

**UK Council  
for International  
Student Affairs**

**UKCISA**



**Annual review**  
2023–24

## Introduction

Dear colleagues,

This year brought significant shifts in the student immigration system, with rule changes and fee increases affecting the experience of international students in the UK, as well as the workloads of UKCISA members in student sponsors across the UK.

We saw the introduction of restrictions on dependants of postgraduate taught students and a rapid review of the Graduate route, as well as noteworthy increases to the visa application fees, the immigration health surcharge (IHS) and the salary threshold for the Skilled Worker route.

Change on this scale always impacts on advisers, not least those working at UKCISA. Our Advice and Training team analysed an unprecedented number of statements of changes to the immigration rules in 2023-24 and updates to fee guidance from the four UK governments, to ensure that we provided our members and their international students with timely advice and guidance. As well as updating our core training to reflect these policy changes, we expanded our training offer to include innovative content – including a new strand on influencing policy and developing their coaching skills. Our flagship member event, the UKCISA Annual conference, took place in Wales for the first time in over a decade and provided the opportunity for our member communities to come together to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the #WeAreInternational campaign that speaks so authentically to our vision and mission.

Our #WeAreInternational campaign continues to deliver for our members and students. Our #WeAreInternational grants programme concluded in March 2024, funding small but impactful projects across our membership to benefit the international student population. Our **#WeAreInternational Student Charter** is being used in a range of ways across our membership, and we look forward to disseminating case studies in the months ahead to highlight how different member institutions are using it to enhance the international student experience.

Our events for members and students facilitated opportunities for our members and stakeholders to engage directly with UKCISA's inspirational #WeAreInternational Student Ambassadors. We recruited our fifth cohort of ambassadors in late 2023, bringing new voices into the programme, and we graduated our third cohort into our ambassador alumni community. Our ambassadors continue to connect us to the authentic international student voice to help shape the experience for current and future students, and our UKCISA Fest enabled us to engage with and celebrate a wider range of international student voices.



Internally, our new governance structure is being established, providing new mechanisms to inform our Board of Trustees and support our expert practitioner networks in student advice and immigration compliance. We continue to build a sustainable organisation for the future, collaborating with our members and sector partners to advocate for positive policy change.

We continue to strengthen meaningful relations with key government departments. Our regular engagement with colleagues from the Home Office in policy and operations provides an invaluable channel through which to share insights and intelligence from our members. As we come to the end of a Department for Education in England grant for international student support, we have an opportunity to reflect on how UKCISA has played a key role in delivering on the government's International Education Strategy and disseminating positive messages, including under the #WeAreInternational banner. We look forward to continuing to work with UK governments to deliver a world-class international student experience and attract the next generation of global talent.

This work would not be possible without the hard work of the UKCISA team, our members, and our student ambassadors, as well as the support of our trustees and committee members. We are extremely grateful for their continued commitment to UKCISA's vision for the international student experience.

Signed by,



Lord Karan Bilimoria, **President**

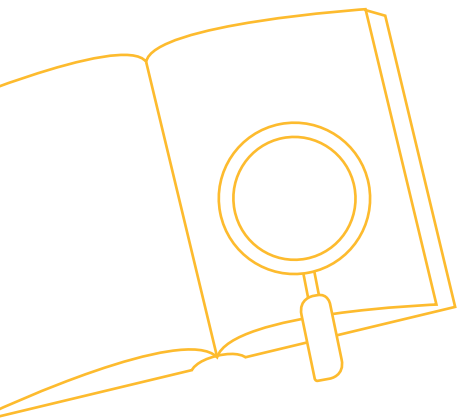


Professor Koen Lamberts, **Chair of the Board of Trustees**



Anne Marie Graham, **Chief Executive**

## Influencing policy



UKCISA works with UK government departments, agencies, devolved administrations, and sector organisations to ensure that the UK remains attractive and welcoming to prospective and current international students. We monitor policy related to international education and immigration and advise on implementation of policy and related guidance.

