

EMBARGO LIFTS 00:01 THURSDAY 18 JULY

Damning new info about Home Office's hostile treatment of international students revealed by APPG on TOEIC

On **Thursday 18 July**, the APPG on TOEIC (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Test of English for International Communication) is launching a report that reveals damning new evidence that the Home Office has taken rash and unnecessarily hostile action against international students accused of cheating on the TOEIC test in 2014, and that key parts of the Department's response have been covered up.

The report (attached) also concludes that the evidence used by the Home Office to revoke the visas of tens of thousands of international students was "confused, misleading, incomplete and unsafe".

The report is the result of four evidence sessions (detailed on pp.8-9 of the report), where affected students, legal experts, technical experts and third sector representatives were questioned by members of the APPG.

See below or p.10 of the report for the key findings.

See p.4 for the APPG's recommendations for the Home Office.

The report will be officially launched at a press conference at 9am on Thursday 18 July in Room B, 1 Parliament Street SW1A 2JR. Migrant Voice, Secretariat for the APPG, is coordinating this press conference alongside the office of Stephen Timms MP. Please reply to this email if you would like to attend. Affected students, members of the APPG and Nazek Ramadan, Director of Migrant Voice, will be available for interview at the press conference and by arrangement beforehand.

From the foreword by Stephen Timms MP, Chair of the APPG on TOEIC:

"One thing that struck me throughout our hearings was that evidence from ETS – the basis for denying visas to thousands of overseas students, often with catastrophic effects – quite simply could not be relied upon. The inquiry concluded that the evidence used against the students was confused, misleading, incomplete and unsafe..."

"Some students have – at great cost – managed to clear their names. However, universities still see them as a risk due to the nature of the allegations made against them. As things stand, and without help from the Government, their futures remain bleak. This report sets out crucial steps we believe the Government must now take."

Nazek Ramadan, Director of Migrant Voice, Secretariat to the APPG on TOEIC:

"This report reveals shocking new evidence that the Home Office ignored expert advice, relied on dodgy evidence and took action against students they claimed were treated fairly – and that the Department continues to cover up the full extent of those blunders."

"The result was that tens of thousands of people have spent five years living a nightmare. One student told the APPG that the allegation was like a cancer that had infected his whole family."

"We welcome the Home Secretary's announcement that he plans to make a statement on this matter before the summer recess, and we urge him to read this report and its recommendations before he makes his final decisions. He does have the power to put this right."

Some of the key new findings (see p.10 of the report for full summary):

- At a confidential meeting of experts in August 2014, Home Office officials disclosed that they were unsure whether the evidence against the students was robust enough to stand up in court and asked whether it should be "shored up" or "redone". This was after thousands of students had already had action taken against them on the basis of that evidence. The Home Office ignored the advice of the experts at that meeting and are still refusing to admit publicly that the meeting ever happened.
- The Home Office has relied extensively on a 2016 report by Professor Peter French, which concluded that the rate of "false positives" (individuals wrongly identified as having cheated) in the ETS checking process would be less than 1%. However, in evidence to the APPG, French stressed that his conclusion was only correct *"if the results that ETS had given the Home Office were correct"*. As explained in (1) above, all of the experts questioned the reliability of those results, casting significant doubt on the usefulness of that statistic, used so heavily by the Home Office in their defence. French also cautioned against using his conclusion to argue that any particular student cheated, an approach the Home Office has used consistently.
- The Home Office has repeatedly insisted that 'questionable' students – those who may have cheated, according to the ETS evidence – had no action taken against them without being offered the chance to sit a new test. New evidence reveals that lists of students accused of cheating sent by the Home Office to institutions where they were enrolled *did not distinguish* between 'invalid' and 'questionable' students. They were all thrown out and therefore liable to removal from the UK.
- According to one lawyer – who has dealt with around 100 TOEIC cases – the Government *"pioneered a process that made it as difficult"* as possible for those accused of TOEIC fraud to clear their names, said Barrister Michael Biggs. They were left with *"no effective remedy"*.
- The Chair (Home Office official Peter Millington) of a working group designed to support students indirectly impacted by the TOEIC allegations refused to send a letter from members of the group raising concerns about the lack of support being offered *"on the basis that he couldn't write such a letter to his boss"*. The concerns were never addressed and, before its termination just a few months later, the group helped just 300 out of 68,000 affected students.
- Students who have won their cases are still being denied access to UK education institutions, with rulings in their favour not regarded as *"clear judgements"* and their immigration records seen as a threat to the institution's licence. At least one university has also refused help to a former student wrongly accused of cheating on the basis that to do so would be a threat to their licence.

Contact press@migrantvoice.org for more information.