

**UK Council
for International
Student Affairs**

Annual Review 2009-10

The UK Council for International Student Affairs is the UK's national advisory body serving the interests of international students and those who work with them.

UKCISA

UKCISA is a membership organisation, a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. It is governed by elected and co-opted representatives from throughout the education sector and supported by grants from the UK and Scottish governments.

In March 2010 the membership included 191 Higher Education institutions, 218 Further Education colleges, 57 Students' Unions and a similar number of specialist and voluntary bodies from all parts of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

During the year UKCISA also provided extensive advice to a wide range of government departments and agencies on international student policy and procedures.

In 2009-10, we generated 80% of our income of £1.67m from membership subscriptions, training, projects (such as the Prime Minister's Initiative) and other services. The balance was provided by government grants enabling us to expand our reach, provide a national advice service on policy and a full portfolio of services to both members and the wider public throughout the UK.

Foreword



When I chaired the final session of UKCISA's Cumberland Lodge Policy Forum in February this year, it was quite clear to me that academic institutions, many of which are heavily reliant on international students for income, course viability and their academic contributions, were facing a major crossroads.

Recruitment had increased significantly over the last two to three years in what has become and continues to be a major UK success story. On the other hand, government, concerned about possible abuses to the immigration system, were introducing a range of new measures which, perhaps inadvertently, were presenting very real challenges and causing considerable concern.

Amidst all this, UKCISA – as an independent advisory body – has done much to assist international students and the sector to adjust to the new requirements and, at the same time, raise with government aspects of the system which could, and many believe should, be urgently amended and improved.

This has been therefore an extremely important, and often testing, year for UKCISA.

I am delighted to have been able to support its work as its President and applaud its major achievements over the past year.

Baroness Usha Prashar
President, UK Council for International Student Affairs

Introduction



As Usha Prashar notes, this year has seen what the Home Office have called the 'biggest transformation in immigration and visa systems for a generation'. These changes, especially Tier 4 of the Points Based System, have critically affected all international students and all educational institutions.

This has been a major challenge for all but I believe that UKCISA, through its authoritative advice and guidance, has played a crucial role in ensuring that students and university and college staff can navigate through the often changing and complex new rules and procedures.

In addition, our two surveys represented invaluable feedback to both the sector and government on how the new system was operating and our involvement in policy discussions has often resulted in significant benefits and improvements.

Of course visas and other rules and entitlements, from part-time work to fee status, are only one side of UKCISA's work. The other is to work with the sector to encourage and enable even higher standards of support for international students and here again there have been major achievements this year.

The Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI), for instance, has provided, through UKCISA, additional funding for new services and to support innovation and best practice. I am delighted to say that research now shows that student satisfaction ratings, across nearly all of 20 key areas, have significantly improved since the scheme began.

Many players have contributed to this but our role in managing the relevant PMI projects has, I believe, been crucial and one in which we can be justly proud.

The quality of the total experience for all our students – from first enquiry to support during their studies – is of fundamental importance to our reputation and continuing success as a world leader in international education. I hope you will see in this brief Review the value and impact which UKCISA delivers - on comparatively modest resources.

Over the past three years the ratio of our core government grant to international student numbers has reduced, as student numbers have increased sharply. Meanwhile the percentage of our turnover funded directly by our members has increased.

The work has also become much more complex, initially with EU accession, then with differing regulations for each of the devolved countries and now the transformation of the whole immigration system. We have responded to these challenges by expanding our reach and introducing new approaches and we will continue to do so.

But we will also continue to look to the UK and Scottish governments, even (and perhaps especially) in times of economic difficulty, to continue to support the work we do.

Their support not only relieves government of the need to undertake certain advice functions itself, as is often done in other countries, but helps to ensure the continued success and very substantial earnings and benefits for our education sector and the UK economy as a whole.

We are extremely grateful to them, to all who have supported our work over the year, to members of our Board and committees, to our staff and, of course, all our members throughout the country who represent such a supportive community and powerful alliance.

Professor Christine Hallett
Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of Stirling and Chair, UK Council for International Student Affairs' Board of Trustees

April 2010

UKCISA's activities 2009-10

Advice

We produced the only comprehensive description and analysis of the new Tier 4 rules and procedures, specifically written for advisers.

- We produced updated versions of the UKCISA Guide to Tier 4 within weeks of the introduction of each new phase. We sent email alerts to 2,300 member contacts weekly and published a Special Briefing as a digest of all the different rules affecting differing categories of student.
- Over 1,400 copies of the 600 page UKCISA Manual, the essential guide for all advisors, were distributed to institutions.
- 22 Information Sheets for students on all aspects of coming to the UK for studies were reviewed and updated to reflect recent changes (see page 8 for a full list).

Research and analysis

We undertook the only independent surveys of the experiences of Tier 4 (student) applicants.

