Tourism South East

#Tourism Day of Action

23 June 2021

International language Schools – COVID Closure Impact on the South East

Nationally, more than 750,000 students come from all over the world each year to study in the UK. English language centres and further education colleges are popular amongst EU students, while international students from China are the largest group in both higher education and independent schools. However, students come from a wide range of countries – 61 countries had at least 500 students coming to the UK in 2016/17

International students bring an economic benefit to the UK and are an important export market, with the Department for Education estimating the value at £17.6 billion in 2015-17. (MAC 2018: Impact of International Students in the UK)

Visit Britain highlight, the number of visits from overseas in 2018 that encompassed an English language course stood at almost 614,000, or 1.5% of all visits, with spending by those who took a course amounting to £940 million, or 3.5% of all spending.

The typical visit lasted for over twice as long as the average visit but had a slightly lower spend per night. These two attributes combine to result in the average spend per visit being £1,532. The youth traveller is identified as a key target audience in the Britain Tourism Strategy, planting the seeds for return trips with 63% of holiday visits to Britain conducted by repeat visitors.

The impact of COVID on the Language schools in the South East has been extensive, through their very nature they are restricted to the overseas market and have therefore been unable to operate and many have gone out of businesses. It is estimated that 38% of language schools are located in London and the South East of England. They are also important to the local economies where they study, supporting local employment. International students have direct impacts by spending money in the UK on tuition fees, living expenses, and by friends and family visiting them.

Current Case Studies

Hastings and Rye

There are circa 20 language schools in the wider Hastings area, some are very small, and may not survive the pandemic. The largest operator pre-pandemic brought in circa 16,000 students per annum. It is estimated that the number of students normally received to the area pre-pandemic is circa 35,000 per annum. There are currently no students attending these schools.

The direct economic impact on the destination is estimated £35M per annum. The indirect economic impact is difficult to calculate but returning students visiting with their family years after their visit, is estimated at a potential several millions pounds It should also be noted that many of the students' host families live in some of the poorest parts of the town, so the collapse of the business has really impacted upon the most deprived in the area.

Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole

Locally we had 20 schools and have so far lost 5 (including Harrow House in Swanage). The estimated reduction in student weeks has increased from 82% to 85%. We currently estimate that 93% of staff have been furloughed, released, or working reduced hours for reduced pay, but given the increased loss of student weeks this figure may increase.

Normally we estimate the size of the English language school sector in BCP to be £140M per annum. With a reduction in student weeks this would mean that the sector has shrunk by £112M to around £28M per annum. Normally we welcome around 46,000 students a year to BCP. Though difficult to be accurate, unscientifically, we now estimate this figure between 1,500 to 2,000 students for this year.

It is clear that the sector is on its knees in and we are expecting two more schools to close their doors. There is no summer business, and we are looking at another long hard winter, which will certainly claim even more schools especially when the furlough scheme comes to an end.