

Edinburgh Language School fighting for its reputation

By Sunnah Khan

Inlingua, a language school based in Edinburgh, is just one of the education providers currently fighting to save its reputation after the UK Borders Agency (UKBA) named them as one of over 400 which will lose the right to sponsor international students. This has been introduced as part of reforms relating to student visas, and is aimed at tackling abuse.

According to UKBA, changes to the student route form part of the Government's comprehensive package of overhauling the immigration system to bring immigration levels back down to sustainable levels.

New regulations include significantly tightening up on the standards education providers must meet before they can bring international students to the UK. The information issued by UKBA claimed that over 400 colleges had lost their right to recruit international students after they failed to sign up for the new inspection system. The new system is designed to ensure that genuine international students receive the highest quality of education. The UKBA estimates at least 11,000 students have been prevented from taking advantage of the system by revoking the institutions' sponsorship powers.

Immigration Minister, Damian Green said: "Widespread abuse of the student visa system has gone on for too long and the changes we have made are beginning to bite."

He felt that institutions were offering "an immigration service rather than an education" to international students and that tough new rules and enforcement would ensure that "only first class education providers would be given licences

to sponsor international students.”

Among Scottish education providers named by [UKBA](#) in this clean-up were The Hamilton School of English and Inlingua.

✘ Inlingua, Edinburgh is part of an international network of schools providing English and foreign language courses and is accredited by The British Council.

Ronald Becker, centre director at [Inlingua](#) expressed his concern regarding this public denouncement of his establishment. “The list and statement on the UKBA website does not clarify which schools were removed due to lack of compliance, and those who had not applied for Highly Trusted Sponsor; leading to the assumption that all the schools were being “named and shamed” as ‘bogus’ schools.”

The UKBA refer to 474 education providers out of which only 51 have been blacklisted for any malpractice.

The majority of schools on the list including international chains had decided not to apply for educational oversight with the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) under new regulations that were introduced this year. The ISI grants Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS) status but is only necessary for institutions who wish to issue 12 month General Student Visas. Those who choose not to apply are still entitled to bring in international students for up to 11 months on the Extended Student Visitor Visa.

Inlingua decided against applying for HTS status for that very reason. Becker explained:- “Most of our clients come from within the European Union. We’re not in the same business as universities and big colleges who regularly have an intake of student staying for over 11 months. Applying for HTC would have required additional costs which were totally unnecessary.”

Inlingua like the majority of other education providers can

still sponsor International students, but only on a short term basis. "UKBA are not differentiating between bogus schools and proper colleges and language schools and universities who do everything above board," said Becker. "It was grossly misleading and a very bad choice of words which have completely been misused."

A UKBA spokesperson responded to The Reporter about this:- "We have made it clear the revocation of these licences is not necessarily an indication of non-compliance or poor educational standards; some simply failed to submit an application to demonstrate they meet our new higher standards.

Both Inglingua Edinburgh and Hamilton School of English have had their sponsor licences revoked as they failed to apply for Highly Trusted Sponsor status by October 9th 2011."

There are concerns that these stricter regulations on sponsorship, as well as further measures to tighten student visa rules by UKBA due to be announced in April, may put international students off enjoying a British education. Current estimates show that international students contribute over £5bn to the UK economy through tuition fees and off-campus expenditure.

[The British Council](#) claim that:- "International students bring immense value to the UK. They enhance our institutions academically, financially and culturally and many become lifelong friends and advocates of the UK when they return home. It is in the interests of the UK to continue to welcome genuine students from around the world."

Continued restrictions however on the post-study work route, which has allowed graduates free labour market access, will be closed, and students wishing to stay and work will need to apply under the skilled worker visa route. There will also be new time limits on student visas and tougher rules on work placements.

Nicola Dandridge, Chief Executive of [Universities UK](#) expressed her concern regarding the sponsorship changes. She said:-
“Universities UK believes that the numbers of international students coming in to the country should be accounted for separately, and not included in the definition of net migrants for the purpose of government policy. International students are not economic migrants. they come to the UK to study and then they leave.”