

UK Council
for International
Student Affairs

UKCISA



Annual review

2021–22

Introduction

Dear colleagues,

We are coming to the end of another challenging year, as the Covid-19 pandemic and the UK's exit from the EU continues to transform the international higher education sector. This year, we have faced new challenges and come together to support students from Afghanistan and those affected by the war in Ukraine.

UKCISA has worked hard to support its members and international students throughout this period, where we have seen a return to in-person activity, the launch of a new Graduate route, and new fees and student support regulations across all four nations.

We have focused on five areas, outlined in our 2020-23 strategy, to achieve our vision:

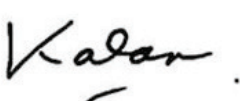
- Influencing policy
- Delivering world-leading advice and training
- Empowering our membership
- Disseminating our knowledge
- Developing excellence

This year, we welcomed over 600,000 international students to our campuses – a huge achievement and a testament to the hard work and dedication of the higher education sector. We will continue to support our members to deliver a positive international student experience, as we emerge from the pandemic and rebuild.

Looking ahead, we are excited to share the #WeAreInternational Student Charter with the sector, providing guidance on the fundamental principles for delivering a world-class international student experience, from pre-arrival to post-graduation.

Thank you to our members for their contribution to our successes, our team of trustees and staff for their dedication and hard work, and our #WeAreInternational Student Ambassadors for sharing their experiences to improve the international student experience. We would also like to thank our funders for their generous support.

Signed by,



Lord Karan Bilimoria,
President



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



Anne Marie Graham,
Chief Executive



Lord Karan
Bilimoria

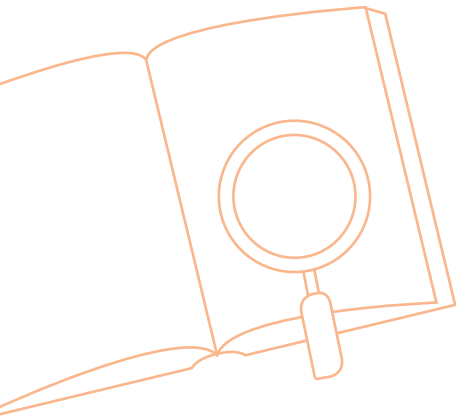


Professor
Koen Lamberts



Anne Marie
Graham

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.

Covid concessions

UKCISA lobbied government departments to adopt measures to support international students during the pandemic. This included calling for:

- Concessions to the immigration rules to allow international students in the UK, who would normally need to make immigration applications from their country of residence, to apply in the UK instead.
- The continuation of concessions that provided immigration protection for those who couldn't leave the UK but who didn't meet the requirements for any other route.

Alongside other sector bodies, UKCISA successfully lobbied for the extension of the option for students to continue their studies by distance learning. We also advocated for specific assurances in law and guidance that those who had relied on these concessions would not be penalised when applying under the Student or Graduate route.

Global crises

We responded quickly to support our members and international students during global crises that impacted the UK education sector, including the war in Ukraine and the crisis in Afghanistan. We:

- Shared resources and useful information including explaining complex concessions for UKCISA members, students from Afghanistan and Ukraine and their families.
- Co-signed a joint letter to the Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Education which called for specific asks for Chevening Scholars, the Chevening programme and the processing of visa applications for Afghan students and staff to take place in third countries. The letter also called for the grant of exceptional assurance for those Afghans already in the UK whose visas were due to expire imminently while they submitted asylum claims. Additionally, we liaised with UKVI on concessions around documentary evidence for Afghan students.



- Contributed to a task and finish group with other sector organisations and government representatives to respond to the emerging crisis in Afghanistan, striving to ensure that as many Afghan nationals as possible were able to reach the UK to continue or begin their studies.
- Joined a rapid task and finish group to advocate for provisions for Ukrainian students and their family members, and to ensure support for overseas nationals affected by the war in Ukraine.