### Marking boycott

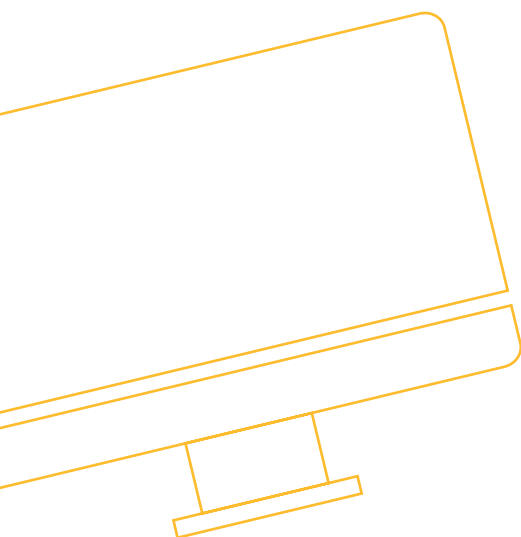
---

Due to the ongoing University and College Union dispute, a marking boycott took place at many member institutions between April and September 2023. Following requests from UKCISA, the Home Office agreed to have special arrangements for educational institutions with students whose applications under the Graduate route might have been affected by the marking boycott.

### Application and IHS increases

---

In October 2023, the government increased the fee for a student immigration application and announced the increase of the IHS for January 2024. In response, UKCISA ran a member consultation to gather views to feed back the impact on current students and potential decline in recruitment. We also ran multiple pulse surveys for students on the impact of the Graduate route review and included questions on the impact of increasing visa and IHS fees, to gain an understanding of student sentiment.



### Digital status

---

As the process to convert physical biometric immigration documents into digital status begins, UKCISA continues to remind the Home Office and UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) about the need for safeguarding and protecting migrants. We have emphasised our concerns about managing data and the need for easy-to-navigate systems to rectify errors and have also reminded the UKVI of the need to retain decision letters for migrants that explain their immigration status (the length and conditions of their immigration permission). We have also raised points about the roll-out of the digital status – asking that the process and requirements for migrants are made clear and are available early, and that the Home Office ensures protection for those who do not register for an online account by any given deadline.

### **Premium customer support team (PCST)**

---

We have worked with the UKVI to help them ensure that there is continued and sufficient support for educational institutions following the termination of the PCST in October 2023. Thanks to our members, we have gathered information and presented emerging issues to the UKVI, explaining the impact of these issues on our members and students and suggesting ways of resolving these, while continuing to highlight problems in the various channels of communications that have been in place post-PCST.

### **Other immigration work**

---

Following reports from UKCISA members, we highlighted to the UKVI that there were a growing number of errors in cancellations of student immigration permission. We explained the impact of these errors after collecting anonymous data from our members and explained the need for an urgent way to resolve these. As a result, errors were reduced.

Following the changes to the student dependant policy announced by the Home Office in May 2023 (concerning students on postgraduate courses), we made representations to the Home Office that there should be no further restrictions on any other group of students eligible to bring dependants.

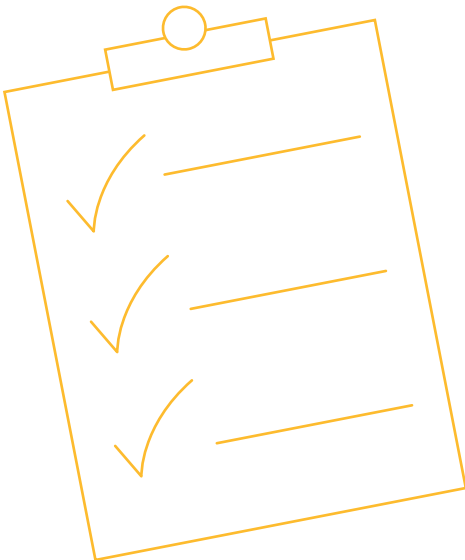
We regularly asked that any proposed changes to policy be made through consultation with the sector and given a long lead time. When the Statements of Changes to the Immigration Rules were published, we ensured that our members were supported in understanding such changes, through our website, news items and a weekly member newsletter.

Moving forward, we continue to attend meetings, and actively contribute to the work of the Simplification of the Rules Committee, the Home Office's Education Advisory Group, and the UKVI sector meetings.

### **Pulse surveys and consultations**

---

In order to gather student perspectives on changes to policy (immigration or otherwise), UKCISA established regular pulse surveys that ran throughout the year. The results gathered from these have so far been used to demonstrate the students' views to our members at UKCISA Connect events and sector events we attended. We have submitted findings from consultations that we have responded to since September 2023 when the first pulse survey was conducted.



We have also had regular discussions with our members, sector organisations, and student ambassadors on sector-wide consultations and pieces of work. Examples of these were when writing the UKCISA position paper, **'Equity, inclusion and innovation: a sustainable international student policy'**, published April 2024, for the Home Office consultation on maintenance requirements and for our response to the Office for Students Harassment and Sexual Misconduct.

