

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP on MODERN LANGUAGES



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Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury.

The APPG on Modern Languages calls for an urgent plan of action to safeguard accessibility to international visits and exchanges in all schools

Background

School international visits and exchanges are a crucial part of formal education and must be revived

- For students' personal development, skills, confidence - and motivating students to study MFLs
 - Visits/exchanges are the embodiment of the MFL KS3 curriculum's key aim: "Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures."
- For the future of modern languages as a subject at GCSE, A level and University.
- For other subjects organising international visits e.g. geography, STEM, history, art, sports.

School education visits and exchanges are under pressure

- 50% of schools are now cutting trips/exchanges (up from 21% doing so last year)
- Especially in deprived areas: majority of schools (68%) in deprived areas are cutting trips (vs 44% in least deprived areas)
- Tripling since 2018 of the number of schools reporting no international engagement at all (11% to 36%)
- More schools moving to 'cultural/leisure tourism' with stays in hotels rather than exchanges with schools and homestays
- Even independent schools with long traditions of school exchanges are finding regulation onerous and reason to abandon visits.

Why?

1. Post-Brexit paperwork for travel and border checks
2. Increased burden of safeguarding (enhanced DBS checks) administration
3. Conflicting or absent official guidance
4. Access to opportunity and funding

Impact of the above leading to:

- Pressures on staff time
- Increased costs for schools and families
- Inequity (some families have to pay more, some students cannot travel if they cannot get the right paperwork in time)
- Stressful journeys (border checks, delays meaning coach drivers reach driving time limit before end of trip, reduced ferry availability, etc.)

Summary of recommendations (set out in more detail on subsequent pages)

The APPG calls on the Government to lead on the priorities below:

1. Establish cross-departmental leadership
2. Review paperwork and costs for both outgoing (UK-EU) and incoming (EU-UK) groups
3. Consistent and clear guidance for schools
4. Address the burden of DBS
5. Review the Turing scheme
6. Reinforce the deployment of support, incentives and data to drive up participation

Recommendations in more detail

1) Establish cross-departmental leadership to act on the priorities listed below:

- **Identify a Minister** whose remit already includes school visits/educational placements, **and/or consider appointing a 'Mobility champion'** charged with coordinating all relevant government departments (not just DfE).
- **DfE, FCDO and Home Office civil servants to work in a joined up approach.**
 - Departments can deploy help from sector allies for policy support and distributing information: Association for Language Learning (ALL), Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), British Council; British-German Association; Embassies and Cultural Institutes; UK-German Connection; School Travel Forum; UK-German Cultural Commission...

2) PRIORITY 1: Review paperwork and costs for both outgoing (UK-EU) and incoming (EU-UK) groups

- **Re-establish group-travel paperwork** for both outgoing (UK-EU) and incoming groups (EU-UK):
 - 1) Explore bringing back a new **List of Travellers Scheme (also known as Visa Waiver form)** which allowed children and young people of non-EU nationality on school trips to travel without a visa or ETIAS to EU member states.
 - 2) Explore bringing back a new **Group Passport** scheme.
- **When passports are necessary, explore ways of reducing their cost:**
 - Explore ways of **reducing the cost of children's passports (under 16 years)** which, at £53.50 currently, is too expensive for many families. For example, explore and cost the feasibility of giving students access to a **free/discounted passport valid for 1 year** if they do not own one (perhaps targeting less advantaged groups e.g. state schools and/or Pupil Premium/Free School Meals). In the absence of group passports, this is currently a top priority from stakeholders.
 - Review whether children who are non-UK nationals are subject to **inequitable extra costs** (e.g. through passport or visa charges, or other requirements) and how they might be supported if so.
- **Review the recent bilateral UK-France agreement on easing travel rules for educational group visits, extend this to all EU countries, and ensure reciprocal agreement for UK pupils travelling to the EU.** For example:
 - Allow ID card travel for European students travelling in a group for a school visit to the UK.
 - Address discrepancies in border control entry requirements to different European countries (cf *Consistent and clear guidance*, below).
 - Proactively negotiate similar agreements with other EU countries.
- **Review procedures to facilitate older students going on work experience placements (self-funded, unpaid)** for both outgoing (UK-EU) and incoming (EU-UK).
- **Ensure all solutions will be compatible with the requirements of future digital entry and exit systems for both UK-EU (EES/ETIAS¹) and EU-UK (ETA²).** For example, a List of Travellers would remove the requirement for individual ETIAS.

