

‘America first’ puts Scottish university in US under threat

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Glasgow Caledonian University has invested \$15 million (£11.5m) in establishing a base in New YorkSLAVEN VLASIC/GETTY IMAGES

A university’s bold plan to open a campus in Manhattan has collided with the protectionist “America first” rhetoric of President Trump at a crucial hearing in New York that could deny it a licence to admit students.

Glasgow Caledonian University has invested \$15 million (£11.5m) in establishing a base in New York, signing a 15 year lease to occupy two floors of a building in a fashionable part of Lower Manhattan, and spending \$3.2 million (£2.5 million) to build classrooms, a library and a lecture studio.

Yet four years after arriving in the city, and three years after the campus opened in SoHo, the university has yet to obtain the required licence from New York state that would allow it to award degrees.

At a hearing yesterday to determine whether the application will finally be granted, it emerged that the Glasgow Caledonian faces fierce opposition from local private universities, who claim that there are not enough students or employers to support the arrival of a new university. The protests are being made in a political climate that has shifted dramatically since the election of Mr Trump.

At the hearing in a meeting room on the tenth story of a skyscraper just south of Times Square, Catherine Collins, a member of a three-person “board of regents” representing the state education department, said the prevailing attitude “in this country is America first. I think everyone knows that.” American employers “want to support our country and want to support our students”, she said. “Why hire your student, as opposed to an . . . American educated student?”

Robert Clougherty, dean of the university’s New York base, said: “We are seeking to open an American college, we are not necessarily a foreign institution.”

Cara Smyth, vice-president of Glasgow Caledonian’s New York college, said it was seeking to offer something unique, with an international perspective, and with a focus on sustainability in business that had already proven attractive to scores of companies in New York.

She said the Scottish bid had received support from Macy’s, Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger and Eileen Fisher.

Ms Smyth added that the campus was due to play host today to nearly 40 chief executives, from companies with a collective worth of \$365 billion, as part of the outreach and convening work in the fashion industry that the college had conducted in the absence of any students.

She acknowledged that it had been difficult to run the campus, officially opened by Alex Salmond in early 2014, without any students. “We hoped this process would go faster,” she said. “The fact that it didn’t go faster, it forced us into a period of probation.”

The application is to offer masters degrees in luxury brand management, international fashion marketing, risk management, and social business and microfinance.

Melanie Steiner, chief risk officer with the clothing company PVH Corp, which owns Calvin Klein, Speedo, and a host of other brands, said her company struggles at present to find graduates with the training the new college would offer.

“I appreciate the point about America first,” she said. “But talent management has become fully global now.”

Such arguments were loudly contradicted, however, by the leaders of private universities in New York city.

The board of regents will consider their decision and issue their verdict at a later date.