Graduate route

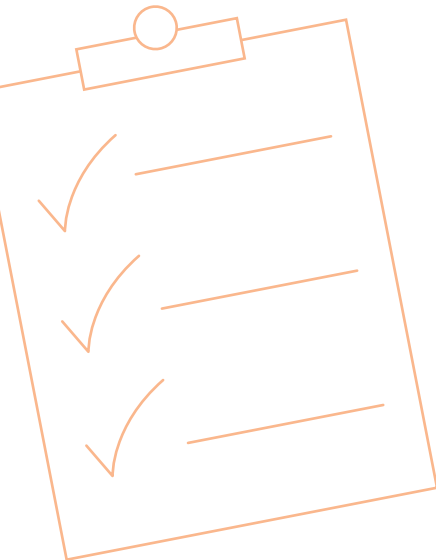
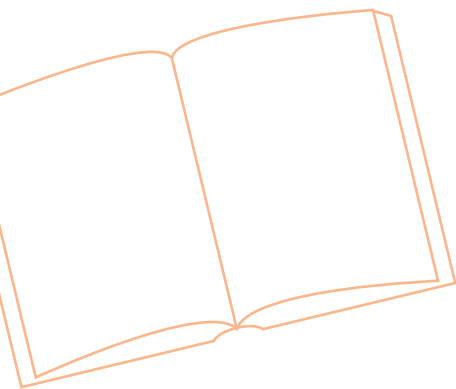
Prior to the Graduate route launching, UKCISA and its members gave extensive feedback to the Simplification of the Rules Taskforce on the draft immigration rules for the Graduate route, which the Home Office student migration policy team found constructive and useful in the development of the route. UKCISA successfully lobbied to allow those with permission under the Graduate route to be self-employed.

We also convened a cross-sector group, bringing together member institutions, sector organisations and Home Office colleagues to discuss the technical development of the route, and its implications for member institutions' reporting requirements.

Since the Graduate route launched, we have gathered insight from our members on how the scheme is working and if any improvements are needed through our member symposiums, online forum, and member advice line. This insight enabled us to proactively raise issues with the Home Office and sector colleagues and convene meetings with the Home Office's student migration policy team to clarify the rules and guidance for all student immigration routes.

'Home' fees

We provided information and tailored advice for students and members on the new regulations for determining 'home' fee status after the UK's exit from the EU. This enabled students to understand their fee status and helped our members to feel informed and confidently assess and advise international students in their fee assessment work. We also liaised regularly with government departments to seek clarity on complex rules and suggest improvements to the regulations.



“The collaboration that lies at the heart of ISEG is truly inspirational. As a collective of sector bodies who are committed to enhancing the employability of international students and improving the outcomes of international graduates, we are in a unique position to harness the expertise of key stakeholders – across many different areas of specialism – to truly make a difference.”

Gemma Green, AGCAS Head of External Relations

“During my time as a #WeAreInternational Student Ambassador, I have spoken with members of the Home Office about some of the challenges I faced when applying for a student visa, and I was invited to take part in a focus group led by the Scottish Government about the development of a Scottish International Education Strategy. I value these opportunities to use my voice and contribute in a meaningful way to making international students’ educational journey in the UK a better experience.”

Claudia Yanez,
#WeAreInternational
Student Ambassador

International Student Employability Group (ISEG)

The International Student Employability Group (ISEG) coordinate the higher education sector’s efforts to enhance the employability of international students and graduates. ISEG, now in its second year, identify areas that would benefit from sector-wide collaboration, share examples of good practice, and plan, implement and evaluate projects to enhance the employment prospects of international graduates.

This year, the group published **a guide for employers** to highlight the benefits of hiring international students and graduates and to raise awareness of the Graduate route and Skilled Worker route.

Following the decision of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to cease international calling to collect graduate outcome data in December 2021, ISEG has focused on **outlining the need for reliable data** for the higher education sector and provided HESA with an established network of key sector stakeholders to discuss international graduate outcomes.