3) PRIORITY 2: Consistent and clear guidance for schools

- **Foreign Office Country Desks request travel entry requirements for school visits from their counterparts in Europe and supply clear links** to this information.
 - FCDO provides specific information for school visits on the Travel Advice site for each country.
 - Ensure information covers UK school groups comprising both UK nationals and non-UK nationals.

¹ For an overview of the EU's EES (Entry/Exit System) and ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System), see <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/the-eu-entry-exit-system-and-eu-travel-authorisation-system/>

² For information on the UK's Electronic Travel Authorisation system see <https://www.etauk.uk/news/uk-to-launch-eta-system>

- Ensure clear information on visas, including Schengen Visas.
- **Ensure all local authorities provide the same guidance to schools.**
 - Collaborate with the devolved administrations to ensure consistency across the UK.

4) PRIORITY 3: Address the burden of DBS ('Appendix D requirements'³), for example:

- **Allow use of DBS checks already carried out by other organisations** (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh).
- **Review** whether the requirement for all adults in household to have Enhanced DBS check (e.g. older siblings)⁴ can be safely relaxed.
- **Review system bottlenecks** to ensure administration can be completed in good time
- **Provide practical official guidance** to simplify the process for schools.

5) PRIORITY 4: Review the Turing scheme/review the contract with Capita for delivering it

- **Make the application and reporting processes easier** for schools.
- **Make the administration processes and support services smoother and faster.**
- **Address fears of 'arbitrary' or unfair awards.**
- **Request more granular data from Turing** re: participating schools and students and nature of the visits (cf *Making the case to policymakers*, below).
- **Bring in multi-year funding cycles** (as single year cycle impracticable to many schools and colleges).
- **Bring in reciprocity** (i.e. funding incoming students as well as outgoing ones).
- **Consider joining Erasmus Plus** (including eTwinning) as a non-EU associate country.

6) PRIORITY 5: Reinforce the deployment of support, incentives and data to drive up participation

- **Rejoin and promote eTwinning** (or create a UK version): a free community and collaboration platform to facilitate international school partnerships as gateway to further projects and travel
- **Promote quality assurance schemes** that already exist to support teachers, such as those offered by STF members and the LOTC Quality Badge scheme.
- **Promote the British Council's International School Award** as a way for schools to demonstrate their pupils' SMSC development.
- **Encourage and reassure school leaders and teachers by reinforcing relevant statutory guidance**
- **Deploy sector stakeholders to support policy:** ALL, ASCL, British Council and Embassies and others are ready to send guidance and information out to schools and school leaders.
- **Better data:**
 - **Evidence to show the importance of visits** in (a) boosting achievement and engaging learners (e.g. GCSE results), (b) boosting employment prospects, and (c) for supporting teachers' own CPD, skills and motivation. For example:
 - *Lords European Affairs Committee, 29 April 2023 report: The future UK-EU relationship.*
 - *Recommended studies include: Kantar/EEF evaluation of International School Exchanges (resilience, confidence, soft skills); Mandarin Excellence Programme re: impact of physical trips to China and their motivation, confidence and wider impact on future study and career plans.*
 - *Work with Department for Business and Trade to demonstrate value of language skillsets in trade.*
 - **Statistics on school visits that are taking place:** their nature and the demographics of the schools and students taking part. For example:
 - More granular data collection from Turing (UK) and Taith (Wales).
 - Data from the British Council's Language Trends.
 - Data from travel agency sector surveys.

³ Appendix D of *Keeping Children Safe In Education*