



POLITICAL MANIFESTO

The British Educational Travel Association (BETA) is a not-for-profit trade association formed in 2003 to represent the interests of producers and suppliers marketing services and products in the educational travel sector (defined as all forms of youth and student travel, contributing to the travellers' education in its broad sense). BETA has 120 members with a combined annual turnover of £1.7 billion. BETA members offer cultural exchange and working holidays, language learning and education, backpacking, volunteering, accommodation and more.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Youth and student education through travel can be harnessed as a valuable opportunity with potential for the sector to deliver considerable value to Britain. Educational travel contributes to the wealth and social fabric of Britain because of the developed international understanding and empathy – it is a vital ingredient for Britain’s future prosperity and values as a society.
- BETA wants points in this manifesto to be taken into consideration by Government when introducing legislation that directly or indirectly affects the sector.
- BETA wants Government to achieve better consultation between the industry and government departments on issues that affect the sector.
- BETA urges Government to:
 - deal with “Challenges to Growth” with good policy and consultation;
 - encourage British young people to travel the world where they are often able to contribute to the societies they visit while themselves learning so as to return to Britain with better skills;
 - deal with the proposed Youth Mobility scheme within Tier 5, working holiday visas on the basis of reciprocity and value creation for Britain;
 - ensure the safety of student visitors to Britain is not compromised by inconsistent fire and/or health and safety legislation.

WHY IS THE SECTOR IMPORTANT?

youth and student travel generates substantial economic benefits for Britain

The British tourism industry is primarily made up by an estimated 150,000 SME's – within which is included the entire educational travel sector. The sector includes significant outbound and inbound parts catering to the broad educational needs of British young travellers visiting and learning about the world, as well as attracting and meeting the needs of those travelling to the UK for formal or broader education.

Outbound British travellers in the sector explore, work and study overseas for the long-term benefit of Britain. While travelling they often contribute to the societies they visit. They return with a clearer knowledge of the world providing a competitive advantage for Britain. They generally travel close to the communities they visit and uniquely advertise Britain as a destination, encouraging others to visit.

The economic benefits of the youth and student travel sector have been well documented. A diverse and culturally aware population brings enormous advantages to an open, enlightened society; one where young people from Britain travel overseas to gain experience of different cultures, as well as one where Britain welcomes young people from overseas to experience the diversity of a world-class nation embracing a rich mixture of cultures.

The UK visitor economy is worth £85 billion. It is the country's fifth largest industry and employs 2.1 million people – more than the construction or transport sectors of the economy - and accounts for 7.7% of the UK workforce. Overseas and domestic visitors also pay £12.7 billion in tax from VAT and Air Passenger Duty alone, making the industry a valuable contributor to the Exchequer (source: Tourism Alliance). The end-user sector BETA represents are young travellers aged between 18 and 34 years, with this sector accounting for 39% of all inbound visitors to Britain, 45% of bed nights and 35% of the annual visitor spend (source: VisitBritain). BETA also represents organizations primarily focused on providing or supplying services to young travellers in the domestic and outbound markets. 25% of all international arrivals can be attributed to youth tourism. (source: WYSETC). The 2012 Olympics pitch is based on youth orientation and a comprehensive programme will ensure this is achieved.

The export education sector today generates just over £6 billion of revenue per annum in Britain for Britain with a further estimated £5 billion in indirectly related spend and benefit. (source: The Global Value of UK Education and Training Exports). There are 330,000 international students in higher education in the UK. Data also shows that the UK has 13% of global market penetration in this segment (source: UNESCO UIS database 2006). By 2020 there is expected to be between 800,000 and 850,000 international students in the UK. (source: Vision 2020: forecasting international student mobility – a UK perspective). To achieve these numbers against strong international competition Britain needs to offer itself not just as a great education destination but also as a great travel destination, with excellent facilities, to be a hub to enable wider exploration of other countries in the European Region.

Britain's image and effectiveness on the world stage – as well as the nation's ability in the future to influence world events, is enhanced by the many students who visit Britain as part of the educational process who return home to pursue careers that very often lead to a position of influence in politics or industry.

CHALLENGES TO GROWTH

there is the need to tackle the high cost image of Britain

There is a growing image problem in the sector as Britain is a high cost destination. This is masked by the healthy visitor numbers, but closer study shows the growing belief within important source markets of the high cost of visiting the UK compared to other Western European destinations. Clearly strong currency has an impact but there are longer term underlying issues that need to be tackled.

Transportation is a core issue where the lead-in fares are high, but in reality final pricing can be competitive once the rules are understood.

Tourism being used as an indirect tax vehicle backfires when it discourages tourists from visiting. Suppressing overall attractiveness as a destination holds back the potential for economic growth. Examples are the increases in Airline Passenger Duty (APD) which makes Britain comparatively a more expensive destination than other Continental European options. Continued talk of a bed tax, encourages overseas operators to take capacity out of Britain in order to protect the competitiveness of their programmes.

