

The logo for English UK, featuring the words "ENGLISH" and "UK" stacked vertically in a white, sans-serif font, enclosed within a white square border.

ENGLISH
UK

Global opportunities

How government can support the UK
English language teaching sector

English UK Position Paper / May 2026 (updated edition)



English is the lingua franca of global trade. Many international businesses use English as their official language of communication.

Language proficiency can have a positive impact on employability, as well as on social and international mobility, and is without question a key driver behind the desire to learn English for many people.

– The Future of English: Global Perspectives, British Council, 2023



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Introducing the UK ELT sector

In these uncertain times, the UK needs strong export industries and ways of forging positive links with the wider world.

The English language teaching sector provides both.

The UK ELT sector supports 40,000 jobs all over our country, contributes £1.8 billion to our national finances, feeds our universities and builds lifelong global affinities to the UK.

We transform lives through learning and intercultural understanding.

Our sector attracts children, students, professionals and older adults to study and experience life in the UK.

Students come from all over the world to continue their educational or professional journeys, while enjoying cultural immersion and leisure.

On average, teenage students stay for less than a fortnight and adults stay for under six weeks.

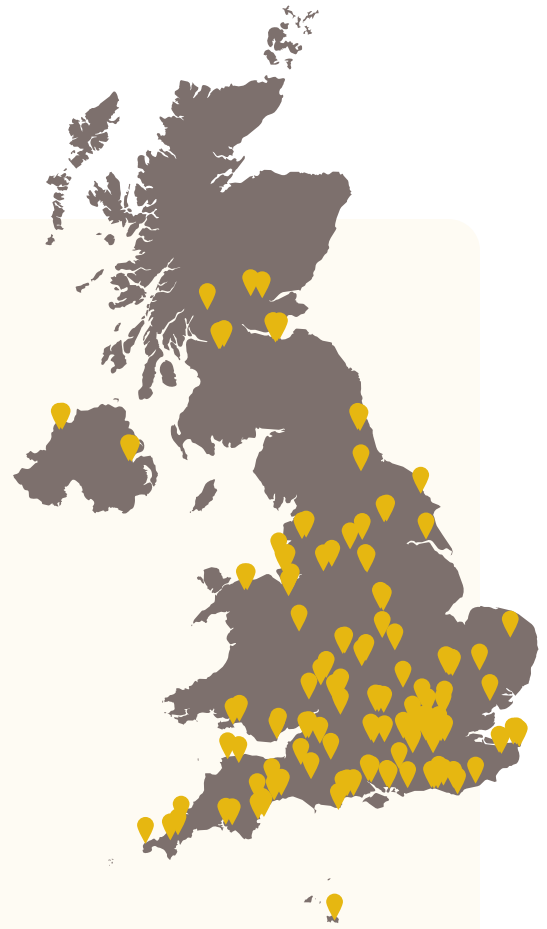




UK ELT supports
40k jobs
directly and indirectly



UK ELT raises
£295m
for the UK in taxes



UK ELT contributes
£2 billion
to the economy each year



UK ELT students
spend 2x
more than other tourists

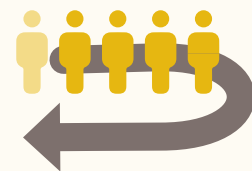
with centres in over
100 locations
ELT benefits the whole country



students from over
100 countries
visit the UK to study English



each UK ELT student
adds £3,650
to the UK's national finances



80% of ELT students
hope to return
to the UK for leisure or study

The UK ELT sector in context

New research has found that each ELT student added an average of £3,650 to UK finances in 2024, 15% higher than a decade ago. In the same period, jobs supported by UK ELT rose to over 40,000 and taxes paid to £295 million – both increasing by 12%.

And we could contribute even more.

The UK was a pioneer and leader in the global English language teaching industry.

Yet, despite our best efforts, recovery from the pandemic has been slower than that of our competitors due to the end of passport-free EU travel, which undermined our largest market.

