



News Release

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Dramatic fall in number of suspect colleges, English UK research shows

The number of non-accredited private English language colleges which may still be actively recruiting students in breach of immigration rules has fallen by almost 95 per cent both nationally and in London in the past four years, according to English UK research.

A letter to immigration minister Damian Green from Tony Millns, chief executive of English UK, the organisation of accredited state and private language centres, says: "We believe that this [research] shows that the changes introduced up to the start of last year were having, and continue to have, an extremely beneficial effect: 45% of the previously non-accredited are no longer operating as English language schools; 27% are recruiting EU students only and are therefore also not a concern in immigration terms; and 22% have achieved some form of accreditation that is at least better than nothing."

Only six per cent of the original 560 language schools monitored nationally by English UK since 2002 are still giving cause for concern compared with four years ago, when checks found the vast majority were still active.

In London, of the original 178 language schools monitored by the charity, 34 per cent are no longer operating, 22 per cent are taking EU students only, 23 per cent have some form of accreditation, and just five per cent require further research.

Pointing out that it was English UK which had continually raised the issue of "bogus colleges" as an immigration loophole with the Border Agency and the last government "for years before anyone took any notice," Mr Millns says the success in sorting out the non-accredited sector will have had far more impact in reducing abuse of the student visa route than several more recent initiatives.

English UK originally created its database of 560 non-accredited English language schools to get an idea of the scale of the problem "because members were certain that these 'schools' were sources of blatant abuse of the student visa system," says the letter to Mr Green. At that time there were fewer than 300 accredited private sector English language schools.

The accuracy of the database was confirmed by a consultant working for the British Council in 2004, who found the main reasons the schools had not

applied for accreditation were the cost and the fear they might not meet the required standards.

The most recent survey, carried out by an English UK researcher this spring, identified just 33 schools, six per cent of the original total, as still giving cause for concern.

This was because when approached during a "mystery shopper" exercise, they appeared to agree that they could accept an adult Russian student on a short course, despite not being accredited to take visa students. "This could potentially be error or lack of understanding of the student visa system on the part of the person we spoke to, but we obviously have no power to investigate that further," said Mr Millns.

Notes to Editors

1. English UK is the world's leading language teaching association, with more than 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. For more information, please contact Tony Millns, Chief Executive of English UK on Tony@EnglishUK.com