



Government warned on cutting international student numbers

Press release

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Dramatic cuts in student visa numbers being proposed by the Government would not only damage the UK's economy and higher education sector but also fail to meet targets for lower migration, according to two authoritative new reports.

The Institute for Public Policy Research report concludes that tens of thousands of genuine international students are at risk of being turned away from British universities and colleges, costing the UK billions of pounds, as the Government seeks to meet an "artificial target" for cutting migration.

Analysis by the IPPR finds that cutting student immigration would only have short term impacts on net migration. Large reductions in student immigration would produce only small reductions in net migration.

The IPPR report comes only days after the Higher Education Policy Institute published its own document on the implications of the Government's proposals restricting Tier 4 visas. Results of the Government's consultation are expected next month.

Both reports cover much of the same ground, which is that Government would have to cut the numbers of genuine students entering the UK in order to meet its migration targets, that it is using unreliable data to establish the numbers of students entering and leaving, and that a tightening up of regulations on sponsoring institutions would be the best way to ensure students were genuine. Both documents also suggest that the Government is not being overt about its true intentions.

Tony Millns, chief executive of English UK, commented: "These well-researched reports undermine the Government's case both for treating students as part of the country's net migration statistics, and for cutting numbers beyond what is necessary to reduce abuse, for example by improving accreditation of colleges. These reports indicate the Government is running real risks with our international education sector, one of the growth areas of the UK economy, if it seeks to cut net migration by reducing international student numbers. The worst aspect is that both reports show that cutting students won't necessarily achieve the Government's objective on net migration anyway, so the policy could fail and yet do significant damage to a vital sector."

Student Migration In The UK, written by Sarah Mulley, the IPPR's associate director for Migration, Trade and Development, says that the Government's proposals are "likely to have significant negative consequences for legitimate

international student recruitment. These proposals are most easily explained in light of the government's overall objective to reduce total net migration to the UK, and consequently to reduce student immigration. In our view... reducing student immigration is unlikely to significantly reduce net migration in the medium to long term, and the economic costs of the drastic reductions in student immigration that would be necessary to meet the government's overall objective would be considerable.

"However, if it is the government's intention to follow this course, it is important that this be openly stated and discussed in the policy, political and public debate." It adds: "International students contribute a huge amount to the UK education sector and to the wider economy. The ability of international students to come to the UK sells Britain and British business to the rest of the world. The government cannot have its cake and eat it: it will simply not be possible to reach the reduced net migration target and retain the benefits that students bring to the institutions they attend and the wider economy."

The HEPI report, *The UKBA's Proposed Restrictions on Tier 4 visas: implications for University recruitment of overseas students*, written by University of East Anglia vice-chancellor Professor Edward Acton, is no less damning.

It concludes: "If the government is determined to be guided by International Passenger Survey data and to discourage international HE recruitment, we need certainty about the matter. We can then drastically curtail the considerable British resource being spent on seeking to attract international students by our embassies, by the British Council, by BIS and by every university. William Hague can rethink his announcement in January that 'as British Ministers fan out across the world in the months to come we will be promoting British education as well as our economy as a whole.' The Treasury can build the concomitant fall in export earnings into its forecasts. The Higher Education Funding Council for England can revise its list of 'at risk' institutions. Universities can plan with local authorities how to cope with the rapid loss of income, shedding of jobs and singularly ill-timed damage to university cities and regional economies that will follow."

Notes to Editors

1. English UK is the world's leading language teaching association, with more than 440 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