



English UK members demand an apology from Government over "banned colleges" list

Press Release
November 7 2011

English UK members have instructed lawyers to demand a full retraction and apology for wrongly including them on a list of colleges "English UK members have instructed lawyers to demand a full retraction banned" from bringing international students into the UK.

The organisation, which has more than 450 fully-accredited language centres in membership, is co-ordinating the action by a number of its members who were named on a list of 66 "banned" colleges released to the media last week.

They were described as being among 474 which have either had licences revoked, cannot sponsor any new students or have been banned following an investigation.

However, at least 22 of the schools are fully-accredited English UK members which took the business decision to voluntarily resign from the Register of Sponsors this autumn. They meet high inspection standards, can still legitimately teach certain groups of international students, and have not in any sense been banned.

"We are co-ordinating action over the way in which the Home Office allowed it to be inferred that all the colleges on that list were bogus, fronts for illegal immigration, or of poor educational quality. This has been enormously damaging to the reputation of perfectly legitimate and high-quality businesses," said Tony Millns, chief executive of English UK.

"Our affected members are initially asking the Home Office for a full retraction of this misleading information, and they may consider pursuing those parts of the media which published the list or stories based upon it as well.

"We and our hard-working, law-abiding members are absolutely furious about this."

The legal letter complains of the "misinformation" placed in the public domain by the UK Border Agency. "Such misinformation so far as it relates to our clients is untrue, defamatory and gravely damaging to their goodwill and reputations. This letter therefore seeks an immediate apology and retraction," it says.

The letter goes on to state that the press release and news items based directly on it amount to a "flagrant defamation" of the colleges "in that the

impression has been created that those on the banned list are untrustworthy, offering an immigration service other than education, have lost the right to bring international students to the UK, is not a first class education provider, does not meet the standards required of a Tier 4 sponsor when it chose not to apply, is abusing immigration controls, and is facilitating the abuse of student visas”.

"The potential damage is potentially substantial, irreparable and unquantifiable," says the letter, requesting an "immediate and unqualified apology".

Most of the English UK members named on the "banned list" decided against remaining on the Register of Sponsors either because it was uneconomic to do so or because their businesses did not require it.

It is only necessary to be on the Register of Sponsors to bring in points-based visa students on longer-term courses, such as a university degree. Summer schools, centres specialising in English courses of up to 11 months, and those who only take students from the EU, do not need to be points-based sponsors.

Some centres which did take small numbers of points-based visa students made the decision to withdraw from this market in September, when new regulations meant they faced a five-fold increase in inspection costs. Many smaller businesses that provide education of an exceptionally high quality could simply not afford this.

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 from this autumn 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