



## Press release

November 21 2010

### **STUDENT VISAS ARE THE WRONG TARGET FOR CUTS**

Cutting the number of student visas, as the Migration Advisory Committee suggested this week, would not help the Government meet its target of reducing net migration and would seriously damage the UK's economy and its universities, says English UK. .

There are six good reasons why we should not cut the number of visa for international students.

The first is that the Coalition's aim of reducing net migration from the 'hundreds to the tens of thousands' by 2015 is in itself the wrong target. The aim should be to reduce *settlement* (permanent migration which adds to the UK population and demand for public services), not temporary migration. As Home Secretary Theresa May suggested in a speech on 5 November, this can be done partly by making it much more difficult for people to switch from temporary migrant status to permanent migrant status.

Second, international students are the group of migrants least likely to settle here. The Home Office's own report *The Migrant Journey* (published 6 September) shows that in 2004, of the 186,500 students granted visas, only 5,568 later gained settlement rights. This is just 3%.

The vast majority of entrants gaining settlement rights (84%) came to the UK on family and work visas.

Third, international students contribute little to net migration because in any one year, the number finishing their courses and leaving the UK is about equal to the number coming in. The Home Office report *The Migrant Journey* said that of the international students who came to the UK in 2004, nearly 3 out of 5 had left the UK again within two years. Those who remained had legally extended their stay, either because they were on longer courses, or because they had found work in highly-skilled or shortage occupation posts, or because they had married a Briton. The report concluded: 'It seems plausible that the vast majority of migrants granted non-visit visas in 2004 have left the UK'.

Fourth, 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.* Over the last two years, exchange rates have made the UK more affordable and international student numbers have increased as a result.

Fifth, if there were a 'cap' or limit 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 student fees are an increasingly vital income stream for UK universities, enabling them to keep courses and departments open to preserve choice and subsidise places for home students. Universities which lost a significant number of international students would have to cut courses and close departments. By 2013 some might even face insolvency.

Finally, net migration since the 1970s has directly correlated to the relative performance of the UK against the global economy. It was negative through most of the 1970s (the three day week and IMF bail-out, industrial unrest and strikes) and into the early 1980s. It was slightly positive through the later 1980s, marked by the Lawson boom and 'Big Bang' in the City, leading to many financial services firms moving to London.

It dropped again in the early 1990s recession, but rose consistently on the back of the UK's economic recovery from 1996 to 2008.

The IPPR think-tank noted in June that 'net immigration to the UK in the year to September 2009 was 11 per cent lower than in the year to September 2008'. Their conclusion was that 'the economic crisis, the natural cycles of migration flows and the tougher policies of the last government have already turned the tide – and at this rate we will see net immigration fall below 100,000 without the cap on immigration'. Even on the current government's most optimistic forecasts, UK economic growth over the next 4 years will lag behind that of most other major countries, and especially that of fast-developing nations like Brazil, China and India.

The UK will simply be a much less appealing destination for migrants – except perhaps exactly the international students we need, who are attracted by the UK's reputation for quality in education.

"We will be asking the Government to take note of all of these points in the review of student visas which is to start shortly," said Mr Millns.

#### **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](http://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. Though English UK argues that net migration is the wrong target for government cuts, it should be noted that limiting the number of students entering the UK for less than a year would not help the government to achieve this goal. This is because net migration is defined as those of non-

British birth entering the UK minus those who leave the UK *for more than a year in each case*. Anyone staying less than a year is not a migrant in the official sense.

4. English UK's positive proposals on what should be done, or at least considered, to reduce migration and particularly settlement will be submitted to the Government's migration review team and published tomorrow, Monday November 22.
5. For further information please contact Tony Millns on 07976511439 or Susan Young on 07976 222905