Members of ISEG: UKCISA, AGCAS, Association of Colleges, British Council, BUILA, Institute of Student Employers, Prospects/Jisc, Independent HE, Universities UK International, Universities Scotland, and #WeAreInternational student ambassadors.

The immigration system and the higher education sector

UKCISA gains valuable insights into the immigration system from students, members and direct communication with the Home Office. In November 2021, UKCISA submitted a formal response to a call for evidence from the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) as part of its investigation into the relationship between the immigration system and the higher education sector.

#WeAreInternational Student Ambassador programme

We are proud to work with and learn from our student ambassadors to help deliver our vision for a world-class international student experience. From advising on core activities, to speaking at sector meetings, conferences and events, their knowledge and dedication has been integral to delivering on our ambition to put the student voice at the heart of policymaking.

Delivering world-leading advice and training

Our members said:

“I loved that the trainers spoke about the categories in detail and explained in plain English what little things mean.”

“It was excellent – the whole topic is now a lot clearer in my mind and I know where to go to look for further clarity.”

“The trainers were very approachable and welcoming of questions and comments during the session which is something I always really like about UKCISA training. You don’t feel judged.”

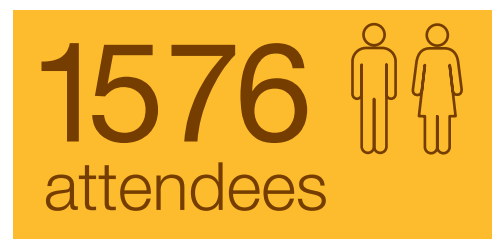
Our team of experts provide high quality advice and guidance and deliver a national training programme that is relevant and responsive to the external policy context. We support our members through changes to the visa and immigration system and encourage career progression in international support.

Advice lines

Our advice lines are open to our members and to the public, offering a unique route to experts in the field of international student support. This year we had over 1500 enquiries on our member advice line and over 3200 enquiries on our student advice line.



Online training programme



The UKCISA team continue to deliver an extensive and impactful training programme online. This has allowed members from across the UK to attend without incurring travel time and cost. Our competitive pricing has enabled multiple team members to attend training sessions together, facilitating knowledge-sharing across teams. UKCISA has responded to the needs of members in a timely manner, sharing information and advice on priority areas in a year where there has been a multitude of change.

UKCISA Manual

“Thank you so much for introducing me to the manual. It’s a real game changer.”

UKCISA member



Our unique online manual is an essential guide to the rules and regulations affecting international students, covering immigration, fees and student support. Our expert team analyse changes to rules and guidance and provide context and analysis for our members. The manual is an indispensable reference point for UKCISA members.

This year, we have added links to primary sources at the top of each page so that our members can find current, relevant information easily and quickly. Additionally, we have archived detailed historical information so that experienced advisers can access information about key immigration changes.

Empowering our membership

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.

427
members



77



further education
institutions

184

higher education
institutions

119
students'
unions

47
corporate and
education sector
organisations

Our members said:

“Overall just a brilliant experience. I attended my first UKCISA conference in 2019 so I wasn’t sure how the online equivalent was going to compare but I was very pleasantly surprised.”

“This was my first conference and I found it really engaging and inspiring. It is great to have access to recorded sessions to catch up.”

“I absolutely loved this year’s virtual conference. Brilliant set up, content and ability to access sessions.”

UKCISA Annual Conference 2021

Due to Covid-19, UKCISA Annual Conference 2021 took place online over five days. The programme comprised 63 events including live workshops, interactive and pre-recorded sessions, and social events (including yoga, mindfulness and a virtual disco). Keynote sessions included a panel with the UK Immigration Minister and the Home Office on the day of the Graduate route launch, a discussion with Professor Sir Steve Smith, International Education Champion, and an interview with Colin Yeo, barrister and founder of Free Movement.

A student fringe event ran alongside the members’ event with two Facebook live sessions on the Graduate route and employability with 429 attendees.

A red rectangular graphic. On the left, the number '5' is large and bold, followed by the word 'days' in a smaller font. To the right is a white calendar icon with five days marked with an 'X'. Below these elements, the text 'UKCISA Annual Conference' is written in a white, sans-serif font.

