



Government's student visa changes damages competitiveness of £2.5bn sector

Press Release

November 2 2011

The UK's £2.5bn English Language sector is losing students to overseas competitors as a result of Government visa changes.

Eighty per cent of accredited colleges surveyed think the changes have made them less competitive in an international market, and fear that students will instead choose to enrol on courses in countries such as Australia.

A particularly damaging change for the sector is a four-fold increase in inspection costs for most private colleges since the Government ruled that previous systems were no longer valid for most student visas. These included the rigorous, widely-respected, and internationally-trusted Accreditation UK scheme, run by the British Council.

Colleges believe their next mandatory inspection is likely to cost an average of over £10,500, compared with £3,253 for their previous Accreditation UK inspection. The majority of institutions surveyed say they face a double burden of costs as they need to keep their internationally-recognised Accreditation UK status up to date as well. The total average cost of £14,000 would be uneconomic for many language colleges.

"It is almost incomprehensible that at a time when the UK's growth figures are just 0.5 per cent that Government actions are threatening a valuable part of our export sector," said Tony Millns, chief executive of English UK, which represents more than 450 fully-accredited English Language centres in the state and private sector.

"It is extraordinary that this government is imposing red tape, bureaucracy and an enormous costs hike on what is a rare growth sector in the economy.

"We're calling for the Government to urgently reinstate Accreditation UK as an approved inspection scheme. It was developed in a full understanding of the needs of this specialist sector and is the most rigorous system in the world. "This needs to be done quickly, before too many centres either find it is uneconomic to continue trading or are forced to pass on vastly increased costs to students who are being warmly welcomed by our competitors, particularly in Australia, Canada and the US."

Mr Millns said the member survey had confirmed that some English UK centres had decided to withdraw from the Government's register of points-

based visa sponsors as a result of the uneconomic costs of the new inspection regime. They can continue to take students on visitor visas.

Mr Millns added that the Government's approved inspection schemes simply look at education provision and do not check compliance with visa regulations, which is done by UKBA officers. No English UK member centre -- for whom Accreditation UK inspection was mandatory -- has been closed down by the UK Border Agency.

Peter Thompson, Principal of the Oxford School of English, said: "Under the new visa restrictions, we have seen demand for the long-term General Student Visas fall to zero: one year ago, we had 47 students here on a GSV, while today we have only six, all of whom are coming to the end of their course. Our network of educational agents worldwide continually expresses astonishment at the barriers the new visa restrictions have placed before their students, and at the immense harm this has done to the UK's appeal as a study destination; and in many cases, tell us they have stopped promoting education in the UK and have switched their focus to educational institutions in Canada, the USA or Australia. The financial loss to our school is significant and threatens our very existence, but repeated as it is in schools and colleges nationwide, the loss to the UK's economy and international standing is an utter disaster."

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. Accreditation UK is a quality-assurance scheme that monitors UK schools, colleges and universities offering courses in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The scheme checks and improves the standards of providers' teaching, management, facilities and welfare provision. It is administered by English UK and the British Council. It is the only scheme in the world which looks at teaching in language schools.
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 at English UK via Susan Young on 07976 222905. We can also provide you with more quotes from the survey.