What's more, the UK market for ELT faces significant pressures due to rising accommodation, travel and course costs as well as the disruption that comes from new technology, such as online and AI supported language learning.

Growing domestic ELT supply in some source markets and new, emerging destinations for study abroad, including Dubai and the Philippines, are also important disruptors.

With hard work and innovation, UK ELT centres have regained 72% of pre-pandemic student weeks and attracted 37% of all students studying ELT abroad in 2025.

We are still the world's most popular ELT destination but overall volume is down as the UK is attracting more short-stay junior students and fewer longer-stay adults.

Growing the UK economy is the government's number one priority, and ELT can help.

To fully play our part, we need the government to work with our industry and other stakeholders.

We need a better operating environment, more agile immigration and more promotional support.

We are ambitious. We want to do more for our industry and for our country. We want the UK to become the world's biggest English language learning destination once more.

In this document we outline six simple, supportive government policies that would enable us to do that.

We are delighted that since we began campaigning on these issues in 2025, we have partially achieved three of them, but there is still much further to go.



Students benefit from coming to the UK, and we benefit from them being here... My passion is for an open, global Britain – one that welcomes new ideas. One that looks outward in optimism, not inward in exclusion.

Students come and build bonds with their classmates – and friendships between students become friendships between countries. That’s what education is all about.

A force for good in people’s lives, a force for good in our world. A generation of young people who have studied abroad and cultivated friendships with people from different cultures – those ties make the world a safer, more vibrant place.

– Secretary of State for Education Bridget Phillipson,
Embassy Education Conference, 2024



What the ELT sector does for the UK

1. UK ELT supports one of the UK's most successful exports

More people communicate using English than any other language, with roughly 2.3 billion people speaking it as a first or additional language.

English will remain the dominant global language for the foreseeable future. This means the UK ELT sector will continue to be important for years to come.

Thanks to Accreditation UK, our quality assurance scheme run in partnership with the British Council, English UK member centres enjoy a global reputation for excellence.

2. UK ELT helps to build international relationships

At a time of rising international tension and uncertainty, creating personal connections across borders is vital.

In 2023, students came from over 100 different countries to learn or improve their English. 80% liked the UK so much that they hope to return for a holiday or further study.

As we embark on an era of new trade deals, ELT-friendly offers like youth mobility schemes could help build relationships.

3. UK ELT creates jobs and supports local economies

ELT centres are based in all four countries of the UK. The highest ELT tax take was £3 million in the London borough of Camden, followed by Bournemouth and Brighton and Hove, each contributing £2 million.

Direct employment and financial benefits created by ELT are concentrated around teaching centres, while the indirect gains are widespread.

Our sector supports 40,320 full time equivalent jobs in the UK, up 12% in a decade.

We are attracting fewer, more affluent students, each worth around £3,650 to the UK, a rise of 15% between 2015 and 2025.

As well as specialist staff, ELT supports jobs in tourism, leisure, hospitality, travel and retail, also people hosting students in their homes.

ELT students spend almost twice as much as ordinary tourists visiting the UK.

What the ELT sector does for the UK (continued)

4. UK ELT is a route to UK universities for international students

International education, and universities in particular, are a significant UK export industry, contributing £27.9 billion in total revenue to the UK in 2021. 77.9% of this was accounted for by the higher education sector.

Many students start their journey at our ELT centres, either as teens enjoying their first experience of the UK or as young adults preparing for their degrees.

Their ELT programme prepares them not only for the English they need for their future courses but also helps them adjust to life and study in the UK, ensuring better completion rates overall.

5. UK ELT is an invaluable service for staff joining our NHS

Our language teaching centres teach and test medical English for healthcare professionals new to the UK, helping our NHS grow to meet patients' needs.

The NHS workforce continues to grow but insufficiently to keep pace with demand.