A dark blue rectangular graphic. At the top is a white calendar icon with a star inside. Below it, the number '63' is large and bold, followed by the text 'online events' in a smaller font.

A yellow rectangular graphic. On the left, the number '429' is large and bold. To the right is a grid of 429 small white person icons arranged in three rows of 143. Below the number and icons, the text 'attendees to our Graduate route and employability session' is written in a smaller font.



Member symposiums

We gave members the opportunity to discuss key issues affecting themselves and international students at our popular member symposiums. These member-led online events are an invaluable way for our members to share best practice and for UKCISA to keep up to date with issues affecting the sector and raise issues with relevant stakeholders.

This year, we held five symposiums covering diverse topics: lessons from this year's intake of international students, the future of professional development at UKCISA, the introduction of the Graduate route, scams targeting international students and supporting students in times of crisis (held jointly with AMOSSHE).

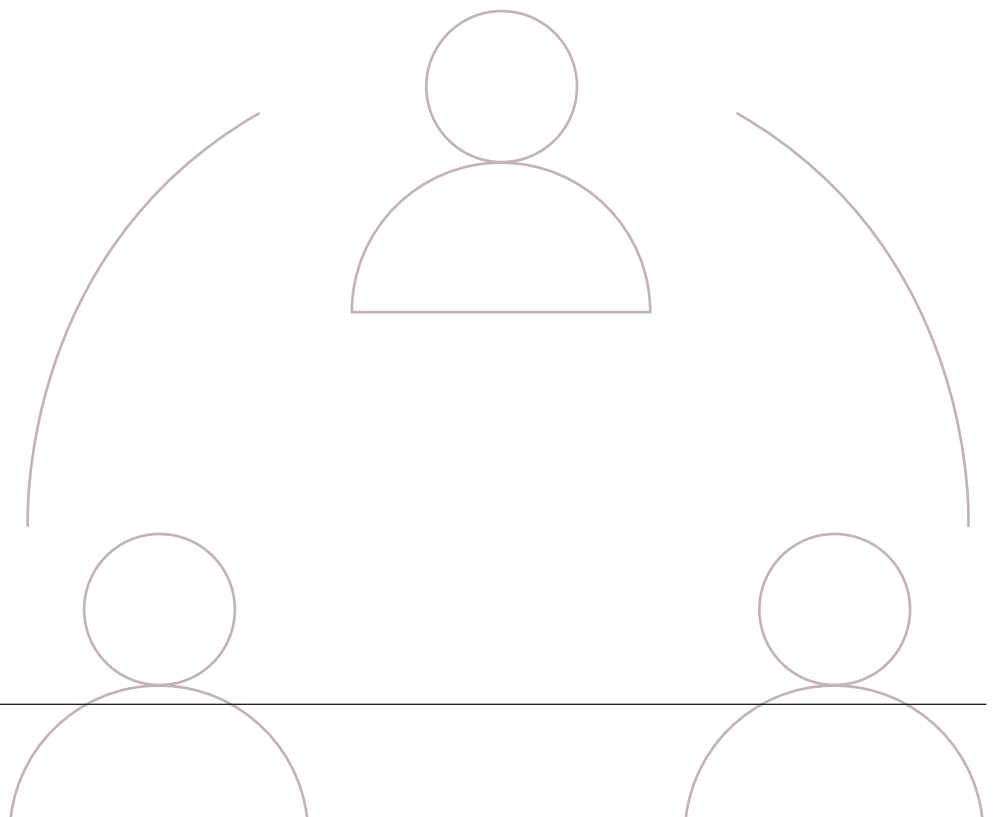
Following the session on the Graduate route in December, we arranged a follow-up session looking at challenges posed by the introduction of the Graduate route that provided members with a further space to raise concerns and better understand how its introduction would affect them.

