

## **Minutes of the International Education Council Meeting – 26 February 2014**

### **ACTIONS**

- The Secretariat to follow up with Jisc and BESA for input into a revised draft of the International Education Strategy Achievements document
- Working with the Home Office, the Council Chairs to respond to the Council on the recommendations from the International Student Recruitment (visas) working group
- The Secretariat to follow up with Daniel Stevens and Dominic Savage to agree next steps for the proposed International Student Experience and Education Technology working groups

### **MINUTES**

#### **Welcome and introductions**

Matthew Hancock co-chaired this meeting with Professor Sir Eric Thomas, as David Willetts was overseas on ministerial business.

#### **Overview of progress since strategy launch**

It was noted that it had been over six months since the launch of the International Education Strategy and that it was a good time to reflect on achievements. Additionally, each of the Industrial Strategy sector council chairs had been asked to provide a progress update for use in a report to be published in March. Council members were asked to comment on the International Education Strategy Achievements paper in order to shape the education sector's contribution.

It was highlighted that the paper included specific examples of success for each of the five policy strands, including:

- The £375m Newton Fund for joint research and innovation with emerging powers
- The growth of the UK's first MOOC, FutureLearn, and the biggest best BETT show yet
- Roll out of the Education is GREAT marketing campaign
- UKTI education had already supported £400m in contract wins

Council members agreed that the paper was a succinct description of achievements. Jisc highlighted the ICT services it provided to the education sector and BESA highlighted that exporters in education technology operated at all levels, including school and skills development. The Secretariat was asked to follow up with Jisc and BESA to ensure their comments were reflected in the final report.

#### **International student recruitment (visas): working group report**

Kit Malthouse, Chair of the working group, presented a paper summarising the work of his group. It was noted that the sector had highlighted three pressing themes:

1. Communication: improving the dialogue between Government and the sector about both policy and practical issues would help to avoid conflicting messages about the UK's student visa offer in the media and elsewhere which might be confusing to an international audience.
2. Frequency of changes to immigration policy: It was noted that minimising the frequency of policy changes could enable institutions and students to comply with requirements.
3. Permission to work while studying and post study work. It was highlighted that 50% of Silicon Valley start ups were led by international graduates from

Stanford. The UK should not miss the opportunity to capture the talent it trained.

The working group had also considered the policy of international students at different types of education establishments being subject to different rules but had not reached a consensus on the issue.

Council members recognised the issues raised in the working group report. A range of specific issues were raised in discussion including:

- The UK's reputation for educational quality, and the need to avoid compromising this quality when looking to remove barriers to international student recruitment.
- The scope for using the Joint Education Taskforce (JET) more efficiently for policy dialogue in order to ensure public messages from both the Government and sector were more coherent
- Concern in the Further Education sector about requirements to contract with private English Language Training testing organisations.
- Difficulties reconciling current post-study work rules with the complexities of sectors such as fashion and high-tech.

The Chair (Sir Eric Thomas) noted that Government departments ordinarily observed Council meetings, but that the Home Office had been invited to respond to factual questions.

John Thompson from the Home Office thanked the working group and the wider Council for their input and agreed that it would be useful for the sector and the Home Office to work more closely together, both to discuss policy and to communicate the UK's offer. The latter should cover both the way the visa system worked and the opportunities that existed after graduation. The Home Office recognised that there was scope to improve IT and sponsor management systems and would continue to work to do so. On the pace of change, the Home Office appreciated the need for certainty within the sector, but stated it would act both where there was abuse in the system and where there were opportunities to make the UK more attractive. For example, there was now a new visa route for Mandarin teachers, which was a result of a constructive conversation with higher education institutions.

It was proposed that JET and the Higher Education co-regulation steering group could be used to consider some of the recommendations from the working group, e.g. how sponsorship rules worked, and whether students studying A levels after GCSEs should continue to need two separate visas. It was noted that the sector better understood where students sit in the net migration figure and that genuine students were welcome to study in the UK.

Working with the Home Office, the Council Chairs would officially respond to the Council on the recommendations in the working group paper.

### **Barriers to Exports: working group report**

Richard Simmons, Chairman of BPP, presented this paper on behalf of Carl Lygo who had chaired the group. The paper contained four recommendations:

1. Improving assistance in gaining recognition overseas for the credentials of UK FE providers
2. Enhancing the UKTI Education website to improve information flow
3. Sharing knowledge about trade missions and opportunities for the whole sector
4. Improving links between International Development Aid and BIS

FE credentials: Matthew Hancock noted that he had approved a statement of support for vocational qualifications offered outside the UK. There was a role for Government to help communicate the UK's systems which were often perceived as complex in countries such as China.

