

Letter to the UK Prime Minister

10 Downing Street

London

SW1A 2AA

Paris, April 16th 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to you today on behalf of a long-established profession, that of **school trip organisers, to bring your attention to the consequences of the UK's withdrawal from the EU on our industry and on young people travelling to and from your country.**

France and the UK were until last year the leading partners on the European continent in terms of school exchanges, due to their proximity and ease of access, which has always made both territories and cultures attractive to each other.

In France alone, we are sending around 10,000 school groups a year to the UK, representing **over 500,000** French young people who, each year, have the chance to discover and be inspired by your country as English is the first language studied in French schools. These figures do not even include the language-study trips taking place during the summer break and school holidays representing an extra 50,000 travellers.

We recently had the opportunity to discuss this with our German colleagues, whose number of school groups is around 7,000 per year. They are equally concerned, as are all other European operators sending school groups to the UK, by the challenge created by the need of each traveler to hold a valid individual passport from October 2021 onwards.

We wanted to bring to your attention the financial details and the economics of the market. When a student goes on a school trip to the UK, the price generally breaks down as follows:

- 40% is linked to chartered transport from France, the coach operator.
- 10% goes to the ferry or railway companies, the main ones being P&O Ferries, DFDS, Brittany Ferries for ferry carriers Eurostar and the Eurotunnel for rail carriers.
- 50% is spent in the UK on accommodation, tours, attractions, food and various expenses.

French operators alone estimate that their direct input into the UK economy is £ 100,000,000 over the course of a year. Needless to say this revenue is also unquestionably generating significant indirect profits and benefits for the entire country. It is also important to bear in mind that this small figure relates to France alone and does not include students travelling from Germany, Spain, Italy, The Netherlands, etc.

School trips usually represent the main source of income for the following sectors in the UK, especially during the low tourism season from February to June.

- Accommodation is the most important item, particularly for host families, generating an essential income for thousands of British families, which they will now need even more to recover from the economic crisis resulting from Covid. British receiving organisations and operators will be severely impacted. Youth hostels and hotels whose core business is welcoming the "young public", and whose economic activity depends on the accommodation of school groups, in particular during weekdays.
- Activities are the second expense item for a school trip. They include entrance tickets to museums, cultural sites, amusement parks, theatre tickets, as well as language and sports activities. For some companies, the foreign school group business represents an essential part of their turnover, in particular tour guides, or language schools and teachers. Needless to say they too will suffer severe impacts.
- The loss of ancillary expenses including group meals in restaurants and various personal purchases (souvenirs, items in supermarkets etc.) will also impact the local economy. Perhaps the most relevant example would be the city of Canterbury. How would the tourist economy in Canterbury fare without European tourists, especially school groups ?

One should also bear in mind that, these areas of spendings and investments are spread across the whole country supporting, the economic development in geographic areas away from London, and creating economic / business opportunities in areas such as Devon, Kent and the Midlands. School children travel all over the country, contributing to the regional economies.

In addition, day trips around the Kent region have been very popular with schools in European regions near Calais, since the UK has long time been a very affordable destination with simple customs procedures.

1- Changes resulting from the UK's departure from the EU

The new rules planned to take effect from October 2021 will **clearly complicate access to the UK for French and European students due to:**

- a) The **new requirement to present an individual passport**. It may seem like a small detail, but in the case of school groups it increases the travel budget for parents by 10% to 20% on average depending on the age of the students and represent a substantial sum for the families of young travellers whose budget is generally constrained.
Bear in mind that a school trip is often the first opportunity for a young person to go abroad, and sometimes the only occasion in his/her life. As such, school trips have a social purpose and when the UK is the first destination visited, one can imagine how much students will be attached to it later. The new requirement of a passport to all visitors will also result in significant additional administrative procedures and preparation well in advance which will undoubtedly discourage not only the parents but also the teachers organizing the trip.
- b) The **end of the collective passport (list of travellers)**. This will prevent students of non-EU nationality from travelling with their class because they will have to apply for a visa (further cost and procedures in addition to the personal passport). Moreover, as in many European countries, the classes need to travel with all the pupils who constitute the group or they do not travel at all. If one of the students is unable to travel on account of a a passport/visa problem, the entire project can be called into question, or its destination changed.

2- Short and long term consequences

As a result, schools and families of student travellers have already notified us of a drop in interest in the UK as a destination if the new rules were to come into effect, to the benefit of other intra EU destinations such as Ireland or Malta from October 2021.

Therefore, we, specialists in the sector, foresee a **reduction in the number of school trips to the UK of up to 50% after the new entry requirements come into effect.**

In addition to the serious economic impact for the UK finances, the British host families and the professional sector on both sides of the Channel, British and European alike, we are also very concerned about the negative impact that such a decline in cultural and language exchanges will have on a young audience in the process of developing personal and professional skills that will be crucial for the future of our societies.

3- What we ask of the British government

We therefore ask that the UK government re-examine the issue regarding the conditions of access to the UK for under-18 EU people travelling on a school group or a linguistic stay of less than 15 days to :

- **Keep the “list of travellers” in place for all school groups, in line with the process that the British government has decided on for British groups going to the EU (<https://www.gov.uk/collective-group-passports>).**
- **Allow the use of an ID Card only, and therefore cancel the need to present a passport.**

All the companies we represent have always had very good business relationships with the UK and want these to continue. Most of us are passionate about our industry because we lived the UK experience when we ourselves were young school students. We want to continue to “keep the door open” for our young students to experience and enjoy the UK life, culture and history.

After this terrible Covid period, we want to be part of the recovery and help get the UK tourism sector back up and running very quickly. We are all ready for the restart and would like to work hand in hand with your government for the sake of the UK economy as well as our industry and the future of our young people all over Europe.

Yours Sincerely,

The French school trips and linguistic stays organisers

Contact details

Antoine Bretin, Youth stays director VERDIÉ HELLO, VERDIÉ OPEN CLASS –Mobile : +33 (0)6 28 09 99 15 - antoine.bretin@verdie.com

Edward Hisbergues, Sales Manager PG TRIPS Association - Mobile : +33 (0)6 71 24 98 47 - contact@pgtrips.com

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