



Press release

November 21 2010

GOVERNMENT CAN CHANGE VISA SYSTEM WHILST PROTECTING ONE OF OUR TOP FIVE EXPORT INDUSTRIES, SAYS ENGLISH UK

English UK today published its input to the government's review of the UK visa system for students, with proposals we believe will help meet the objectives of reducing net migration and reducing abuse of the system, whilst protecting one of our top five export industries.

International students contribute over £10 billion a year to the UK economy in their spending on course fees and living costs. International education is one of our top five export industries and students' spending while here counts as foreign earnings. It is a vital contribution to our economic recovery.

Key proposals on reducing net migration and settlement include:

- Making it much more difficult to transfer from temporary to permanent migrant status
- Demanding higher levels of skills, qualifications and English language requirements for skilled workers, possibly including a minimum pay limit
- Restricting numbers entering via the family route and increasing requirements on those entrants, particularly in English language proficiency, assessed through a secure test
- Classifying post-study work as 'not leading to settlement'
- Banning students on shorter courses from working, or allowing unpaid work (internships) only
- Considering removing the right to bring dependants for students on shorter courses, or removing the right of dependants to work.

To reduce abuse of the visa system, it proposes:

- Assessing the potential risk posed by nationals from different countries. Those posing the lowest risk, such as Japan, would move to visa-waiver status, with restrictions placed on students on lower-level courses from the highest-risk nations.
- Creating an overarching new accrediting body for private sector colleges and remove the lowest-quality ones from the Register of Sponsors so they cannot bring in students
- Requiring students to pay fees in advance, in full for courses up to 6 months and two-thirds of first year fees for longer courses.

In addition, English UK proposes that after the current review is complete, the visa system should be left unchanged for at least a year and that after that amendments could only be introduced on one of two set dates each year. The points-based system has been subject to

constant change since its introduction less than two years ago, leading to great confusion among visa applicants and prospective students about the current requirements.

“There is no need for drastic action on student visas,” said Tony Millns, chief executive of English UK. “The economic situation has already made the UK less attractive to migrants, and the new system is considerably tougher at all points than it was prior to 2009. Students do not contribute significantly to net migration or settlement, and they are the wrong target for cuts in UK visas.”

English UK argues strongly that students contribute little to net migration (Home Office research found they were the likeliest group of migrants to return home at the end of their visa period) and are a vital contributor to the UK economy and the financial health of the university sector.

Moreover, students contribute little to net migration due to their relatively fast turnover: new entrants are balanced out by students completing their courses and leaving the country.

If there were a ‘cap’ on students who study in the UK for longer than a year, the main group who would be hit are those coming for preparatory courses such as international foundation year programmes leading on to degree courses at UK universities. Universities recruit nearly half of their international students from those already in the UK on these preparatory courses.

International education is one of our top five export industries and students’ spending while here counts as foreign earnings. It is a vital contribution to our economic recovery. Over the last two years, exchange rates have made the UK more affordable and international student numbers have increased as a result.

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 independently inspected and fully-accredited private sector colleges. English UK is a registered charity (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 or Susan Young on 07976 222905