

Under-18s outnumber adult students in UK ELT for the first time

News release

There were more junior than adult students in the UK's ELT centres in 2016, as structural changes within the industry continue.

English UK's latest student statistics report shows that, while many source markets declined last year, China entered the top five after years of steady growth and Saudi Arabia replaced Spain in second place. Italy remains the UK's top sending market, despite having one of the largest drop in student numbers.

"These statistics show the industry has experienced a third successive year of decline. It has already been undergoing seismic structural shifts as it matures, with competition between host countries coming into ever-sharper focus. To this, we can now add the uncertainty created by external factors including the UK's exit from the European Union, elections in Europe and 'Trumpism'," writes English UK's chief executive Sarah Cooper in the introduction to the report.

She adds: "In this time of uncertainty and challenge, English UK is ambitiously leading the way. We are already producing high quality statistical reporting in a more timely fashion than other major ELT destination countries... for us, this report is only the start."

The association is leading the UK ELT sector to succeed, she will tell its annual conference in Bristol, with a focus on providing increasingly high-quality data and market intelligence, including the newly-launched QUIC service which will analyse member statistics within six weeks of a quarter ending.

Overall, student weeks declined by 13 per cent and student numbers by 11 per cent.

The top five sending markets in 2016 were Italy, Saudi Arabia, Spain, France, and China.

Most of the growth came from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Argentina, while the largest declines came from Italy, Libya, and Spain.

Samuel Vetrak, chief executive officer of StudentMarketing, which produces the report, says first indications are that competitor markets such as Ireland and Malta either grew or declined to a lesser extent than the UK.

"Two years ago, the UK's ELT industry was battling with the impact of a strong pound, increased competition from other destinations, and uninviting visa policies. For 2016, the common denominator shaping the direction of the industry was undoubtedly Brexit. Weakening of the pound, triggered by the results of Referendum on Brexit, certainly helped the UK attract students that were previously put off by the costs attached to studying in the UK. Nevertheless, it did not manage to prevent another year of decline for the UK's ELT industry, however, the full effects of Brexit will be reflected in 2017 figures."

In her conclusion to the report, English UK Deputy Chief Executive Annie Wright notes that while 51 per cent of ELT students were under-18s “an increasing number of our member centres are responding to this demand by offering courses for young learners.”

Junior students outnumbered adults in central England, south and south-eastern England, and south west England and the Channel Islands.

Other notable developments included China’s outperformance of Turkey and South Korea, robust growth in Kuwaiti students, driven by government sponsorship, and a 25 per cent growth in student weeks from Argentina. “Mexico held steady while Brazil and Colombia continued to fall: domestic politics and economics, along with the perception of unsympathetic UK visa policies, continue to affect demand,” she wrote.

Notes to editors

1. English UK is the national association for English language teaching centres in the UK, with around 450 accredited centres in membership. It covers university and further education college language departments, international study centres in independent schools, educational trusts and charities, and private sector colleges. English UK is a UK registered charity (www.englishuk.com).
2. A copy of the full report is available on request.
3. For more information, contact Jodie Gray, Head of Market Development on Jodie@englishuk.com