Peer support scheme

This year, we opened applications for our new peer support scheme which will bring UKCISA members together to develop their confidence and advocacy skills. The pilot scheme aims to create a support network, equipping those involved to help and support each other. For this year's pilot, we selected 15 individuals to take part and share their feedback on the scheme.

“We wanted to convene a peer support scheme to help our members gain confidence and advocacy skills to help undertake the role in the most effective way, while maintaining self-care. We hope that this scheme provides some support to members in doing the invaluable work they do to support international students.”

Anne Marie Graham,
Chief Executive, UKCISA



What do you like about being a member of UKCISA?

“The advice line is fantastic. The website is always clear. I feel UKCISA really gets the sector and knows how to represent it. One of the best organisations available to those working in the HE sector.”

“The impact on mental wellbeing and confidence in self-ability has been significant in the last 12 months. Therefore, accessing the website and manual reinforces my ability to give clear, concise, and accurate advice. Combining this with the feeling of being a part of a bigger network of fabulous people, has been invaluable.”

“Being in a community of professionals who all want to do their best for their students, who are happy to share advice and guidance to achieve that and provide an opportunity to push for changes where they are needed.”

“Friendly, helpful staff who are always there to tell me what I need to know and advise me in the best way possible.”

Disseminating our knowledge

“Being part of the #WeAreInternational Student Ambassador programme has truly been a privilege. I have had the chance to meet and work with an incredibly diverse, talented and passionate group of people, and I have been given a platform to share my story and advocate for a better international student experience in the UK.”

Simran Mahajan,
#WeAreInternational Student Ambassador and Student Advisory Group Chair 2022

“The whole journey of the #WeAreInternational Student Ambassador programme has been really empowering for me and has helped me develop a new level of confidence. Throughout the year, I attended training that taught me skills such as building relationships, writing and communicating with impact, and policymaking. Moreover, it has helped me work on projects at my own university.”

Melody Sequeira,
#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.

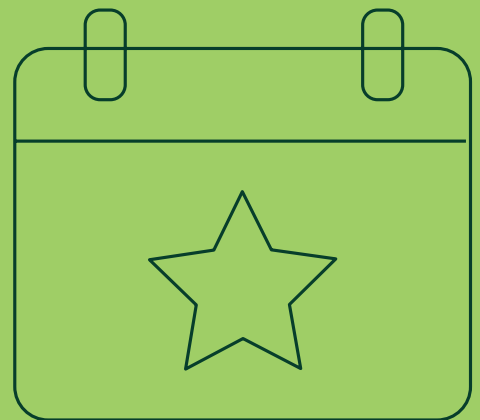
[#WeAreInternational Student Ambassador programme](#)

The #WeAreInternational Student Ambassador programme is UKCISA's network of global future leaders. We empower international students to shape a 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 2021–22, we appointed two cohorts of [#WeAreInternational Student Ambassadors](#). From sharing their international student experience at annual sector conferences such as BUILA, UUKi, and AMOSSHE, to taking part in focus groups with Scottish Government, HEPI, and UCAS, our student ambassadors developed their policy knowledge and leadership skills to lead change.

In 2021–22, #WeAreInternational Student Ambassadors spoke at over

40
events



“UKCISA Fest builds bridges among international students, sector partners, and policymakers by inviting everyone to discuss and share information and experiences to support international students’ success in the UK.

As an international student myself, I truly believe UKCISA Fest brings everyone together to tackle real issues that international students face, and we are going further to make a difference in the UK education sector for the international student community.”

