

## **APPG for International Students Inquiry**

### **A sustainable future for international students in the UK?**

#### **Submission of evidence from English UK**

#### **Background**

English UK is the trade body and membership organisation for accredited state and privately-owned English language teaching providers [currently 424 members].

English language teaching (ELT) is a sector which is largely invisible to the British public, unless they encounter a group of exuberant teenage summer students queueing for a bus. But it is a significant export industry, bringing monetary, cultural, soft power and educational benefits to the UK with few, if any, negative impacts on the economy, jobs or services.

Figures gathered for this submission<sup>1</sup> suggest 550,000 international students came to the UK to study English at some level in 2016/17, staying for an average of 3.7 weeks. The majority of students - 58 per cent - at English UK member centres in 2017 were from the European Union (EU).<sup>2</sup>

They attend universities, colleges, privately-owned language centres and boarding schools in every region and nation of the UK, sometimes located in areas where they become a significant driver for the local economy. Around half of the students are under 18: the vast majority come here to learn or improve English for further study or employment.

During an average month-long stay, each student's net fiscal contribution to the UK economy is £216. That represents a gross value added for the UK in 2016/17 of £1.429bn, and a turnover of £3.197bn.

ELT supports around 35,700 jobs, ranging from teachers and other language centre staff to supply chain employees, to workers in shops, transport, tourist attractions and other places where students and their overseas visitors spend money. ELT centres directly employ 19,300 staff in all roles, including welfare, host family liaison, marketing and management, with a full-time equivalent (FTE) of 14,800: 11,400 of these are highly-qualified teaching staff.

Students want to maximise their UK experiences and their spending extends beyond course fees and accommodation. During their time in the UK, they spent around £880m extra, with a further £155m a year coming from visiting friends and family.

But benefits to the UK extend far beyond jobs and export income.

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<sup>1</sup> The Value of English Language Teaching, Capital Economics, 2018, The Social Impact of UK ELT, StudentMarketing, 2018

<sup>2</sup> English UK Student Statistics 2017

## **In the classroom**

Students come to the UK to study English from 114 different countries<sup>3</sup>, so there is always a wide range of nationalities in classes around the UK. 53% of them are under the age of 18, so the opportunities for widening cultural understanding from an early age are immense.

Studying here has a powerful effect on people, building a lifetime of affinity to and affection for the UK. Almost 80 per cent of current and past students plan to return, often bringing friends and family. Just two per cent do not intend to come back.

Many return for undergraduate or postgraduate study: students seeking English-medium education often form a bond with the country in which they first study. If students do not come to study English as a teen, they may never come at all. English language study is therefore at the heart of the wider international education industry and provides a vital portal to UK HE.

The visa system needs to be reviewed to take account of this vital pathway. It used to be a straightforward and natural route for students to spend a year learning English before they were ready to start a university course. It was possible and popular to apply for a new CAS and then visa while they were still here.

Unfortunately, this facility was removed in a change in government policy, forcing them to return to their country of origin to start the application process, causing them unnecessary cost and stress. It is no coincidence that there then followed a three-year decline in the numbers coming to the UK to study English<sup>4</sup> and a concomitant increase in those going to competitor countries with a more enlightened approach to international education and the complex paths students take in their educational journey

## **In our communities**

Over 90 per cent of ELT students take part in UK life, with the majority attending cultural or social events, or making local friends. A minority volunteer in the local community. More would do so if their visa permitted it, as it is such an obvious way to immerse oneself in the culture and enhance the language skills being developed in the classroom.

They are a valuable source of income for ordinary families who care for them in their spare rooms, and they bring a wider cultural exchange, often starting friendships with host parents which can last for generations. Students from overseas are not seen as migrants rather as welcome visitors, who bring both financial and cultural benefits to the family and wider community.

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<sup>3</sup> English UK Student Statistics 2017

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### **For research, trade and soft power**

There are clear soft power benefits of having a significant group of highly-educated, motivated and often wealthy individuals as influencers once they have returned home to careers or further study. This particular soft benefit can only become more important as we make our way in the world post-Brexit.

We should be doing everything we can to make the UK the world's premier destination for international education

### **Attachments**

**English UK Student Statistics 2017**