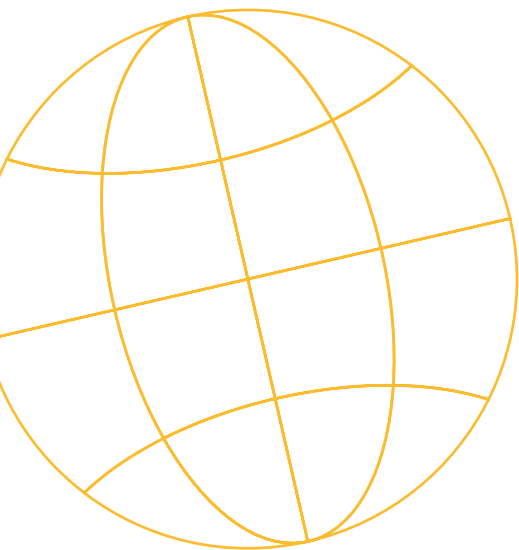
### **International Student Employability Group (ISEG)**

---

UKCISA continues to chair the ISEG, which brings together sector bodies working to support international student employability.

This year, ISEG introduced guest speakers to their quarterly meetings to update on initiatives and gather insight from the group. Guests have included Higher Education Student Support Champion (HESSC) colleagues to discuss their work on employability, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to talk about apprenticeships, and Jisc to discuss graduate outcome data.

The group has also published resources and toolkits in collaboration with ISEG members to share the benefits of the Graduate route to employers, institutions and students, which can be found on the **ISEG page of the UKCISA website**. Additionally, there has been continued work with Jisc to explore how data on international graduate outcomes can be enhanced, the gathering of evidence for the All-party Parliamentary Group **(APPG) Report: Graduate Visa Inquiry 2023**, and discussions to inform the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) rapid review on the Graduate route.



## Delivering world-leading advice and training

Our team of experts provides high-quality advice and guidance and delivers a national training programme that is relevant and responsive to the external policy context. We support our members through changes to the immigration system and fee regulations, and encourage career progression in international support.

### Advice lines

Our advice lines for UKCISA members and the public offer access to a specialist team of Office of the Immigration Services (OISC)-registered advisers, who hold a wealth of experience in advising on international student affairs.

This year, we  
have responded  
to over

**4,700**  
enquiries

Over

**3,000**

enquiries on  
our student  
advice line



Over

**1,600**

enquiries to  
our member  
advice line



## Our members said:

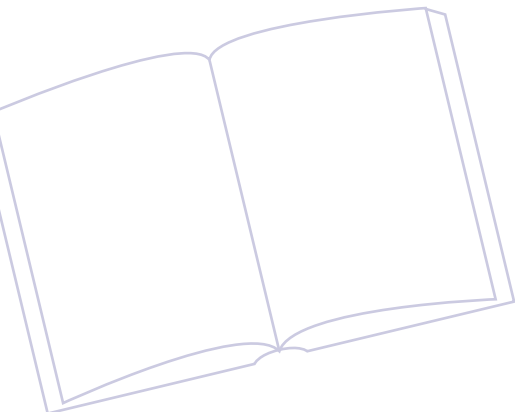
“Excellent training. It has provided me with the knowledge I needed, and I feel much more confident.”

“The delivery was good, and the information provided was broken down well making it easy to digest.”

“The training was well-planned and delivered in a very professional manner.”

“It was great to have my questions answered, and any uncertainty I had was cleared up.”

“It was useful, informative and I would definitely recommend it.”



## Online training programme

UKCISA has expanded its comprehensive and effective training programme online, making it easier for our members from all over the UK to participate. Our affordable prices allow multiple team members to join sessions together, promoting knowledge exchange and peer support.

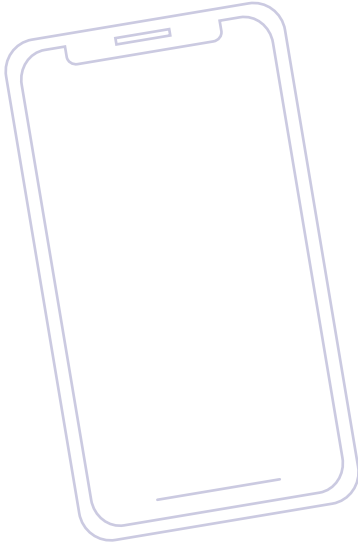
We address members' needs by managing waiting lists, scheduling repeated sessions, and providing customised training for specific groups. After each session, we actively seek feedback to maintain quality standards. Annually, we conduct a thorough survey to assess members' preferences regarding content, delivery methods and format. This approach enables us to refine our training programmes effectively, ensuring they remain aligned with the evolving needs of our members and upholding our commitment to excellence.



