

Written evidence submitted by Destination for Education

DESTINATION FOR EDUCATION RESPONSE TO EDUCATION COMMITTEE INQUIRY ON EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Introduction

1. Destination for Education welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Education Committee's inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services.
2. This response sets out the financial implications of closures for higher education and independent training providers due to the impact of COVID-19. Specifically, the response focuses on the financial impact it could have on the UK's vital higher education export sector, if the necessary action is not taken.

About Destination for Education

3. Destination for Education is a coalition of three pathway providers working together to ensure that Britain's higher education sector can compete globally. These pathway providers include: INTO, Kaplan and Study Group.
4. Pathway providers prepare international students for study at UK universities. We help international students to develop the study and language skills they need to succeed at degree level which they have not had the opportunity to attain in their local education systems. A full list of these institutions can be found in **Appendix A**.

Response

The financial implications of closures for providers (including higher education and independent training providers), pupils and families

5. We understand that COVID-19 has put an unprecedented level of strain on the Government and public services. Our number one priority is public safety and we fully support the Government's effort to suppress this virus.
6. With this in mind, we would like to outline to the Committee the financial implications caused by COVID-19, and specifically the support the higher education export sector needs from government to mitigate the potential negative impacts on the education sector.

Student visa extensions and visa switching

7. Due to the pandemic, the Government has rightly extended the visas of students who are unable to return home due to social distancing restrictions and permitted visa switching for those currently residing in the UK. However, this visa extension only applies until 31st July 2020¹ and there have been no reassurances beyond this date. This approach has the

¹ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): advice for UK visa applicants and temporary UK residents](#)

potential to have a negative financial impact on the education export sector in both the medium and long-term.

8. In the medium-term, these short extensions do not provide enough reassurance for international students for the upcoming academic year. As things currently stand, international students currently residing in the UK or those on pathway courses who are due to start their university course in September 2020 would need to travel back to their home country to renew their visa before they could travel back to the UK. Notwithstanding restricted travel options (such as the lack of availability of flights) due to coronavirus, the international students may also face a period of quarantine (depending on conditions and their home country) before they could begin their academic study. In addition, their travel to and from the UK risks an increased import of further infections.
9. These increased barriers to entry may result in deterring international students from coming to the UK to study in the upcoming academic year, which would be harmful to the profitability of the education export sector in the medium term, the sustainability of the UK's higher education sector and potentially have long-term consequences for the perceived status of the UK's education exports. Prior to the pandemic, studies showed that increased unnecessary barriers for international students have come at a cost to the UK economy; a study from ExEdUK and EY estimated the UK's perceived falling status as a higher education study destination came at a cumulative cost of £9bn to GDP² over a 6 years period.
10. This is in addition to the ongoing financial pressures facing UK universities during the pandemic. Recent research undertaken by the British Council has highlighted that UK universities should expect a sharp fall in the number of international students coming to the UK to study in the upcoming academic year, which in turn could cause a loss of income of up to £460m from students from east Asia alone³.
11. We understand that social distancing measures need to be in place in order to protect public health, however, this medium-term negative impact could be avoided if the Government extended the ability to switch or extend study visas from within the UK until 30 September 2020 as a first step, with the view to making this a permanent change. The sector has already proven that visa extensions and switching can be done within the UK whilst maintaining high levels of compliance and making this change would go a long way in increasing the UK education export sector's long-term global competitiveness.
12. It is also important that prospective international students, who are right now deciding where to study from September, have total confidence that if they commence their study online at an UK HEP, due to Covid-19 restrictions, they will definitively be able to enter the UK to continue and complete their study when that mobility becomes possible. The government should confirm to students that absence from the UK due to COVID-19 will not negatively impact future visa applications when face-to-face study becomes available. This will ensure that there is continued confidence in the UK from international students around the world.

Long-term negative implications for the UK's education export sector

² Supporting International Education in the UK, ExEdUK, June 2016

³[UK universities face at least a £463 million shortfall in coming academic year](#), June 2020, British Council

13. We urgently need reassurances to be made to prospective international students who are considering coming to the UK to study in future. This is critical for the long-term strength of the higher education sector.
14. There are two specific areas that we would like the Government to reassure prospective international students on, in order to mitigate potential long-term financial implications for the education export sector:
 - i. The UK is a safe destination to study.
 - ii. The Government's planned two-year graduate work visa.

The UK is a safe destination to study

15. The Government needs to continue to communicate to export markets the measures that have been taken to keep current and prospective international students safe during COVID-19. This includes the social distancing measures in place, as well as reassurances that they will not be forced to travel to renew or switch their visa if it is not safe to do so due to COVID-19. It is critical that this communication is continuously made and aimed at both current and prospective international students and published in key markets for the education export sector.

The Government's planned two-year graduate work visa

The Government's planned two-year graduate visa is a step in the right direction in making the UK's education export sector more internationally competitive. The government has also taken the positive step of confirming that international students arriving up until April 6th 2021 will still qualify for the two-year graduate work visa. This accounts for international students who are required to study some of their degree online from their home country, due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, more needs to be done by the UK government to publicise that this change has been made, which will go a long way to reassuring international students and protecting the education export sector in the long-term.

Conclusions: Steps the Government could take to mitigate negative financial implications

16. As outlined above, COVID-19 has the potential to cause negative financial implications for the higher education export sector in both the medium and long-term. These implications include causing prospective international students to study elsewhere for the upcoming academic year and a dramatic loss of income for the UK's Higher Education providers, in addition to longer term consequences, such as harming the perceived status of the UK's higher education system.
17. We believe this can be mitigated by taking the following steps:
 - i. Extending the ability to switch, renew or extend study visas from within the UK from 31 July to 30 September 2020 as a first step, with the view to making this a permanent change.

- ii. Making reassurances in the media of our key education export markets outlining safety measures in place to protect students if they choose to study in the UK – and reassurances that they will not be forced to travel to renew or switch their visa if it is not safe to do so due to COVID-19.
- iii. Publicising the Government's commitment that if current or prospective students are required to study some of their degree online from their home country, due to COVID-19 restrictions, they would still be eligible for the two-year graduate work visa If they arrive in the UK by April 6th 2021. In addition, the Government should confirm to students that absence from the UK will not negatively impact future visa applications when face-to-face study becomes available.
- iv. Enacting into law the proposed Graduate Route, so that prospective students, who will graduate in summer 2021 can have certainty as to eligibility.

18. We urge the Education Committee to call on the Government to make these changes in order to strengthen and protect the future of the UK's higher education export sector.

APPENDIX A

STUDY GROUP'S UNIVERSITY PARTNERS:

- Durham University
- Cardiff University
- Coventry University London
- University of Huddersfield
- Keele University
- Kingston University, London
- Lancaster University
- Leeds Beckett University
- Liverpool John Moores University
- Royal Holloway, University of London
- The University of Sheffield
- University of Leeds
- University of Lincoln
- University of Strathclyde
- University of Surrey
- University of Sussex

KAPLAN'S UNIVERSITY PARTNERS:

- University of Nottingham
- University of Glasgow
- University of Liverpool
- University of York
- University of Bristol
- University of Essex
- University of the West of England, Bristol
- Bournemouth University
- Nottingham Trent University
- University of Brighton
- University of Birmingham
- Aston University
- Queen Mary University of London
- University of Westminster
- City, University London
- Cranfield University

INTO'S UNIVERSITY PARTNERS:

- University of East Anglia
- University of Exeter
- Newcastle University
- The University of Manchester
- Glasgow Caledonian University
- Queen's University Belfast

- City University
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- University of Gloucestershire
- University of Stirling

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