

Skills Minister delivers keynote speech at International Higher Education Forum

Good morning everyone thank you so much for inviting me to speak to you.

It's wonderful to have the opportunity to talk about the importance of international higher education. It's a fascinating part of my brief at the Department for Education – and one whose significance I believe has, over the past few dismal weeks, become ever more important.

The opportunity for people – particularly young people – to study in other countries, to weigh their views and experiences against those of other cultures as they develop their minds and lives is so extraordinarily important at all times. But as we see the world begin to fracture once more into different spheres of influence and thought that importance grows.

This audience does not need me to tell it that the universities of the United Kingdom have a hugely significant role to play – not just because our country is one of the great global leaders in student recruitment, not just because the appetite of foreign students to live and study in our country is ever increasing – but most centrally because of what our universities represent.

I think of course of exceptional traditions of academic excellence. But what has made that excellence, what has enabled it to flourish and survive is liberty. Liberty is today under attack in the world. No where more violently and obviously than in Ukraine.

We should all be proud that the UK continues to be at the very forefront of international efforts to support the resistance to tyranny in Ukraine. In my department we are trying to do our bit too.

We have been working closely with the higher education sector and across Government to ensure that Ukrainian students are supported during this difficult time.

I am very pleased to say that this includes new visa concessions announced by the Home Office for Ukrainian nationals, including students, that will provide them with an opportunity to extend their leave or switch to a Graduate visa without having to leave the UK.

We recognise the current uncertainty is going to mean that many students may experience additional challenges and I very much want to thank the HE Sector for the remarkable work they have already done in supporting Ukrainian students, from providing crisis counsellors to making Student Hardship Funds available for students who need financial assistance, to simply showing friendship.

So, before I go on, I would like to emphasise my gratitude to the sector for

all your hard work – and all the support I know you will give in the months ahead.

It is a great testament to you that the UK has remained the destination of choice for so many international students.

Your world-class reputation, your globally renowned teaching, your cutting-edge research and innovation.

Our International Education Strategy, published in 2019 and updated last year, is pivotal to protecting and enhancing your reputation.

At the heart of this strategy are two principal ambitions which we want to achieve by 2030.

First, to increase the value of our education exports to £35 billion per year And second to host at least 600,000 international higher education students in the UK per year.

Well, we are already delivering against both of these ambitions.

In 2019, the value of education exports was estimated to be £25.2 billion an increase of over 8% in just a year.

I was incredibly proud that we met our international student recruitment ambition for the first time in 2020/21 – nearly 10 years early – with 605,130 international students, studying in the UK.

Clearly, as you have demonstrated, the sky is the limit. But now you've burst through the sky – where next?

There are several parts to this answer, but the first and most obvious is that we, in Government need to work with you to support every part of the international student journey from application to employment.

This includes optimising the application process for potential students, raising awareness of private finance options, and looking at best-practice in graduate employability.

There is much more to be done, but doing these things will make sure the UK remains highly attractive to international students.

There are, of course, challenges.

We cannot ignore the uncertainties of recent years – further demonstrating the need for our institutions to diversify their intake of international students – and broaden the regions they recruit from.

We are already seeing progress, we've seen notable increases in student entrants from our priority countries. In 20/21 entrants from Nigeria rose by 89% and those from India by 27%. This is a brilliant endorsement of our improved student offer including the Graduate route.

Not only to ensure sustainable future recruitment, but to guarantee we continue to benefit from the diversity, fresh ideas and new perspectives that international students bring to our campuses.

As you well know, the UK's international higher education offer is more than just international students. You represent world beating research institutions. Your transnational education – or TNE – programmes mean that students all over the globe can access a UK education, wherever they may be.

As we continue to reform our post-16 sector, I think there is very great potential for the sustainable growth of TNE.

Education exports from UK HE transnational education have been rapidly growing in value – almost doubling in 10 years, from £350 million in 2010 to £690 million in 2019.

I want the UK to remain at the forefront of innovation in TNE provision especially as we look to what we have learned over the past few years.

The work of the International Education Champion, Sir Steve Smith, is integral to the continuing success in growing UK education exports. I know many of you will know Steve. I hope you continue to engage with him in this exciting mission.

He is working across five priority countries: India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam to open up export growth opportunities for UK education.

We want to offer our full support for education exports and trade.

As you know, the UK now has an independent trade policy, which we are using to shape the future of UK trade around the world, bringing benefits to the education sector and those of the countries that we trade with.

We very much want to support the sector as best we can in negotiations.

So we're working with the Department for International Trade promoting education in Free Trade Agreements and ensuring the sector's views are represented.

Now more than ever, the Government is seeking to strengthen our relationships with partners and allies around the world.

This is all part of our ambition for a Global Britain – with close and strong relationships in every continent, championing the rules-based international order, standing up for and promoting British values across the world.

Education, as one of the UK's soft power strengths, has a pivotal role to play in delivering this ambition.

One such example is the 2030 roadmap for India-UK future relations, launched last year by the Prime Minister and Indian Prime Minister Modi.

Through this ambitious Roadmap, we will elevate the India-UK relationship and guide our cooperation for the next ten years covering all aspects of our multi-faceted relations through education exports.

In 2020/2021, the UK welcomed 53,015 Indian students to the UK. I look forward to building on this success and our wider relationship with India.

Despite the impact and uncertainty of the last two years, I am proud to say that our collective, global efforts are supporting a new generation of young people to access and enjoy life changing international experiences wherever they study.

Aptly named after Alan Turing – father of computing and World War Two codebreaker – who studied for a time in the United States, our Turing Scheme is truly global, with this year's participants planning to travel from their schools, colleges and universities to study and work across the globe in over 150 destinations.

Through study or work experience abroad, we want to support people from across the UK to experience the world. To support this ambition, we have confirmed funding for the continuation of the Turing Scheme for the next 3 years, including £110 million for the 2022/23 Academic Year.

My department has been promoting Turing across the world with ministerial discussions in the US, Canada, Germany, France, Spain, Switzerland, Australia, India and others throughout the Commonwealth.

It has been excellent to see such positive engagement, and I look forward to seeing how UK institutions will continue to build and strengthen collaborative partnerships overseas as we move into the second year of the scheme.

We have now announced plans for applications for the second year of the scheme, which will provide funding for mobilities in the 2022-23 Academic Year.

I urge institutions who want to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the scheme to register their interest now on the Scheme's website and to start preparing their bids.

I am extremely proud of the work the higher education sector and Government have achieved over the past year.

As we step into the future, the positive lessons we have learned from the past year will play a crucial part in growing the UK's education offer and strengthening the UK's global agenda.

I strongly believe in the power of education to help us solve global challenges.

When I graduated (a long time ago) the Vice Chancellor said words to the effect of "some may see our ceremony today as arcane – I hope you will see it as an event which connects you with the greatest tradition of free thought

and inquiry to be found anywhere in the world. I hope you will be proud of that and seek to preserve and protect it for future generations.”

I want more international students to come to the UK not just because it's good for our economy, not just because it's good for those universities' balance sheets, but because it will enable students from around the world to learn at our remarkable universities which continue to preserve and protect – for the world – the greatest traditions of free thought and inquiry.

Thank you for listening and thank you for all you do.