## Immigration manual

Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Home Office published six Statements of Changes to the Immigration Rules. During this period, there were also changes to guidance, policy and practice, including the end of the PCST, the phasing out of biometric residence permits, and the introduction of electronic travel authorisations. In response, members of the Advice and Training Team updated over 50 pages of our online immigration manual, several of them more than once, and usually in less than two weeks after the changes came into effect. Our focus for the next year is the transfer of the manual to the new website and how best to use this opportunity for further improvement in functionality and usability.





## **‘Home’ fees**

---

This year, we provided information and tailored advice for students and members on wide-ranging changes to eligibility for ‘home’ fee status in all four UK nations. We published fresh versions of our separate ‘Who pays ‘home’ fees for higher education?’ guides for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and updated our website information for Scotland.

We sought clarity from the Scottish government on important points for students and members, when it extended ‘home’ fee eligibility to certain people with time-limited immigration permission. Additionally, we liaised closely with the Department for Education about changes needed to make ‘home’ fee status more secure for people from Ukraine, and then explained these changes to students and members.

This work enabled students to present the right information to fee assessors and helped our members to more confidently assess and advise international students in their fee assessment work.

## **Lobbying work with the Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) team**

---

UKCISA is a member of a working group led by the Russell Group that meets with ATAS team members monthly. Since the first meeting in December 2021, we have been engaging with the ATAS team and representing members’ views and experiences on the ATAS system. We are currently engaged in collaborative work with the ATAS team on new guidance that is due to be published in 2024.

## Empowering our membership

### Our members said:

“I’d like to say a sincere thank you to UKCISA for all the support and guidance that I have received over the past decade of membership.”

“I called the UKCISA advice line to seek some guidance on an issue, and my query was dealt with in exemplary fashion. I am always impressed by the expertise offered, and the willingness to help. UKCISA offers excellent service!”

“I have been to many UKCISA training events and annual conferences and have made frequent use of the member advice line. The work UKCISA does is hugely appreciated and immensely valuable. It has certainly made my job a lot easier!”

UKCISA’s members are from across the education sector, all committed to the highest standards of international student support. We aim to reflect the diversity of our membership in our advocacy work and in the services we provide.



## Our members said:

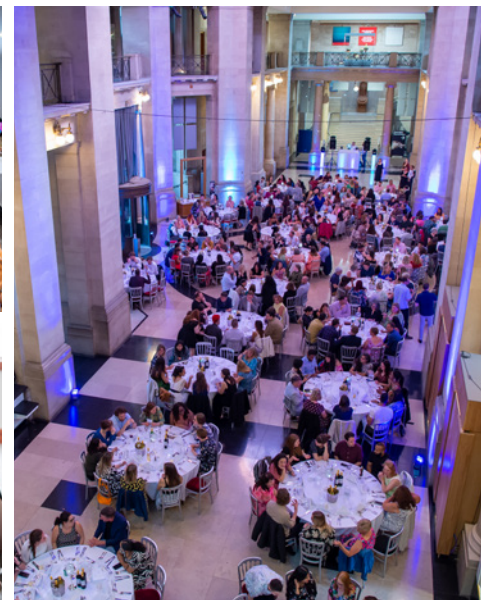
“We really enjoyed UKCISA Annual conference, and I have to say it proved to be our number one conference of the year!”

“There was a huge selection of content and high energy throughout, including ample time to engage with exhibitors.”

“I really enjoyed conference! It was an opportunity for me to get to speak to people at institutions all over the UK, but also for me to step out of my comfort zone. The sessions were informative and fun, and the gala dinner was a particular highlight!”

## Annual conference

UKCISA Annual conference 2023, held in Cardiff, offered a comprehensive exploration of key themes within the international education landscape. Representatives from Universities Wales, Global Wales, Taith, and British Council Wales led an engaging plenary session looking at the international education agenda in Wales. Additionally, the event featured contributions from UKCISA's #WeAreInternational Student Ambassadors, showcasing the diverse perspectives and experiences of international students studying in the UK. Notably, a high-profile update panel discussion and Q&A session involving members of the UK Home Office policy and operations teams provided valuable insights into current regulatory and operational considerations. Experienced members and sector experts delivered presentations and shared examples of good practice throughout the three-day event.

