



# Key findings

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1. 70% of students applying overseas found the visa application process **quick and efficient**, up from 59% in 2009
2. 75% were satisfied with the standard of **customer service from visa application centres**
3. Over 50% of students reported **confusion or difficulty resulting from changes in the rules**
4. Colleges and universities were both the most widely used and the highest rated **source of information and advice** about Tier 4 visas
5. Students repeatedly underline the **difficulties they faced in obtaining clear and correct information**, especially from UKBA
6. Providing **evidence of qualifications** was the most straightforward part of the process (79% found this easy)
7. Providing **proof of funds** was straightforward for 55%, but 13% reported major difficulties
8. The main areas of difficulty in the application process were the **application form and instructions** (55% had some problems), the **Tier 4 policy guidance** (46% had problems) and the practicalities of biometrics (47% had problems).
9. Although 90% were successful on their first application, **7.5% had to apply a second time** and a further 1% were successful in administrative review
10. Of those applying from overseas, **only 28% found the cost of a visa** reasonable in 2011, down from 33% in 2009. 35% of those applying to extend visas in the UK **strongly disagreed that the cost was reasonable** (compared to 30% of those applying overseas)
11. The **additional costs of obtaining a visa have risen steeply**. For those applying outside the UK, the proportion with extra costs over £200 has increased from 16% to 29%. For those applying in the UK, those incurring more than £200 additional costs rose from 23% to 46%
12. More than 10% of students were affected by the **changes in English language requirements**
13. As a result of the new English language requirements, **5% had to repeat a test to get a higher score, 4% had to take a different language test** because UKBA would not accept the test which the institution had originally accepted and **3% of respondents unexpectedly had to attend a pre-sessional course**
14. **One in ten of all respondents required two visas** in order to attend a pre-sessional English course prior to their main course
15. 74% of students said they **found immigration procedures at port of entry** easy and straightforward
16. A quarter of those who had to **register with the police** reported problems
17. Most students were aware of **receiving information from their sponsor institution** about their responsibilities as a Tier 4 student but 16% weren't sure, or thought they had not received information on this
18. Of the recent rule changes, **the abolition of the Post Study Work (PSW) route** was rated as having most negative impact on their decision to study in the UK (in all sectors), followed by changes to the **rules on working while studying**
19. The **changes affecting dependants** were rated as having a moderate impact on students' perceptions of the UK welcome, although the number actually bringing dependants was very small
20. About 60% of students believe that **the UK welcomes well-qualified international students**, but 20% neither agree nor disagree and a further 19% actively disagree

# Recommendations for UKBA and government

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1. **Rules should be changed less often** (ideally no more than once a year, in line with the admissions cycle), and with more notice
2. **Improve and streamline the information and guidance** provided to applicants
3. Use the introduction of online forms as an opportunity to review and revise **Tier 4 application forms** and instructions for both entry clearance and extensions of leave to remain, and to streamline the latter in particular. Ensure changes are made in consultation with advisers and students to ensure the new forms are simple to use and understand
4. Ensure **requirements for proof of funds** are clearly spelt out in terms of amount needed and ways in which it can be demonstrated, including how dates are counted and how exchange rates will be calculated.
5. Ensure that the **format of bank documents** required is realistic in terms of what banks are prepared to issue.
6. Consider whether a **broader range of evidence** can be accepted, both in terms of the funds available to students and their families, and evidence of financial sponsorship by a third party and of loans
7. Minimise the need for students to provide repeat **biometrics** and extend the network of biometric centres to more locations
8. Review whether required **SELT scores** are appropriate for all sectors and levels of study, eg in terms of requiring uniform minimum scores across all four sections
9. Consider how the system can more flexibly recognise **native English speakers** and those whose **education has been wholly or substantially in English**
10. Review whether the extension of the **SELT requirement** has prevented abuse, and if so whether this has been proportionate to the additional inconvenience and expense to genuine students and to sponsors
11. **Administrative review** should be speeded up so that students who have been refused in error can use this route to get decisions corrected, without having to apply and pay twice
12. ECOs should wherever possible allow students to **rectify minor errors and omissions** in an application to bring down the number of unnecessary refusals
13. To reduce **unnecessary costs** to applicants and lessen **dissatisfaction with visa fees**, UKBA should
  - a. Be more up-front to applicants about which visa fees are above and which below cost-recovery levels to avoid perceptions of profiting from applicants
  - b. Minimise, and be as transparent as possible, about additional costs such as biometric appointment fees, bank charges and fees for services
  - c. Offer services such as online tracking and SMS or email notification within the standard service rather than charging extra
  - d. Include within the main application fee the cost of providing free or local rate telephone helplines which can provide well-informed responses to individual queries
  - e. Review how fees in sterling are converted into local currency to give a fair exchange rate while avoiding unexpected changes in fees, especially taking into account that applicants may have had to arrange some forms of payment in advance
  - f. Review charges for dependants, and most specifically infants and children
14. Address current confusion amongst both students and Border Officers about what **documents an applicant may need to present on arrival in the UK**, as well as explaining why students need to show documents which have already been scrutinised as part of the application process
15. Do more to ensure all UKBA staff and contractors abide by **customer service standards** to treat all users with dignity and respect

16. **Replace police registration with a simple online process** which enables all Tier 4 students to keep UKBA updated with their addresses
17. **Provide all students with a leaflet on the rules and restrictions** which apply to them, together with a **checklist of what will be required at ports of entry**, when returning their passport
18. As a matter of urgency, **monitor the impact on recruitment of the abolition of the Post Study Work Scheme** and **publish the rules for international students wanting to work after their studies under Tier 2**, for the benefit of both students and employers
19. Given all the recent negative publicity surrounding student visas, UKBA needs to work with the FCO and British Council to develop a **positive communications strategy** clarifying areas of concern and uncertainty and emphasising that the UK, after a period of visa reform, continues to encourage, value and positively welcome well-qualified students

**A copy of the full report can be downloaded from:  
[www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/material\\_media/research\\_reports.php](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/material_media/research_reports.php)**

UKCISA is the UK's national advisory body serving the interests of international students and those who work with them.

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