

2013/59

29 July 2013

Pocket Watch – International Education Strategy

Introduction

The growth of education as a global tradable commodity has been recognised for some time and is sharply evidenced by the range of opportunities outlined and the sheer volume of figures presented in this latest **Report** on International Education which forms part of the Government's burgeoning Industrial Strategy. Published today, the tenth of eleven great sector strategies the Government has been working on, it is as the Minister put it a plan '*determined to harness*' an area in which UK strength is globally recognised but where others are catching up fast and technologies are changing the dynamics of delivery. The value of education exports to the UK has grown over the last three years to over £17bn, 75% of it from international students studying in the UK. To build on this and help spread the growth across other areas such as skills training, English Language provision and education resources, this strategy outlines six challenges that we need to overcome and five policy areas that we need to enact

Six challenges

UK education has many strengths. It is the 'home of English speaking' and the preferred destination for those wishing to learn English outside their home country, it is the second most popular destination for HE students and has high numbers of international students at both UK FE colleges and independent schools but faces challenges in areas like growing technology and the application of visas. The Report highlights six in particular:

- Lack of co-ordination between key agencies and systems making it more difficult to provide comprehensive solutions. The creation in 2009 of the International Education Advisory Forum and more recently the HE Global portal have helped but more is needed
- A 'traditional' infrastructure not always suited to the sort of agile behaviour needed for growth. This includes anything from institutional governance to modern planning laws
- The visa issue which the Government claims is now both more robust and more transparent but has led to negative perceptions abroad
- The emergence of new major players often Government supported and technologically adept. The MOOC movement, for instance, has been largely US driven
- Growing country-to-country competition notably in areas like higher education where traditional 'export' countries are now vying for a share of an emerging growth market
- New market dynamics highlighted by emerging global trends: "*by 2020, four countries will account for over half of the world's 18-22 population: India, China, US and Indonesia*"

Five major policy priorities

The Government is determined to ensure the UK is well positioned in a global education market now estimated to be worth nearly £3 trillion a year and able to provide enormous reciprocal cultural and economic benefits. Amongst its various proposals is a big push on promoting UK education to international students in emerging economies, supporting the development of '*innovative education technology*' and creating a new Education UK Unit and Education UK Champion to help get the messages across. In all, five specific policy priorities are outlined:

- Encouraging more international students to come and study in the UK: "*we consider it realistic for the number of international students in higher education in the UK to grow by 15-20% over the next 5 years.*" This will draw Universities UK, the British Council, UKTI and others into a unified campaign and include clarification on visa arrangements and support for international students who have come from 'crisis' areas and may need

stronger protection. It will also build on the significant GREAT Britain promotional campaign launched alongside the Olympics last year and being extended this year

- Doing more to support Transnational Education (TNE, the provision of education in a country other than the one in which the awarding institution is located.) *"We want to support universities, colleges, English Language teaching providers, independent schools and private education companies to deliver a UK education overseas."* A lot of this will be around strengthening quality assurance systems to ensure that the reputation of UK Education remains high but there will also be further work on developing mutual recognition of qualifications and creating a high-quality end-to-end offer for English language provision in key markets such as Latin America
- Stimulating innovation in technology. The emergence of FutureLearn, the UK's first MOOC platform bringing together the OU, 21 leading UK universities, the British Council, British Library and British Museum, is a classic example of what is being sought here. It's one of four areas which the Government has identified for development, the other three being greater enterprise support, the development of edtech innovation and the creation of an advisory group to advise the Skills Minister on how technology can enhance learning. Elsewhere as indicated in its recent Education position paper, DfID is leading education technology developments in wider parts of the world
- Developing opportunities in new and emerging markets. The UK has identified eight priority countries and one region: China, India, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Columbia, Mexico, Indonesia and the Gulf but this will not be the sole focus of either UK or individual provider activity. To mention DfID again, it for instance is supporting education development in 21 countries, the British Council through its EducationUK student recruitment service, its new EducationUK website and many other activities works globally and the Government itself has been developing a number of bilateral programmes
- Building the brand and seizing the opportunities. Rather as it says on the label, the Government is keen to ensure that it can respond to this growing global education market by ensuring the UK has a strong global brand and an organisation structure able to identify and seize appropriate opportunities. It is therefore developing the GREAT Britain campaign to incorporate a specific focus on 'Education is GREAT Britain,' thereby hopefully creating *"a single, recognisable and distinct identity"* that can be used to promote UK Education. But it is also backing this up with a new dedicated Education UK Unit, a new strategic International Education Council and a new International Champion for UK Education

It's all about making it possible and seizing the opportunity, the core theme running through this Report



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International Education Growth Strategy July 2013