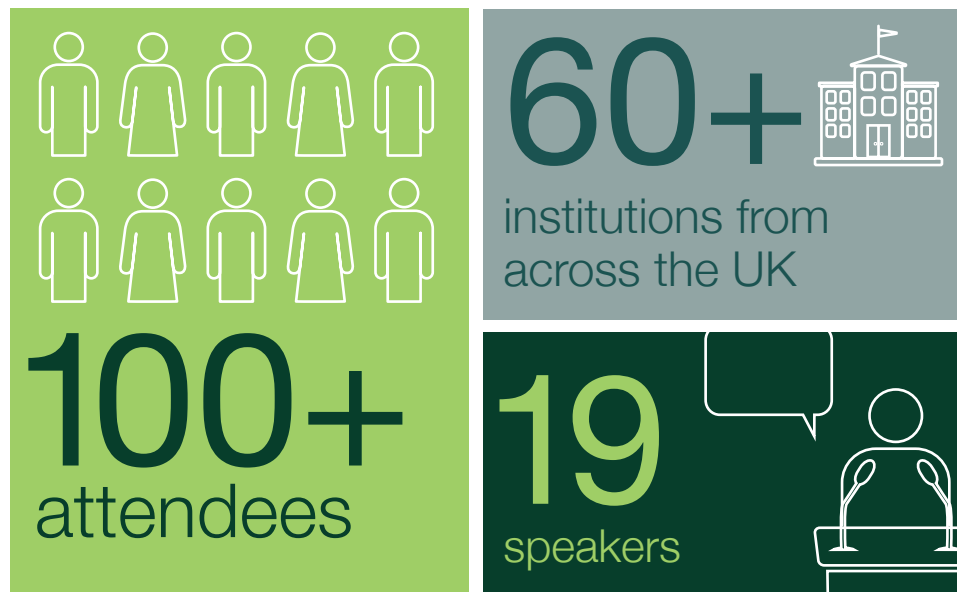


## UKCISA Connect

In January 2024, we launched our UKCISA Connect events, which built upon the success of last year's relaunched member events. We restructured these events to focus on pertinent issues such as the potential influence of the forthcoming general election on the future of international education, the impact of the current policy climate, and sustainability within the sector.

Delegates not only heard about the work UKCISA is doing but also from leading voices within the sector. The new format facilitated in-depth exploration of the subjects, providing participants with crucial insights and allowing attendees to contemplate broader trends and decisions across the sector that impact on their work and students' experiences.

The lively discussions generated among delegates were fantastic to hear, and it was heartening to see that our attendees, representing our entire membership and all the nations of the UK, shared a common objective – to enhance the experiences of international students in the UK.



## Disseminating our knowledge

**“My time with UKCISA has been transformative, both personally and professionally. The skills and insights I’ve gained through my interactions within and outside the organisation have been invaluable. My journey has been enriched by the dedication of the UKCISA team and the enthusiasm of fellow ambassadors and mentors. I am immensely grateful for this experience and am excited about the continuing impact we can make together.”**

**Xiaoxiao Hou,**  
#WeAreInternational  
Student Ambassador

**“I have so much gratitude for the role that UKCISA has played in shaping my experience in the UK. I’ve found significant purpose in representing the student voice as an international student ambassador for UKCISA. I’m thankful for the mentorship I’ve received at UKCISA and will always strive to contribute to the organisation and the international student experience in the UK to the absolute best of my capabilities.”**

**Aditya Mehta,**  
#WeAreInternational  
Student Ambassador

International students are at the heart of everything we do at UKCISA – from ensuring that their voices are heard to providing them with trusted advice and guidance. This year, we highlighted the experience of international students and our members across a range of platforms and forums.

### #WeAreInternational Student Ambassador Programme

The #WeAreInternational Student Ambassador Programme is UKCISA’s network of future global leaders. We empower international students to shape a high-quality student experience, using their knowledge and first-hand experience of studying in the UK to influence policy and develop an inclusive global community.

In 2023–24, we appointed a new cohort of #WeAreInternational Student Ambassadors alongside our existing cohort. Our student ambassadors developed their policy knowledge and leadership skills to lead change by:

- sharing their international student experience at annual sector conferences such as UK ENIC (the UK national agency for international qualifications and skills), the British Universities’ International Liaison Association (BUILA), Universities UK International, Independent HE, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), and UCAS
- engaging with UKCISA members by sharing their experiences at UKCISA Annual conference and UKCISA Connect events through panels, round tables, and focus groups
- taking part in round-table meetings and panels with the International Higher Education Commission, the APPG on International Students, Jisc, the PIE, and London Higher.

