
Can I welcome you all on behalf of the British Council and all the various partners involved in today's seminar. In particular I would like to welcome Sir Stephen Brown and Professor Ivor Crewe, the heads of UK Trade and Investment and Universities UK respectively.

By publishing these two studies simultaneously we are sending out an important signal about the importance of education and of international students to both to our economy and to our society.

The way we engage with the wider world through education exports and through the participation of international students at our universities, colleges and schools tells us a great deal about the outward looking nature of British society.

International students make huge contributions to our education system. They bring international perspectives to our campuses and help us forge ties with the United Kingdom which, we firmly believe, will be maintained as they move into their professional lives.

This long-term value is incalculable. But it is also vital we know the financial value of our education exports to the broader economy. I believe the study undertaken by Professor Geraint Johnes of Lancaster University clearly demonstrates the impact education has on our economic life.

The study provides us with reliable and well-researched statistics from which we can argue the case for continued investment in the international promotion of the quality our excellence in education.

At an overall figure of £10 billion in exports per annum, it is clear that this is no fringe activity restricted to academic cloisters. Across all its aspects, from higher and further education to English language teaching, exams, training, equipment and broadcasting, it is a big earner for the UK - and we must recognise it as such. In terms of services, it’s a big
player: when indirect spending is added in, it is akin to financial services, at £14 billion, transportation at £12 billion and well ahead of insurance at £6.6 billion.

So we have to ensure education continues to be a key driver of our knowledge-based economy. Two decades ago, much was made of the importance of moving from rust belt industries to investing in the financial and services sector as the engine for future growth.

Today's Government has recognised the importance of our country's creativity and innovation as the basis for the knowledge economy of both today and tomorrow. Its science strategy will be firmly based on this premise.

This is where the second report, on forecasting international student mobility, dovetails. Foreseeing the future may be a trickier business than assessing the value of education to the economy today, but a number of things are clear.

First, demand is rising. Second, international competition is becoming sharper. Third, new patterns of partnership in offshore delivery will take root in the next decade. Fourth, the treatment of education as a service under the GATS process will have major implications for its internationalisation.

New opportunities are opening up which must be grasped. The UK has led the world in the provision of quality English language teaching, and must continue to do so. An increasing number of countries tell us of the importance they are now placing on ensuring both their private and public sectors deliver the skills and competency their young people need in English for participation in the global economy.

There are growing demands for the UK's technical and vocational education and training. The UK is a global leader in quality transnational education, including distance learning and other forms of overseas delivered programmes. All indications are this sector will grow very fast over the next few years, and the UK must fully exploit its current position.

Can I thank Professor Johnes of Lancaster, and our colleagues at the British Council and at UKTI, for the global value document. And to demonstrate that even the most seasoned of international competitors can co-operate from time to time, may I thank IDP Education Australia for their participation, along with, of course, colleagues from Universities UK.
Those of us involved in promoting education exports are committed to ensuring that the experience of the international student engaging with UK education will be one of high quality. I am pleased to say the research in the Vision 2020 document indicates quality remains the most vital selling point for the UK in the global market, and puts us significantly ahead of all our competitors.

Five years ago, when the Prime Minister's Initiative was launched, the targets of 50,000 extra students in higher education and 25,000 in further education by 2005 looked more than stretching -- they looked ambitious.

From current trends we can be confident that next year those targets will not only be met -- they will be exceeded.

This has happened because everybody has pulled together: Government departments have worked together with the sector and with the British Council to provide a coherent strategy for education promotion overseas. The whole process has been thoroughly professionalised, from impressive on-line services meeting the needs of 4 million enquirers a year, through to the proper co-ordination with student fairs of the showcasing of the creativity and diversity of the contemporary UK to those we wish to attract here.

Now we are working together to take forward the fresh strategy we have been discussing with the sector and the Government. Education can and must make an even bigger contribution to our economic life - and to developing the international outlook of successive generations of our own young people.

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