As of 2025, 20% of NHS healthcare professionals were foreign nationals. If they are not from an English-speaking country they have to pass an English language test such as the Cambridge English Occupational English Test.

Our language teaching centres have a vital part to play in ensuring this English language requirement is met and that the NHS can continue to meet demand.

6. UK ELT is a highly valuable export industry for the nation

UK ELT was badly affected by the end of freedom of movement.

Despite this, the sector contributes £1.8 billion to our national economy, and is a vital part of our visitor economy.

With further levels of government support as outlined in this paper, the industry can continue to grow and help support the government's revenue targets as set out in its International Education Strategy.

What do we need?

Our six policy recommendations

Our policy recommendations cost little to implement and will help UK English language teaching thrive and reap benefits, including increased exports, jobs, gross added value and closer international relationships.



1. Expand career-enhancing travel opportunities for young people



2. Extend ID card travel for school groups from the EU



3. Recognise UK ELT's accreditation scheme for student visas



4. Make the most of Erasmus+



5. Increase rent-a-room tax relief to preserve UK ELT's unique offer



6. Provide stronger support for growth in the UK ELT sector



...in order to remain competitive, the UK must better harness its appeal as a visitor destination, especially given that evidence shows that visitors who study English language as part of their trip to the UK spend twice as much and stay longer than those who do not.

VisitBritain, VisitEngland, VisitScotland and Visit Wales, as well as local tourism and visitor economy bodies should be actively engaged with the ELT sector through English UK and the Department for Business and Trade to better understand how they could support the opening of new markets and optimise recruitment from existing markets. This would include the emerging and growing market of ‘educo-tourists’ seeking to combine language study with travel.

– Examining the Economics of the English Language Teaching Industry, Pragmatix Advisory, 2025



1. Expand career-enhancing travel opportunities for young people

Youth Mobility Schemes (YMS) offer young adults the chance to live, work and study in another country for up to three years.

Expanding their range and scope would benefit British youth, inbound tourism and UK exports. YMS is also an integral part of UK soft power networks.

Agreements exist with 12 countries plus a separate scheme for India. Caps for Japan and Korea were recently raised and two new schemes created.

UK ELT supports key growth areas through YMS by ensuring young adults who fill job vacancies in industries such as tourism and hospitality have the appropriate language skills.

Our asks

We want the Youth Experience Scheme (YES) agreed in principle between the UK government and the EU to be implemented as quickly as possible after a series of delays.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves said YES would be “good for the economy, good for growth, and good for business,” and she wanted an “ambitious” deal.

We agree.

We want YES visas to be valid for three years, with a high cap on participant numbers.

There is unmet demand to study English, and this would make UK ELT a more affordable option.

YES is not freedom of movement: 2025 Best for Britain polling found 81% of Labour voters supported two-year visas, and 74% four years.

We also want more youth mobility scheme agreements, for instance in Latin America where we have a significant opportunity to grow our ELT market share.

Our policy recommendations

2. Extend ID card travel for school groups from the EU

The post-Brexit need for passports – and sometimes visas – has made UK ELT uncompetitive with EU destinations including Malta and Ireland.

The UK experienced a much higher decline in group visits in 2019-22 compared with those travelling within the EU (a drop of 81% vs 51%). Passports were cited as the main reason.

We were delighted when our campaigning encouraged the government to reinstate ID-card travel for French school groups to the UK, and last year they signed a similar deal with Germany.

Students with EU, EEA or Swiss identity cards studying at French or German schools can now travel to the UK as a group of five or more without a passport. Classmates of other nationalities can travel on their passports without a visa.

Our ask

We want ID card travel to be further extended to school group visits from other countries, including Spain and Italy.

There is no risk that organised and supervised groups of schoolchildren would fail to return home.



Our policy recommendations

3. Recognise UK ELT's accreditation scheme for student visas

Accreditation UK, a rigorous and specialist ELT accreditation scheme run by the British Council in partnership with English UK, is widely recognised for its excellence.

