stop service offers a wide range of advice on everything from employment, accommodation, visas and work permits to Scotland's health service, cultural life and leisure activities.
- 8 The main focus of the service is immigration advice which is why there are two immigration experts in the team, one from the Home Office and one from the Immigration Advisory Service UK.
- 9 In the first three months of operation, the service helped more than 900 customers from over 70 countries.
- 10 As well as helping people who are thinking of moving to Scotland, we want to make sure that all international students feel welcomed and supported during their studies.
- 11 The government is setting up a challenge fund for universities and colleges to help them provide international students with opportunities to enjoy all their new home has to offer, and to make decisions about whether to stay here at the end of their studies.

Telling the world about Scotland

Scotland has a unique selling point. We are known to be one of the friendliest, and educated, peoples in the world. But if we are to persuade people to settle here we need to actively promote our country and everything it has to offer.

- 12 In May last year we launched our website www.scotlandistheplace.com. Individuals who register receive a monthly newsletter and information sheet, and since the site went live, it has had more than 66,000 visitors from across the globe.
- 13 Our leaflet "Fresh Talent: Welcome to Scotland" is distributed through the Foreign Office and British Council networks and we are currently developing additional marketing materials.
- 14 Wherever possible, we send representatives of the Fresh Talent team to education fairs abroad, most recently to Hong Kong and Singapore. Over the next few months we will have a presence in China, Singapore, Malaysia, Poland and India.
- 15 One of the world's leading cancer experts, Sir David Lane, has just moved to Singapore on a two-year sabbatical. During his stay he has agreed to be Scotland's first Fresh Talent ambassador. We are currently looking at how we might develop a network of such champions across the world.

Making it easy for business

Many Scottish businesses would benefit from the skills and experience of migrants, but they may lack the resources, or the confidence, to navigate the visa and work permit system. We want to change that.

- 16 A Scottish Enterprise team member will join the relocation advisory service to offer employers advice on how to recruit staff from overseas.
- 17 A new member of the relocation advisory service will help employers complete work permit applications.
- 18 We will publish an easy-to-use toolkit to guide small businesses through the work permit process.

Keeping the talent flowing

As we look back on the first year of our Fresh Talent policy we can point to some significant progress, most notably the establishment of the UK's first relocation advisory service and Scotland's special leave to remain scheme.

But reversing Scotland's population decline is not a short-term project. We will need a constant flow of fresh talent over the next decade if we are to succeed in our twin ambition of reversing population decline and strengthening our position in the global economy.

That is why working with the Home Office and others we will continue to refine and develop initiatives to attract and support new Scots.

Promoting immigration is a bold step for a small country to make, but we are confident that with strong leadership and the right policies, we can attract some of the world's most enterprising and ambitious people to help us build the best small country in the world.