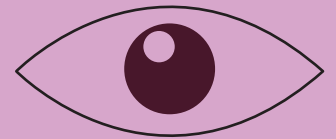
Siqi Jia, #WeAreInternational Student Ambassador

Bringing international students together at UKCISA Fest

In November 2021, we hosted our second UKCISA Fest, a three-day online series of events for international students in the UK. Nearly 200 delegates participated in 17 student-led webinars and interactive sessions, where they explored and discussed diverse aspects of their student experience including:

- academic experience during the pandemic
- mental health
- employability
- engaging with students’ unions
- the new Graduate route
- shaping the #WeAreInternational Student Charter (a student-led document providing guidance for institutions and organisations to deliver a world-class international student experience, from pre-arrival to post-graduation)

3 facebook live sessions

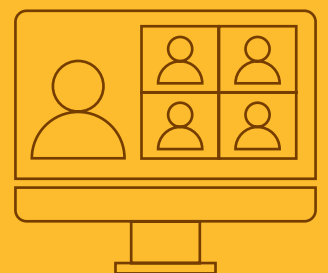


(935 views)

Nearly

200

delegates at 17 student-led interactive webinars



Providing trusted guidance

Our website is a trusted source of information and guidance for our members and international students and their families. This year, we saw an overall increase in visits to our website and an increase in web traffic from overseas.

Top five web pages:

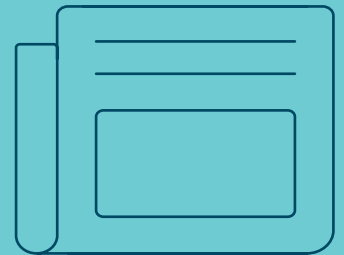
- Fee status for England
- Government student support
- Home or overseas fees: the basics
- Covid-19 information for international students
- Student work



Top news story:

How the UK's red list impacts international students and travel

(42,291 views)



Web traffic:

Over 3.5 million visits to our website

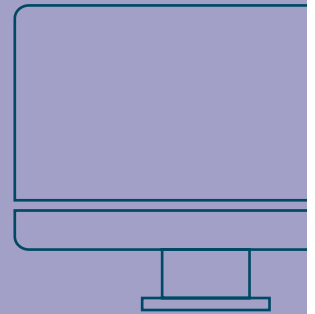
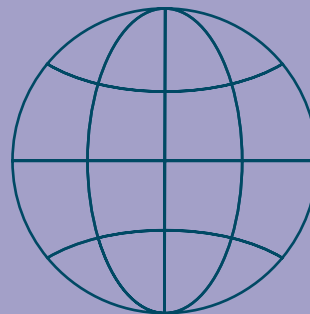
UK – **42%**

Rest of the world – **58%**



Top 10 website users across the world:

1. United Kingdom
2. India
3. Nigeria
4. United States
5. Pakistan
6. China
7. Hong Kong
8. France
9. Netherlands
10. Germany



Promoting UKCISA

Our social media channels bring together a community of UKCISA members and international students. In 2021–22, we saw a significant increase in followers across all channels, and a rise in engagement on Twitter. We used social media to communicate urgent and important information to members and international students, including updates about the Covid-19 visa concessions and support for students from Afghanistan and Ukraine.

Followers:

 7458 Annual increase +25%

 5446 Annual increase +50%

 3474 Annual increase +90%

Developing excellence

The commitment and expertise of UKCISA staff is 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.

Governance review

In July 2021, we undertook a full governance review with NCVO to ensure compliance with charity law and enable us to deliver on our charitable objectives. The review reported that UKCISA is supported by committed and passionate trustees and senior management team. It identified further improvements to enhance UKCISA's governance and ways of working in the future to maintain its robust reputation with members, funders and other stakeholders.

