



## **STUDENT VISA CHANGES “COULD OPEN NEW LOOPHOLE” SAYS ENGLISH UK**

**Press release**

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The changes to the UK student visa system announced by the Home Secretary Theresa May this afternoon could open a new loophole, warns an organisation representing 450 accredited language centres.

Students entering the UK for a year or more will be tightly regulated, as colleges bringing them in on General Student Visas under the Points-based System must now have Highly Trusted Sponsor status and be inspected by Ofsted. But the Government risks losing control of students entering for up to 11 months on an (Extended) Student Visitor Visa, which is outside the PBS.

Tony Millns, English UK’s chief executive, commented: “The danger is that Entry Clearance Officers will not check that applicants for Student Visitor visas are in fact enrolled at accredited colleges, and will approve visas which allow bogus students to come to dodgy colleges with no controls or even proper classes. It would be a disaster if a crackdown on one route allowed abuse to happen through another. The extended SVV is a good route for relative beginners who needed extra time to reach the language level required for a PBS General Student Visa, and we do not want to lose it because of abuse by non-accredited colleges.”

English UK has welcomed several aspects of the Government’s package on student visas, while assessing some changes more critically. “Overall the package of measures is more targeted than the original proposals, and we shall be looking to work with UKBA and Ofsted to make sure that the majority of our member colleges who already have Highly Trusted Sponsor status can continue with that under the new arrangements.

“Finally however we must say to the Government that the UK’s international education sector, one of the few growth areas of the economy right now, has had 5 years of continuous rapid change in the visa system and requirements, and once these changes are introduced there should be no further changes for at least 2 years to restore confidence around the world that it is possible to come to the UK to study.”

English UK agrees with the decision to leave the English level for pre-degree courses at B1, broadly equivalent to a top-grade GCSE, as “welcome and sensible”. It also believes setting maximum visa terms of 3 years for courses below degree level, and 5 years (except for courses such as medicine and architecture) for first degree level and above, is broadly sensible and realistic.

However, it says the Government has “missed a trick” by not basing its approach on payment of course fees (or a significant proportion of fees) in advance, and the concept of visa officials deciding which banks can be trusted or not extends the powers of the UK Border Agency into commercial dealings worldwide.

It is concerned by the discriminatory and anti-competitive decision to outlaw the right to work for students on courses at private colleges, even though these courses may be franchised by a university whose own students can continue to work for up to 20 hours a week.

English UK is also concerned that some genuine students may be deterred from studying at British universities by the new regulations on language requirements, dependants and post-study work. The decision to require students on degree courses to have level B2 English (equivalent to a top-grade A level/university year one) will either restrict access to a considerable number of universities or will increase the numbers of students who have to take an international foundation year course before moving on to a degree, making it effectively a 4-year course. The restrictions on the rights of students to post-study work and to being accompanied by dependants during their courses will deter an appreciable number from coming to the UK, with a backwash effect on the number coming for preliminary English language and international foundation year courses.

### **Notes to Editors**

1. English UK is the world's leading language teaching association, with 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 independently inspected and fully-accredited private sector colleges. English UK is a registered charity ([www.englishuk.com](http://www.englishuk.com))
2. Tony Millns, chief executive of English UK, has been a leading figure in the language teaching sector for more than a decade. He also has extensive experience in the university and education sector, having worked with Lord Dearing on all three of his major education reports, including the Higher Education review which recommended the payment of tuition fees by students. He has been a member of the Home Office/BIS joint education task force since it was set up in 2005.
3. For further information please contact Tony Millns on 07976511439