In 2023–24, #WeAreInternational Student Ambassadors spoke at over

**30**  
events at nearly

**34**  
sessions and engaged with

**15** government and sector agencies in the UK and from around the world



**“UKCISA Fest truly made the UK feel like a melting pot of cultures and introduced me to the next generation of leaders. The delegates brought exhilarating passion and enthusiasm to improve things for international students. I was fortunate to be given a platform to speak on employability and heard some important feedback from the audience. It truly seemed like a celebration of the international student population in the UK.”**

**Vartika Khandelwal,**  
#WeAreInternational  
Student Ambassador



### **Bringing international students together at UKCISA Fest**

On 15 November 2023, we hosted UKCISA Fest, our annual free one-day event for international students in the UK to celebrate International Students’ Day and inform policy and practice through lived experience. 61 international students participated in six plenary and interactive sessions, in which they explored and discussed diverse aspects of their student experience including:

- the policy process and environment in the UK
- international student voice and representation in policymaking
- stakeholder management
- employability
- academic experience

The students came from 25 countries and regions around the world and represented 51 institutions across the UK.

In the evening, 30 UKCISA members, sector partners and policy makers were invited to attend the UKCISA Annual reception to celebrate International Students’ Day with the international student attendees.

**61** international students participated in  
**6** plenary and interactive sessions

students came from  
**25**   
countries and regions around the world

students represented  
**51**   
institutions across the UK

## Providing trusted information and guidance

Our website is a trusted source of information and guidance for our members, as well as international students and their families. This year, we saw a proportionate increase in visits from the UK to our website in comparison to traffic from overseas.

### Top five web pages

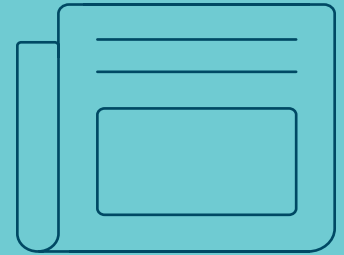
- England: HE fee status
- Home or overseas fees: the basics
- Student work
- Student route eligibility and requirements
- Graduate route



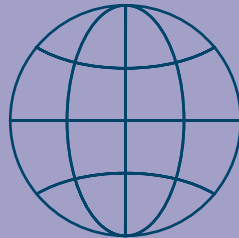
### Top news story

Student update: changes to the Immigration Rules (21 July 2023)

**16,572 views**



### Web traffic



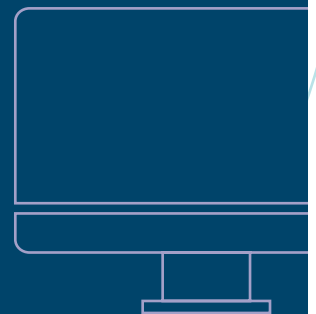
Over 3 million visits to our website

UK – **59%**

Rest of the world – **41%**

### Top 10 website users across the world

1. United Kingdom
2. India
3. United States
4. Nigeria
5. Pakistan
6. Germany
7. China
8. Ghana
9. France
10. United Arab Emirates



France returned to the top 10 this year, taking the place of Hong Kong, which dropped to 12 on the list.

## Promoting UKCISA

Our social media channels bring together a community of UKCISA members and international students. In 2023–24, our followers increased across all platforms. LinkedIn and Instagram both saw significant increases, while engagement more than doubled on both Facebook and Instagram. We used social media to communicate important information to members and international students, including updates about changes to the Graduate route, and the relaunch of the #WeAreInternational campaign.

### Followers

 8,547 Annual increase +5.4%

 8,560 Annual increase +49.3%

 6,097 Annual increase +5%

 5,065 Annual increase +36.6%



## Developing excellence

The commitment and expertise of UKCISA staff are highly valued by international students, members and partner organisations. We have strived to maintain this excellence by promoting a culture of continuous improvement to ensure that staff remain engaged and motivated.