Information flow: Emily Ashwell welcomed the working group's report and explained that UKTI Education's website was currently being developed with a view to providing information in an open and transparent way. Feedback on the best information to include and how to present it was welcome and UKTI Education should be the first point of contact for communications questions about overseas business opportunities.

Trade missions: UKTI Education and BIS were working together on country priorities and opportunities for the sector to engage with trade missions.

International Development Aid: UK organisations had a good track record in winning DFID and other aid funded business contracts, but UKTI Education and DFID were nevertheless working with other Government departments to better coordinate and promote the opportunities available. This would include examples such as the prosperity partnerships in Africa, where UKTI and DFID were working together.

It was noted that the UK could benefit when it provided regulatory advice to another country's education sector if sub-sectors were well joined up, but that opportunities could also be missed if connections were not made. India and the UAE were cited as examples where this has worked well and less well, respectively.

### **Forward work plan: Ensuring a continued high quality international student experience**

Daniel Stevens (DS) presented a joint NUS/UK Council for International Student Affairs proposal for a working group on the international student experience and maintaining the UK's competitive advantage. This would fit with the International Education Strategy policy strand of 'providing a warm welcome for international students'. The UK was renowned for its academic excellence but compared to other countries we did not have a large amount of data available about the wider student experience. A recent NUS survey had also highlighted that a number of international students had said that the UK was not welcoming. The proposed working group would be able to bring together the numerous organisations across the education sector which were involved in welcoming international students and ensure the situation was fully understood.

The Council discussed the difficulties of interpreting data in this area and welcomed the proposal to form a working group. The importance of the physical flow of international students was noted and that as competition increased, it would be crucial for alumni to think affectionately and fondly about the UK and act as ambassadors to promote the UK after graduation. The group should not be limited to

HE – for example, 30,000 overseas students were studying in schools in the UK. It was highlighted that there might also be merit in considering the international student experience for other forms of UK delivery such as transnational education.

The Secretariat agreed to work with DS to agree the next steps for the working group.

Matthew Hancock noted that a stakeholder group had been formed to coordinate Further Education international activity and that the Council might draw on its work in the future.

The Minister stated that a working group to examine education technology in the context of exports would be useful and Dominic Savage, Chair of BESA, agreed to chair such a group. It was noted that this was a timely opportunity to influence and support the sector, whilst considering best practice, effective policy and how to generate business opportunities.

### **Small business in the International Education Strategy**

Lord Young, the Prime Minister's Enterprise Advisor, was present for this agenda item to discuss actions in the International Education Strategy particularly relevant to small businesses. It was noted that a large part of the education sector was made up of organisations that would be small businesses by definition and that UKTI Education supported all in the sector, large and small. Action taken by the sector was also noted, including by BESA, who had been successful in bidding for the 'Sector Mentoring Challenge Fund' and would be running a mentoring scheme for small businesses in the education technology sector.

Lord Young highlighted that 95.5% of firms employ fewer than 10 people and suggested that small firms should join up and work together to increase resource. Lord Young noted the opportunity to educate overseas while remaining in the UK and noted the financial risks for a small business travelling overseas.

It was noted that most education technology suppliers were micro businesses and that a small amount of support could deliver significant results. UKTI Education was encouraging the sector to work collaboratively and to share information, including with small businesses. Existing support for small business included webinars to interact with others and support from UKTI, FCO and the British Council.

Lord Young thanked the Council for confirming that small businesses and actions to support them were being taken seriously in the education sector. The challenges associated with doing business as a small company and the need to find innovative ways to address those challenges were noted.

### **UK-Latin America relations and the role of education**

The Minister welcomed Kate Smith (KS), Director for the Americas at FCO, and explained that three of the eight priority countries for the International Education Strategy were in Latin America: Brazil, Colombia and Mexico.

KS explained that there had been several recent high profile Ministerial visits to the region and the Government was committed to reengaging with the continent.

KS highlighted the following:

- The political stability, prosperity and growth in Latin America;
- That quality education was the cornerstone for long term growth and contributed to the difference in income across the continent;
- The UK's expertise could be beneficial to Latin America, including in the areas of innovation, technology, university partnerships, education policy and public-private partnerships;
- Latin America was open for support and flexibility around the focus countries was highlighted as there were opportunities in smaller markets.

It was highlighted that Latin America was a focus within UKTI Education and for most exporters. The systematic engagement with the region was highlighted as well as the demand for English Language Training.

**Any other business**

The next International Education Council meeting would be held on 5 June in BIS from 13.00-15.00