

News Release
17 January 2012

English UK gets "Banned colleges" story corrected

A news story issued to most national and local media wrongly claiming that fully-accredited English language centres had been "banned" from bringing international students into the country has been corrected.

More than 22 English UK member centres were infuriated when they were named on a list of 66 "banned colleges" released to the media in November, alongside institutions which had been banned for breaking the rules. The story was widely used and several news websites published the list in full.

Several instructed lawyers to demand a full retraction and apology from the Home Office.

These centres had taken a business decision to voluntarily resign from the Register of Sponsors (RoS) when a prohibitively expensive new inspection regime became compulsory. They can still legitimately teach EU students from Europe or those on courses of up to 11 months, and had not in any sense been banned, but the story did not make this clear.

After several months of wrangling, the UK Border Agency last week told one of the affected schools, Brighton International Summer School (BISS), that it had had supplied two separate lists of centres no longer on the RoS and stressed the different reasons for removing centres from the register in its press briefings. It blamed the media for getting the story wrong.

English UK immediately brought this to the attention of the Press Association (PA), the national news agency which had written and circulated the story and the list of "banned colleges" to media outlets through the UK.

"It is regrettable that despite the considerable efforts made by the UK Border Agency and the Home Office press office to ensure that the media outlets understood the detail of the information provided to them, that this was not better reflected by some media in their subsequent publications," said the email.

PA swiftly agreed to "clarify" the story and sent out the following version, agreed with English UK, to all its media customers:

"In 1 POLITICS Immigration List (COLLEGES IN FOREIGN STUDENT BAN) transmitted on 01/11/2011 and repeated early on 02/11/2011, we reported that hundreds of colleges had been banned from bringing foreign students into the UK as part of the Government's plans to control immigration. English UK, which represents accredited English language colleges, a sector worth around £2.5 billion to the UK economy, has asked us to make it clear that its members who were named had voluntarily chosen not to apply to stay on the list, for legitimate business reasons, because they can still bring in students on visitor visas and do not need a Tier 4 licence." It has also taken action to ensure that any of its customer websites still displaying the banned list will remove it.

Tony Millns, Chief Executive of English UK, said: "We're pleased that PA has acted quickly on this and included a fuller explanation of the facts for its users. We are also hoping that

everyone involved, including the UKBA press team, PA and the wider media will now have a better understanding of the issues involved so that similar, potentially defamatory mistakes, will not be made on future occasions."

In its email to BISS, the UKBA's Litigation and Correspondence Team claimed it had even contacted a national broadcaster which ran the list on its website under the headline "banned" to reiterate that this was inaccurate and should be amended.

It explained: "In telephone briefings with journalists the day before the publication, the Home Office press office made clear that revocation of a licence did not necessarily indicate non-compliance or poor educational standards. While explaining various figures within the press notice, it was stressed to journalists that education providers may have decided for their own reasons not to apply - for example, because they no longer were looking to attract overseas students, or had decided to focus on the extended Student Visitor Visa route.

"Two lists of those sponsors whose licenses had been revoked were emailed separately to the Press Association who expressed interest in regionalising the story - one list was of the revocations due to non-compliance of sponsor duties and the other of revocations further to the new educational oversight and Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS) arrangements. Before these lists were sent to the Press Association, the Home Office press office explained over the telephone the differences between these two lists and the various reasons why a college might appear on them."

Notes to Editors

1. English UK is the world's leading language teaching association, with more than 450 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 (www.englishuk.com).
2. All English UK members must be accredited by the quality assurance scheme Accreditation UK, which is run by the British Council in partnership with English UK. It was the first scheme in the world specifically designed to inspect teaching in language schools. Private centres applying to join the Register of Sponsors autumn 2011 were forced to apply for Educational Oversight from Government-approved providers, for which the fees are generally four times higher. Neither Accreditation UK nor the new EO inspection looks at compliance with visa regulations, which is the responsibility of UKBA.
3. Students who come to the UK to learn or improve their English contribute about £2.5 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.
4. For further comment please contact Tony Millns on 020 7608 7960.

English UK Ltd
219 St John Street
London
EC1V 4LY

w: www.englishuk.com
e: info@englishuk.com