



PRESS RELEASE

New passport rules have scuppered EU school visits; Market dives 83% costing UK plc over £700m/yr

For immediate release

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[New research published today](#) shows that in a survey of 82 specialist European tour operators, the number of students they sent to the UK in 2022 was down 83% compared to 2019.

This dramatic drop is due to the elimination of the 'List of Travellers' scheme whereby EU students in organised school groups, accompanied by teachers, could travel to the UK using their national ID cards rather than passports.

There is now a requirement that all such students must have a full passport. This is a document that many EU children normally do not need to travel around most of Europe, and so many do not have one. Figures vary by country but, for example, it is estimated that only 35% of Italian school children have a passport. The cost (anywhere between €50-€120) and administrative burden of obtaining such documents is a substantial barrier to those considering a trip to the UK.

The research undertaken by the Tourism Alliance, UKinbound, English UK, BETA, and ETOA shows that the new requirement for students to have full passports to enter the UK is, for instance, crippling the UK English language school industry with many EU student groups being sent instead to destinations such as Ireland.

In 2019, the UK hosted 1.2m students from EU countries who came to learn English, experience the country's history and culture, or to attend cultural and sporting event. These students spend £1bn in the local economy, support around 17,000 jobs and are a significant component of the UK's soft power activities.

It is more complicated still for the many schools who have pupils whose parents are foreign immigrants. These children have the right to live in the EU but do not yet have access to an EU passport. To obtain a passport, they have to apply to the country from which their parents fled and even if they obtain one, many would also need a visa to enter the UK. The effect of all this is that it is much easier for schools to organise trips to countries other than the UK.

The industry is not expected to recover, as operators indicate that the number of school groups they will send to the UK in 2023 will be down by at least 60%, meaning a further loss of revenue for the UK economy of £600m.

Richard Toomer, Tourism Alliance Executive Director, stated, "Student group travel was an important market for the UK economy. There are many reasons that these groups would want to visit the UK for sporting events, cultural visits, events and many more. What has happened to the UK's once-strong English language school industry, is a prime example of the damage done by this policy and as a result the country is losing almost £1.5bn in export revenue.

"The immediate financial loss is severe, but as important is the loss of soft power. They were exactly the kind of first-time visitors that we need to attract; not only would they return throughout their lives, but their experience of regional UK would be amplified back home.

"Leaving the European Union does not mean we had to lose the List of Travellers scheme. The Government should urgently reinstate it or a similar youth group travel scheme, recognising the extremely low risk represented by these child travellers, the negligible cost, and the positive economic impact."

Notes:

1. The full report with details of the research and background information is available at https://www.tourismalliance.com/downloads/TA_429_462.pdf
2. A recording of a webinar briefing held today with media and tourism partners on this topic is available on YouTube at https://youtu.be/sts1N2M_vXk

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