

Press Release  
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## English UK members give evidence to Home Affairs Select Committee in Brighton

Around 70 universities, colleges and private English language centres travelled to Brighton to give evidence on student visas to a special session of the Home Affairs Select Committee.

Witnesses travelled from as far away as Wales and Leicester to appear before the Committee's only open session to be held outside Westminster during its scrutiny of the Government's proposed changes to student visas.

They warned the chairman, MP Keith Vaz, that raising the student language requirement to B2 (equivalent to a high A Level) risked sending large numbers of students to study in competitor nations such as the USA.

They wanted to see a better accreditation system and more information on their students, such as whether a visa had been granted, whether it had been used, and whether the student had arrived in or left the UK.

And while welcoming the new 11-month Student Visitor Visa, they were concerned that it contained fewer immigration safeguards than the Tier 4 route, and suggested that it be limited to centres holding Highly Trusted Sponsor status.

Mark Allen, of Sussex Downs College, said that two years ago 95 per cent of students on their programmes would continue to study at a British university. "Fifteen to 20 per cent of those are now going to university elsewhere because of the obstacles put in their way. The danger this is causing long-term to the university sector is significant," he said.

Diane Schmitt of Nottingham Trent University told the committee that the language requirement was particularly unhelpful. "We know some countries' education systems don't do much speaking and listening because it's not logistically possible and the national examination at the end of their school system reflects this. Chinese students, for example, don't have an even proficiency profile."

Caroline Lucas, the Brighton MP who organised the meeting, said international education was "a major economic issue". She added: "I do think this issue can be won. There is cross-party support that there are better ways of resolving this problem."

"The message is very loud and clear that these schools and colleges need a period of stability and certainty but are very happy to have a further tightening of accreditation and regulation. But requiring students to have higher level of English really does risk the future of schools and colleges."

Mr Vaz said the committee hoped to produce its report as quickly as possible, ideally by the end of February.

Tony Millns, chief executive of English UK, said the international education sector was growing, and was one of the "bright spots" in the UK economy.

### Notes to Editors

1. English UK is the world's leading language teaching association, with 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](http://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.