The clear sight of policy-makers when formulating solutions can reverse the deteriorating image resulting in economic gain.

visas for opportunity and protection

Visas policy if well managed can enhance Britain's success. Sensitive handling of any changes can result in opportunity for Britain while still resolving the security issues involved. It is obvious to state, but awareness by policymakers of the significant short and long term economic benefit can assist good policy. BETA's preferred policy is one of flexibility and welcome to foreigners who have the best interests of Britain.

the environment

Tackling environmental issues with clear sight of the value of each sector of tourism can lead to a sustainable and beneficial policy. Youth and student tourism are often amongst the most sustainable forms of tourism throughout the world. Often closer to the communities they visit, they offer real opportunities for dispersal of spend and activity to the greater environmental advantage of areas receiving them. Appropriate and intelligent policies, looking at environmental solutions to retain tourism, employment and benefit, while meeting environmental needs are achievable and require good policy!

SECTOR SPECIFIC ISSUES

BETA is committed to raising the standards and providing opportunities for young people from all parts of the world to travel, learn and to experience the diversity of cultures in a global knowledge economy.

There are some issues that must be faced if Britain is to achieve its goals.

outbound student travel is good for Britain's future

Government should be encouraged to think of outbound student travel not as a drain on resources but an investment for the future. Those who travel overseas to study or gain experience are an investment for the future prosperity of Britain and should be recognized as such. Similarly, those who provide services for this sector should be recognized for the benefit they bring to the economy – particularly the employment perspective. Finally the selfless contribution many make to the countries they visit can be of lasting importance and should be a continuing part of Britain's engagement with the world.

working holiday visas – vital for Britain's health and wealth

To ensure an understanding of the considerable economic and social value of working holiday visas scheme there is the continuing need to reiterate its importance. This form of visa is vital in helping fulfil the short-term employment needs in the hospitality industry and health service as well as other service sector industries such as banking and IT support. The lesson learnt over years is simple; government departments must consult with each other and the industry regarding changes to this scheme.

the Home Office Managed Migration 5-Tier System

BETA welcomes the Government's steps towards clarifying and defining routes into the UK for bona fide students and for cleaning up what has for a long time been the grey and much abused distinction between "student" and "worker".

The proposed Youth Mobility scheme within Tier 5 provides a great opportunity to expand the movement of young people to and from new destination/source countries. We urge the Government to go beyond simply renewing the arrangements with the existing Working Holiday Maker partners and honour the commitment to develop government-to-government Youth Mobility agreements with a broader range of countries.

While Britain drives towards encouraging inbound movement into the UK, BETA believes that we must also acknowledge our responsibility to our own young people. Young independently travelling Britons abroad can be the UK's best ambassadors. Therefore we welcome the Home Office's recognition of the importance of the concept of "reciprocity" within Tier 5. We note the requirement for foreign governments to offer young Britain's a programme of "*broad equivalence of purpose and entitlement*". This has great potential to expand the range of countries in which UK young people can fund an international travel/cultural/educational experience through work.

BETA will monitor the Government's progress in these areas to ensure that the opportunities are indeed forthcoming, not ignored or diluted.

safety is always a first priority

For any visitor safety is a vital part of the overall experience. This is relevant for British visitors overseas as well as visitors to Britain. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has travel advisories and help lines that cover part of this requirement. Members of BETA and others in the private/voluntary sector are constantly reviewing and upgrading their offers of support and care for their travellers.

In general within Britain these issues are well taken care of but there is particular concern amongst BETA Members about the risk that recent policy changes may lead to some poor or unsafe accommodation being available. While such properties represent a small percentage of the available accommodation, it has the potential to cause considerable damage to the reputation of Britain.

Since the withdrawal of compulsory Fire Certificates there are sectors of the accommodation stock that risk falling outside existing fire legislation.

There remains ambiguity in other sectors in that home-stay providers are currently largely unregulated and not monitored for health, safety, hygiene and fire.

BETA's position is clear and unambiguous on fire safety; every establishment renting beds or rooms on a commercial basis (charging for the service) should have a fire certificate commensurate with the level of accommodation and number of beds. BETA recognizes that the level of protection or precaution necessary in a small hostel or bed and breakfast establishment will be very different to that of a large hotel. Nevertheless every life is sacred and all sectors of the industry must take responsibility for the safety of visitors.

Similarly, all establishments offering accommodation to young people have to take responsibility for health, safety and hygiene. If Fire Certificates are not reintroduced, operators should prove their adherence to set standards including clear audit trails by following set mandatory procedures.

SOURCES

The Global Value of UK Education and Training Exports

Author: Geraint Jones, Professor of Economics, Lancaster University Management School on behalf of British Council and UK Trade and Investments, April 2004

Tourism Alliance

An initiative providing representation for British travel and tourism associations representing over 200,000 businesses in throughout the UK

UNESCO

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UIS database 2006

Vision 2020: forecasting international student mobility – a UK perspective

Collaboration by the British Council, Universities UK and IDP Education Australia

VisitBritain

The national tourism agency, promotes Britain internationally in 36 markets and England in Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Ireland

WYSETC

World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation, representing the global community of youth travel, student travel and international education specialists