This is why it is the most popular accreditation scheme among UK ELT centres.

Despite this, centres offering Student Visas must be inspected by ISI, an independent school specialist.

Many centres pay for both schemes, a significant burden in terms of both time and money at a time of rising cost pressures.

Our ask

We want the government to recognise Accreditation UK for Student Visas.

This will ensure our learners have the best possible experience and avoids unnecessary costs for language centres.



4. Make the most of Erasmus+

Our 2025 position paper framed our desire for the return of Erasmus+ as ‘a reciprocal exchange programme for young professionals’.

The return of the scheme seemed unachievable as it was unclear whether the government was committed to implementing a reciprocal exchange programme.

We are therefore delighted that the UK is once again a full member of Erasmus+, which will support both UK ELT and young Britons in many ways.

Registrations begin in November 2026 for programmes due to take place in 2027, closing in February 2027.

Our industry is gearing up to attract groups and individuals from the EU who will benefit from what we can offer.

They include schoolchildren and adult learners on study abroad programmes, educators seeking training and continuing professional development and students in further or higher education or Vocational and Educational Training programmes (VET).

In addition, English language centres will be able to benefit from collaborative partnerships with educational establishments in other programme partner countries.

Our ask

Vocational and educational training programmes with a volunteering element were a very popular element of UK ELT’s Erasmus+ offer before we left the scheme. English language learners are often keen to practice their skills in the workplace.

However, now that the UK is no longer part of the EU, individuals on these programmes will need a government exchange visa to legally undertake volunteer work as part of their funded Erasmus+ programme.

We urge the government to provide details on who provides the exchange visa and how to apply as swiftly as possible so that ELT providers can plan their offer.

5. Increase rent-a-room tax relief to preserve UK ELT's unique offer

Homestay accommodation is popular with ELT students, who want to immerse themselves in UK culture and the English language.

Since the pandemic, demand has often outstripped supply as many spare rooms were turned into home offices or AirBnB lets. The high cost of living and increasing numbers of young adults living at home with their parents are also factors.

Students get a truly immersive experience in homestay accommodation.

There is evidence that those in homestays are more fluent speakers at the end of their courses than students in other accommodation.

Homestay hosts experience different cultures and earn money from their spare room, a valuable source of income in a cost-of-living crisis.

The 2025 Pragmatix Advisory report, *Examining the Economics of the English Language Teaching Industry*, found: "The uniqueness of the UK's ELT sector is its ability to blend cultural competence and language learning in an immersive environment.

"However, a sharp increase in domestically delivered and digitally-enabled learning opportunities threaten the UK's ability to continue to rely on this USP to drive demand."

Our ask

We want rent-a-room tax relief increased to £11k from £7.5k, roughly in line with inflation.

Increasing the rate of rent-a-room tax relief for the first time since 2016 would encourage more people to open their doors to ELT students.

Our policy recommendations

6. Provide stronger support for growth in the UK ELT sector

International education is an important UK export. ELT is a major player and a significant entry point.

The UK has a large share of the global ELT market in Europe and the Middle East and growth potential in Asia and Latin America.

With hard work and the right support UK ELT can maintain its strong markets and grow in targeted areas.

Our ask

The latest International Education Strategy identifies soft power benefits and an export target of £40bn by 2030, promising to leverage the diplomatic and British Council networks to build bridges.

English UK has been chosen to join the ministerial Education Sector Action Group, creating and leading the Sector Action Plan (SAP) for growth in ELT.

We seek the maximum level of support to help UK ELT thrive, including diplomatic channels and trade missions.






English UK is the UK's national trade association for accredited English language teaching (ELT) centres. We represent around 300 member centres across the UK and have worked to raise standards in UK ELT since 2004.

We support our members through training and advice, international marketing, and advocacy for the sector – helping learners from around the world come to the UK to improve their English and experience our culture.

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