### Supporting staff

---

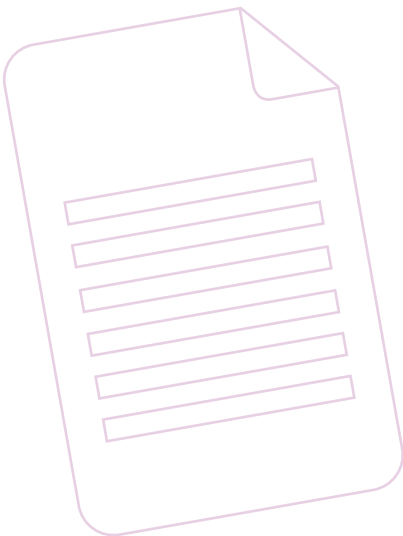
#### What is it like working at UKCISA?



“My time at UKCISA so far has been eventful. From the get-go, I was both supported in my growth and given opportunities to learn about the sector and its challenges. Having a small team means that you are naturally connected to your colleagues, and the nature of my role allows me to work across teams, giving me the opportunity to forge strong bonds with people.

I have been able to lead initiatives like the student pulse surveys to gain semi-regular insights directly from international students and graduates. I have written regular publications like the Annual policy review, which helps ensure I am keeping on top of sector data analysis and reading up on reports. And I have engaged in work that involves direct contact with members, whether it is running consultations or supporting #WeAreInternational grant projects. I look forward to seeing where UKCISA takes me next on my journey in international student policy!”

**Iona Murdoch, Policy Officer**



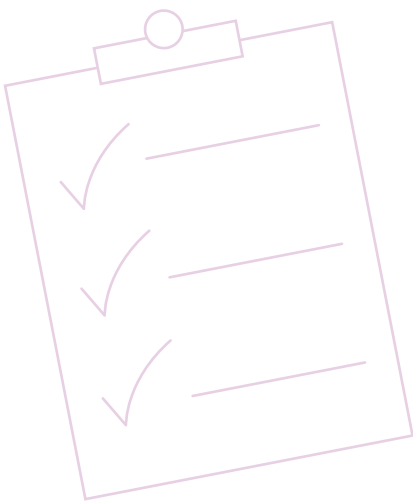


“What truly distinguishes UKCISA is its commitment to making a real difference in the lives of international students in the UK. Knowing that our work directly impacts their experiences and fosters a promising future for prospective international students makes me proud to work here. Time after time, I have been impressed by the dedication, passion, and empathy of my

colleagues at UKCISA, who advocate every day for the thousands of international students here in the UK.

As a former international student myself, I am also particularly appreciative of UKCISA's commitment to amplifying the international student voice through the work of the #WeAreInternational student ambassadors. I know first hand that it can be difficult to feel at home and supported while pursuing your studies abroad, but being part of UKCISA and its work gives me hope for future generations of international students who will come to the UK with just their suitcases and dreams of a brighter future.”

**Carolyn Sowa, Programme Officer  
(Student Ambassadors)**

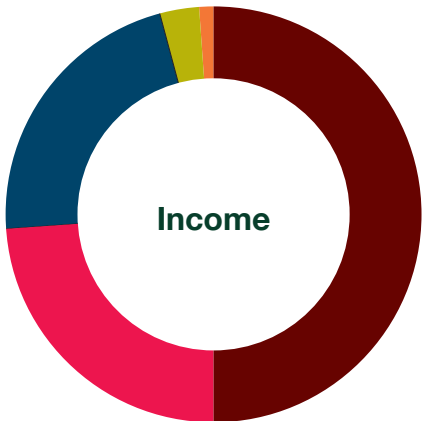


## Finance and funding

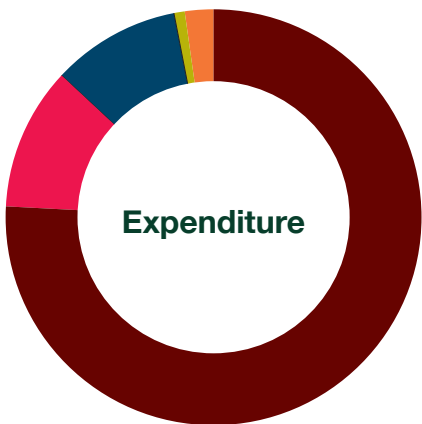
**76%** 

of UKCISA's income comes from our members – through annual subscriptions and attendance at training and our annual conference.

### Financial summary 2023–24



Income	£1,627,011	100%
Membership subscriptions	£851,530	52%
Training and conferences	£394,919	24%
DfE grant	£340,000	21%
Scottish government grant	£20,000	1%
Other Income	£20,563	1%



Expenditure	£1,556,834	100%
Staff	£1,186,511	76%
Operational costs	£176,687	11%
Training and conference	£147,908	10%
Projects/programmes	£17,427	1%
Legal, professional and financial	£28,301	2%

Figures are subject to audit.