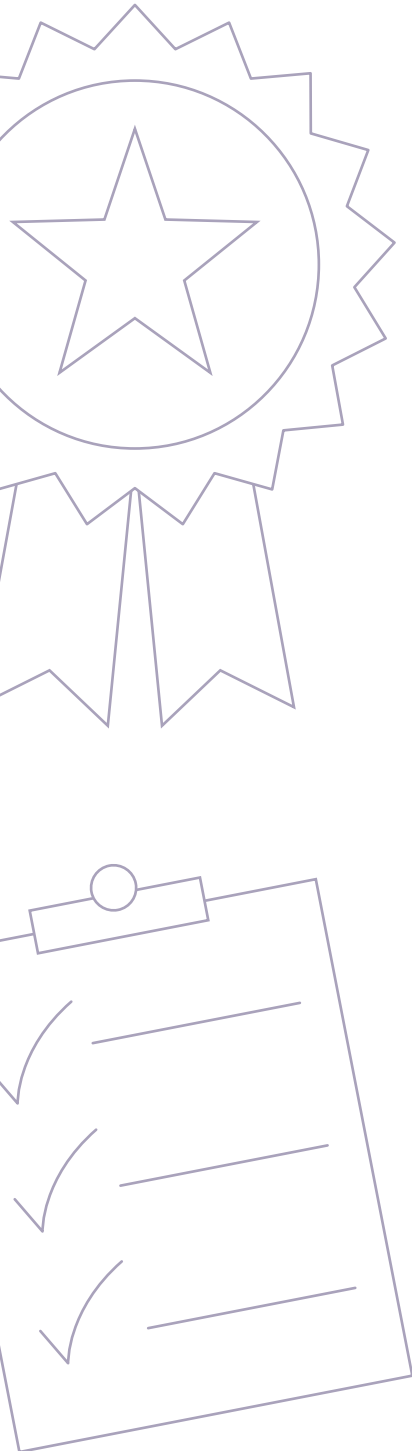
As a result of the review, the trustees established a governance project group to implement many of its recommendations, and work will continue on this project through to late 2022. The project will look at the Board's committee structures, as well as recruitment and selection to enhance equality, diversity and inclusion.

Organisations that held observer status to October 2021 will form part of the new committee structure to give them an active voice in shaping UKCISA's strategic direction.

Supporting staff

UKCISA engaged regularly with staff throughout the year to listen and respond to their views on returning to work in the office. The decision was taken to fully support hybrid-working across the organisation in the long term, including for future recruits. This model retains an office space to ensure maximum flexibility for staff, enabling those who want to work in the office to do so, while allowing those who prefer to work from home to continue to collaborate virtually.

UKCISA joined an employee assistance programme to provide additional support for staff and their families, enabling them to access confidential advice and guidance on a range of topics, at a time convenient to them.



What's it like working at UKCISA?



“As an international student, I am grateful for the opportunity to work at UKCISA – an organisation that ‘walks the talk’ when it comes to improving the international student experience in the UK.

Pursuing a full-time master’s degree while working is a challenging task. Add an extra layer of working in a different country and it can become quite intimidating, but from my very first day at UKCISA, my leaders and co-workers have made the experience much easier for me.

I have always been passionate about policymaking and advocacy because I believe that good policy can enact positive social change, especially in education. My work at UKCISA allows me to connect theory and practice, bridge my postgraduate studies with my professional skills and competencies, and contribute to the development of educational policy and practice in the UK.

Throughout my journey, I have received a lot of support: from my family, friends, my professional network, and many others back in Brazil and here in the UK. This support contributes to my sense of duty to give back all the support I receive and apply the best of my abilities to help other international students thrive. UKCISA is the best place for me to do this.”

Vinicius Campos, Policy Intern



“When I joined UKCISA, I was immediately struck by the professionalism, dedication and commitment to improving the international student experience among my colleagues.

It’s been an exciting experience to shape guidance, policy, and the law as part of the Advice and Training team. Equally, it has been a truly humbling experience advocating for international students and the education sector at platforms where their voices are not heard.

I am grateful for the professional development opportunities I have been afforded at UKCISA. From obtaining OISC level 1 registration, training delivery and development, attending regular meetings to advocate for refugees and asylum seekers as part of STAR’s Access to Higher Education Working Group, and attending meetings as part of ILPA’s Racial Justice and Equality Working group.

I am proud to work for an inclusive organisation that values many voices and is so committed to international students and the education sector.”