- 5,000 responses from those applying overseas for visas and over 500 responses from those extending their visas in the UK demonstrated that the new system was working well overseas, although less well in the UK. It was often undermined by small, technical detail, unnecessarily rigid decision making, problems with ID cards and extensive delays in processing.
- Reports on both surveys were forwarded to all sector and government contacts with the UK Border Agency responding in detail to each of the areas identified for proposed improvement.

Immigration policy

We represented international students and advice staff on the Home Office's Joint Education Taskforce and allied working groups bringing both specialist and practitioner expertise to policy discussions.

- We presented evidence to the Migration Advisory Committee on the benefits of the Tier 1 Post Study Work scheme, and responded to a formal consultation on new immigration charges and to the November 2009 Prime Minister's Review of Tier 4.
- We were influential in ensuring the majority of changes following the Review were limited to only a sub-group of students. We continue to monitor the impact on all.

Training

We provided 48 days of training for university and college staff in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow and at individual institutions. Delegate numbers increased 20% on last year, to 1,400.

- Courses included Basic and Intermediate Immigration, Fee Status (for Higher Education, Further Education and also for Scotland), Residence Requirements, Cross-Cultural Awareness, Advisory Skills, Recruitment and Marketing, Mental Health and a national road-show of fully-booked Tier 4 special events.
- 50 university and college staff were registered on the UKCISA/University of Nottingham Certificate for International Education Professionals, nearly 400 attended UKCISA's annual conference and work began on a new online Initial Professional Development programme.

UKCISA's activities 2009-10

Advice line

We provided a specialist telephone advice service to both members and the general public with nearly 10,000 calls answered over the year.

- The range, complexity and number of changes to rules and procedures this year resulted in a continuous demand for individual advice, on top of the extensively distributed advisory material.
- Visa advice was, as usual, the largest category of enquiry closely followed by fee status and employment. The UKCISA advice line, free to both members and the public, is the only dedicated advice services for international students in the UK.

Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI)

We managed a portfolio of projects worth nearly £500,000 encouraging best practice and innovation and developing new products and services.

- The Prepare for Success study skills website and the International Student Calculator budgeting tool developed new content and together attracted over 200,000 visitors from over 150 countries.
- The NUS project is now pioneering internationalisation strategies with 20 university and college unions.
- A review of the pilot projects scheme, which helps institutions innovate and develop new services, demonstrated widespread benefits. The study visits to competitor countries documented comparative approaches.
- We commissioned a new guide to accommodation for international students from Unipol, who held two linked best practice seminars.

- A major national project on Teaching International Students (TIS), the first of its kind in the world, was established in association with the Higher Education Academy. It has already produced an extensive resource bank and delivered a range of staff development workshops across the country.
- Over 100 senior representatives reviewed the UK's overall international student experience strategy at policy workshops in London and Glasgow.
- All 12 PMI projects achieved their objectives for the year with the allocation spent as planned to within 2% of the budget.
- Results from the International Student Barometer now show that satisfaction rates have improved over the last three years in virtually all the key areas.

Website and communications

We ensured that our website and e-news provided the most comprehensive guidance on international student issues in the UK and was the gateway to up-to-date information for students, staff and stakeholders.

- The site attracted some 676,000 visitors over the year (compared to some 500,000 in 2008-09) with typically 1,000 staff and 50,000 student visitors each month.
- 2,300 individual members and professional contacts received instant updates on rule changes, news, events and policy from UKCISA's weekly e-news alerts and a monthly policy newsletter (News from the Chief Executive).
- As we continue to move from print to online information, our aim is to analyse, interpret and then communicate as widely and as effectively as possible to all those who support or influence the experiences of international students in the UK.

Information Sheets at www.ukcisa.org.uk

Our **online Information Sheets** give comprehensive guidance on studying and living in the UK for international students on the following topics:

Arriving and living in the UK

- Accommodation
- Arriving in the UK
- Driving in the UK: a guide for international students
- International students and culture shock
- Keeping healthy
- Preparing to return home

Immigration

- Making a student immigration application in your home country
- Making a student immigration application in the UK
- Your family's immigration
- Working during your studies
- Working in the UK after your studies

Financial support

- Council tax and international students
- Tuition fees for study in England, Wales or Northern Ireland
- Tuition fees for study in Scotland
- Ordinary residence: case law for fees and Student Support
- Student Support: applying in England
- Student Support: applying in Wales
- Student Support: applying in Scotland
- Student Support: applying in Northern Ireland
- Financial hardship
- Welfare benefits

Studying in the UK

- Study methods used in the UK

In a typical year, we

- answer 10,000 advice calls
- distribute 1,400 copies of the UKCISA Manual
- arrange about 50 training courses for over 1,400 participants
- have over 300 participants at our annual conference
- distribute regular mailings to 2,300 recipients
- have 1,300 subscribers to our email discussion list
- have 50,000 hits per month on the home page of our website

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UKCISA is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (Company Number: 4507287) and a charity registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales (Charity Number: 1095294). Its registered office is at 9-17 St Albans Place London N1 0NX.

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BIS

**Department for Business
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**The Scottish
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