



## PRESS RELEASE

- **UK lagging far behind EU in school group trip numbers**
  - **Operators lay the blame at changes to passport requirements**

For immediate release

19 June 2023

The Tourism Alliance is today publishing [the results of a survey of 145 business](#) who plan and organise school group travel. Collectively these companies brought 728,000 school children to the UK in 2019.

The survey finds that while trips school group trips inside the EU have already recovered to well above 2019 figures (108%) the UK has only recovered 61% of the school group travel market it had.

Operators lay the blame for this squarely at the changes to passport requirements at the UK border. 74% of operators said that the requirement for all school children to have a passport to enter the UK was an 'extremely important' barrier.

### Key findings

- Between **2019 and 2022** the number of school children the business surveyed brought to the UK from the EU declined by **81%**.
- Over the same period the figure for school children going to the EU declined by only **53%**, likely as a result of issues around Covid.

- Recovery from these figures is **starkly different** between the EU and UK.
- The surveyed businesses expect to recover their school group trips to the EU to **108%** of 2019 figures in 2023.
- In contrast, the businesses expect to recover their UK school trips to only **61%** of 2019 figures this year.

More detail about the survey results including perceptions around barriers to bringing school groups to the UK, as well as comments from participants in the survey can be found in the [full report](#).

A few example comments include:

- *“We lost a group of +150 kids this year who were supposed to go the UK in May because of the new passport requirement - they decided to travel to Europe instead. The group that accepted to come (145 kids) was very stressed about the new rules and feared complications before and on the day of travel.”*
- *“The biggest barrier is actually the visa regulation for non-EU students. Therefore, we definitely need a solution e.g. “list of travellers”. Now it means, the schools are forced to book another destination or to leave students behind, just because they were born outside the EU.”*
- *“Why should parents go through this nightmare of visa and passport if there are lots of other nice destinations available?”*

**Richard Toomer, Tourism Alliance Executive Director, said:**

“We are pleased that the UK Government recently agreed to look the documentary requirements at the border for France-UK school group trips [See note 2]. It is vital that any solution – such as a new collective passport for such groups – is scalable so that kids from all across Europe can come and experience everything that the UK has to offer.

“Today’s report shows why urgent action is needed. The longer this takes to resolve, the harder it will be for the UK market to recover and we will continue to lose out to other European countries.”

**Tom Jenkins, Chief Executive of ETOA and the Chair of the Tourism Alliance said:**

“School groups stay in regional locations, spreading spend throughout the UK. The shortfall in 2023 has cost about £400 million in export earnings; money which is desperately needed in depressed areas. This is happening even though schoolchildren pose no threat of absconding. Those that come here build long-term contacts that lead to repeat visits and further income.

“The immediate economic cost is obvious, the long-term damage to the UK’s soft power is more substantial. The country deserves better from its immigration regime.”

## Notes:

1. The full report can be downloaded at [https://www.tourismalliance.com/downloads/TA\\_443\\_480.pdf](https://www.tourismalliance.com/downloads/TA_443_480.pdf)
2. The following extract from the UK-France Joint Leaders’ Declaration: *“On school travel, the United Kingdom committed to ease the travel of school groups to the UK by making changes to documentary requirements for schoolchildren on organised trips from France. France commits to ensuring appropriate mechanisms are in place for visa free travel for children travelling on organised school trips from the United Kingdom and to facilitating the passage of those groups through the border.”* 10 March 2023.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-france-joint-leaders-declaration/uk-france-joint-leaders-declaration>

## Contact:

Richard Toomer  
[Richard.Toomer@tourismalliance.com](mailto:Richard.Toomer@tourismalliance.com)  
07576 303 127

--ends--