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NEW STUDENT VISA RULES – ENGLISH UK RESPONSE

The new rules on student visas announced by Home Secretary Alan Johnson this morning (10 February) will potentially hit the UK English language sector hard. The UK is the global market leader in English language courses, which bring in around £1.5 billion in foreign earnings a year.

The main impact would be to eliminate students from countries such as Korea, Kazakhstan and Colombia coming to the UK to study English. These are often long-stay students who start at lower levels (typically elementary) and work up to the level required for university entry over 32-40 weeks.

The Government proposes to raise the minimum course level for such students to B2 on the European Framework, which corresponds to A level on the Government's own Languages Ladder and 'advanced' on most other language competence scales. This is well above the 'just below GCSE level' which the Government was claiming earlier this week.

To enter at lower levels such students will either have to be sponsored by their government (and most governments do not sponsor such students) or on pre-sessional courses leading to a degree (and most decide on their university course after studying in the UK, visiting various universities, and being interviewed by them).

The Home Office and UK Border Agency have **never published any evidence to show that significant numbers of such students work illegally, overstay their visas or are engaged in any other unlawful activity in the UK.** The great majority are diligent students who want to improve their career prospects by gaining a high-quality UK education and gaining qualifications which are internationally valued.

The Home Office has pointed to recent problems with large increases in applications from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal as evidence, but almost none of these are for English language courses at our accredited member centres.

English UK therefore urges the Home Office and UK Border Agency to:

- remove this restriction on language course level for colleges on the new Highly Trusted Sponsor list
- ensure that there is a level playing field for applications by state and private sector colleges for entry on to the Highly Trusted Sponsor list

- move as soon as possible to a risk-assessed system where visa applicants from high-risk nations face greater scrutiny, while applicants from low-risk countries such as Korea and Kazakhstan are fast-tracked
- work closely with the UK international education sector to achieve a definition of pre-sessional courses which will not tie students and institutions into premature decisions.

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Notes to Editors

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. For more information, please contact Tony Millns (Chief Executive of English UK) on 020 7608 7960 or 07976 511439 or tony@englishuk.com