



English language schools welcome Parliamentary report into student visas

Press release

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English UK, which represents 450 accredited language centres, today welcomed a report warning the Government against making changes which could damage Britain's international education sector.

In a wide-ranging report, the Home Affairs Committee says the sector is estimated to be worth £40bn to the UK economy and is a significant growth market. Pointing to the experience of visa reform in the US and Australia, which led to a fall in applications, the committee warns that some of the Government's proposals could have "serious unintended consequences."

The report says any cap on student visas is undesirable and unnecessary, and urges the Government to improve its data collection systems so that policies are not being made on "flawed data". Students, it says, should not be classified as migrants.

Its many recommendations include a suggestion that the Extended Student Visitor Visa, currently being piloted, should be made permanent. In addition, if the Government does go ahead with its proposal to raise the minimum language requirement to high A-Level standard for students on general visas, the Extended Student Visitor Visa (which does not have a language requirement) should be further lengthened to 18 months to allow the higher level to be reached.

It warns that if the language level were raised and the ESVV were dropped, there would be a "calamitous impact" on the English language sector.

Welcoming the report, Tony Millns, Chief Executive of English UK, said: "The committee is absolutely right in its analysis both of the vital importance of this sector to the UK economy, and of the potentially disastrous consequences of some of the Government's proposals. We are calling on the Coalition to read this report carefully before finalising any policy changes around student visas."

Other recommendations of the Committee's report include a call for a single, streamlined system of accrediting institutions sponsoring international students. It is concerned that Government approval of the current accreditation bodies has lapsed.

The strongly-worded report also says the Government should clarify certain issues around its planned secure English language tests, should prioritise the

implementation of exit checks on people leaving the country, and calls for “a more reliable system of data collection than the International Passenger Survey can be used upon which to base immigration policy.”

Keith Vaz MP, the Committee’s chair, said: “The Government’s policy ought to be evidence-based. Generating policy based on flawed evidence could cripple the UK education sector. In the case of international students this could mean a significant revenue and reputational loss to the UK. We strongly urge the Government to examine the data which it currently uses to extrapolate migration figures and recognise that for any genuine student the doors to Britain’s fine education institutions are always open. If the door is shut they will simply study elsewhere.”

Notes to Editors

1. English UK is the world’s leading language teaching association, with 500 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. Students who come to the UK to learn or improve their English 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 further comment please contact Tony Millns at English UK on 07976511439