

News Release

Home Affairs Select Committee attended by Tony Millns

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Bogus colleges damage the UK's international reputation, MPs warned

Tony Millns, Chief Executive of English UK, has given evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on the issue of bogus colleges.

In a wide-ranging discussion, he told MPs that it was a "national scandal" that private education institutions could be set up with no regulation.

"It has been for many years a national scandal that anyone, whether a fit and proper person or not, can hire two rooms above a fish and chip shop and call themselves a college. It is almost unbelievable given that the world believes that UK education is high quality," he said, adding that at the very least accreditation by a recognised body should be necessary.

He and Nick Lewis from the Association of Colleges told the committee that the new system whereby only accredited schools can sponsor visa students visiting the UK had closed many of the loopholes. But there was a serious need to protect the international reputation of the country's education.

"It strikes me extremely strange that the department of education have never made a move to in any way licence, accredit or quality assure private sector education establishments. I'd go as far as to say it was a national scandal," said Mr Millns. He said that English UK archives showed that there was a register run by the Department of Education and Science until 1982 when it was abandoned as part of the "Thatcher cuts."

"So we had as the sector to pick that up with the British Council. We set up a new accreditation system but that was voluntary. A mandatory system for registration has not existed since 1982."

He told MPs that English UK had been campaigning for a decade on the issue of bogus colleges. He said the organisation had a database of non-accredited English language centres in the private sector, of which 450 were not "necessarily bogus but, how should I put it, would repay further investigation... you get the impression a lot of them are probably substandard at the very least."

It was not just English language centres which were bringing in overseas students, but also private tertiary colleges, often advertising courses in IT or business studies. Tens of thousands of students might have entered the UK via such colleges, and he suggested there were "a couple of thousand" institutions which should be looked at.

Asked if he thought potential terrorists might have been among their students, Mr Millns said he thought it was perfectly possible but was not anywhere near as prevalent as the bogus students who were actually economic migrants and entered the UK to work illegally.

The other problem was that some of the bogus colleges were actually ripping off students who were genuinely seeking education.

"The international UK reputation for quality in education is a key selling point. Colleges which are bogus or simply poor quality... damage that reputation for quality so all legitimate institutions suffer.

"And this is a major economic benefit for the UK. International students bring in about £8bn a year to the UK. They are growing; we've just looked at our first quarter statistics for our core group and it is 14.6 per cent up on the first quarter of 2008.

"Show me another industry sector growing at 14.6 per cent year on year. This is a very significant business for the UK and it is also very important for our perception in the world because... people go back to their countries and become ministers, VCs, and opinion leaders. It is tremendously important for the UK's public diplomacy. Anything which damages it is very bad news for the UK."

The committee is now considering calling on the Department for Children, Schools and Families to give evidence on whether it believes there should be educational regulation of private colleges.

The select committee session was widely reported, including by the [BBC](#), the [Guardian](#), the [Telegraph](#) and the [Daily Mail](#).

Notes to editors

- English UK is the world's leading language teaching association, with more than 400 accredited centres in membership. It covers university and further education college language departments, international study centres in independent schools, educational trusts and charities, and private sector colleges. English UK is a UK registered charity.
- More than 500,000 students every year choose to learn English in Britain, an estimated 43% of all students who travel abroad to study English. They contribute about £1.5 billion to the UK economy in course fees, accommodation and general spending. Many students go on from English language courses to UK degrees or professional qualifications. There are long-term affinity benefits to Britain as well since many students go on to be opinion-leaders and senior figures in their own countries.
- For more information, please contact Tony Millns (Chief Executive of English UK) on 07976511439.