## With thanks to our staff team and Board of Trustees

We are a small organisation of staff and freelancers with over 400 members, including UK universities, further education colleges and students' unions.

**Anne Marie Graham**, Chief Executive

### Advice and Training

**Heather Knight**, Head of Advice and Training

**Christopher Benjamin**, Advice and Training Officer

**Deepa Chadha**, Advice and Training Officer

**Kate Handforth**, Advice and Training Officer

**Tema Nwulu**, Advice and Training Officer

**Sarah Rimmington**, Advice and Training Officer

**Robert Young**, Advice and Training Officer

**Andrew Humphrey**, Adviser (freelance)

**Yasmin Khan**, Adviser (freelance)

**Ros Martin**, Adviser (freelance)

### Engagement and Partnerships

**Yinbo Yu**, Head of Engagement and Partnerships

**Carolyn Sowa**, Programme Officer (Student Ambassadors)

**Anne Salter**, Communications Manager

**David Mitchell-Baker**, Communications Officer

### Finance and Resources

**Abida Khan**, Head of Finance and Resources

**Anushka Gunawardena**, Senior Finance and Resources Officer

**Jody O'Brien**, Office Administrator

**Ben Miller Williams**, Finance and Resources Officer (freelance)

### Member Services and Policy

**Will Burton**, Events and Training Manager

**Iona Murdoch**, Policy Officer

**Oscar Triggs**, Website Project Officer

**Daniel Hooper**, Membership Manager

**So-Ha Au**, Membership and Web Assistant

Thanks to our previous staff members:

**Jessica Benham**, Communications Manager

**Tom Davison**, Interim Administrative Assistant

**Kailee Parsons**, Communications Assistant

**Femina Fernandes**, Administrative Assistant Intern

**Joseph Callanan**, Governance Officer

**Sarah Golding**, Senior Finance and Resources Officer

**Julie Allen**, Director of Member Services and Policy

**Qiqing Deng**, Conference Assistant (fixed term)

## Meet our Board of Trustees

**Lord Karan Bilimoria**, President of UKCISA

**Prof Koen Lamberts**, President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Sheffield (Chair)

**Ross Porter**, Associate Director, Visa Compliance and Financial Aid, London Business School (Vice-Chair)

**Peter Barnes**, Chief Financial Officer, Study Portals (Honorary Treasurer)

**Mervyn Adams**, International Compliance Manager, City of Glasgow College

**Lynsey Bendon**, Assistant Director (Operations and Student Experience), University of Sunderland

**Hannah Brian**, Deputy Chief Executive (Student Engagement), Leeds University Union

**Emma Gwynnett-Davies**, Manager, International@CampusLife, Swansea University

**Maria Loray**, International Project Coordinator, The Union, Manchester Metropolitan University

**Adityavarman Mehta**, #WeAreInternational Student Ambassador, University of Leeds

**Alex Proudfoot**, Chief Executive, Independent Higher Education

**Sally Saca**, Head of International Student Advice Team, Oxford Brookes University

**Laura Rose-Troup**, Head of International, Newcastle College

**Cat Turhan**, Director of Membership Services, Imperial College Union

**Hamish Walker**, Student Immigration Manager, Robert Gordon University

**Lizzie Wright**, Head of International Student Support, Imperial College London

The following trustees chair these committees:

**Finance, audit and risk committee:** **Peter Barnes**, Chief Financial Officer, Study Portals (Honorary Treasurer)

**Membership committee:** **Alex Proudfoot**, Chief Executive, Independent Higher Education

**Nominations committee:** **Ross Porter**, Associate Director, Visa Compliance and Financial Aid, London Business School and Vice-Chair of UKCISA Board of Trustees

**People and organisational development committee:** **Lynsey Bendon**, Assistant Director (Operations and Student Experience), University of Sunderland

**Strategic advisory committee:** **Lizzie Wright**, Head of International Student Support, Imperial College London

**Student advisory group:** **Adityavarman Mehta**, #WeAreInternational Student Ambassador, University of Leeds (Chair) and **Vartika Khandelwal**, #WeAreInternational Student Ambassador, University of Liverpool (Vice-Chair)

**UKCISA**

Woburn House  
20–24 Tavistock Square  
London WC1H 9HQ  
ukcisa.org.uk  
@ukcisa

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 Woburn House, 20–24 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9HQ.

**UK Council  
for International  
Student Affairs**

**UKCISA**