Tema Nwulu, Advice & Training Officer

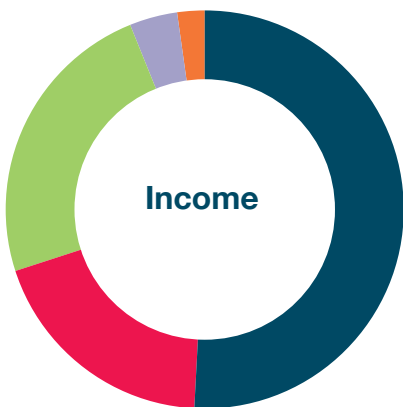
Finance and funding

70% 

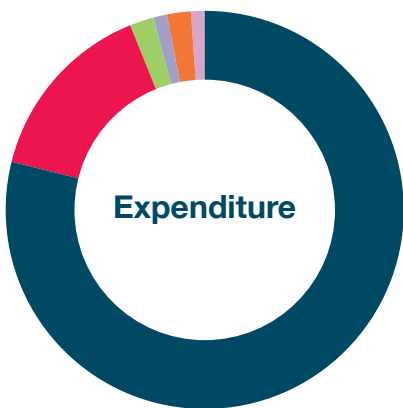
of UKCISA's income comes from our members – through annual subscriptions and attending training and our annual conference.

The grants from the Department for Education (DfE) and Scottish Government also help us to deliver a wide range of services including free advice and guidance to international students and their families in the UK and around the world.

Financial summary 2021–22



Income	1,454,774	100%
Membership subscriptions	741,800	51%
Training and conferences	270,337	19%
DfE grant	350,000	24%
Scottish government grant	60,000	4%
Other income	32,636	2%



Expenditure	1,257,685	100.00%
Staff	990,877	79%
Operational costs	192,017	15%
Training and conference	26,914	2%
Projects	12,207	1%
Legal, professional and financial	23,057	2%
Other costs	12,613	1%

With thanks to our team and board of trustees

We are a small organisation of 25 staff and freelancers with over 400 members including UK universities, further education colleges and students' unions.

Anne Marie Graham, Chief Executive

Advice & Training

Heather Knight, Head of Advice & Training

Christopher Benjamin, Advice & Training Officer

Deepa Chadha, Advice & Training Officer

Kate Handforth, Advice & Training Officer

Tema Nwulu, Advice & Training Officer

Sarah Rimmington, Advice & Training Officer

Robert Young, Advice & Training Officer

Andrew Humphrey, Adviser (freelance)

Yasmin Khan, Adviser (freelance)

Ros Martin, Adviser (freelance)

Engagement and partnerships

Yinbo Yu, Head of Engagement and Partnerships

Jessica Benham, Senior Digital Communications Officer

Tess Thomas, Student Engagement Officer

Finance & Resources

Abida Khan, Head of Finance & Resources

Jody O'Brien, Office Administrator

Judy Theophanous, Finance Administrator

Ben Miller Williams, Finance & Resources Officer (freelance)

Member Services and Policy

Julie Allen, Director of Member Services and Policy

Will Burton, Training & Events Coordinator

Vinicius Campos, Policy Intern (fixed term)

Iona Murdoch, Policy Officer

Oscar Triggs, Website Project Officer (fixed term)

Daniel Hooper, Membership Manager

So-Ha Au, Membership & Web Assistant

Meet our Board of Trustees

Lord Karan Bilimoria, President of UKCISA

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

Alan Mackay, Deputy Vice Principal International, Director Edinburgh Global, University of Edinburgh (Honorary Treasurer)

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

Prof Nora de Leeuw, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Engineering & Physical Sciences, University of Leeds

Lizzie Huckle, Head of International Student Support, Imperial College London

Ross Porter, Associate Director, Visa Compliance & Financial Aid, London Business School

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

Hamish Walker, Student Immigration Manager, Robert Gordon University

Simran Mahajan, #WeAreInternational Student Ambassador, Cardiff University

The following organisations had observer status until October 2021:

- Association of Colleges
- Association of International Student Advisers (AISA)
- BUILA
- English UK
- GuildHE
- Immigration Compliance Network (ICN)
- National Union of Students (NUS)
- Universities UK

UKCISA

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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). It's registered office is at 3-5 Islington High Street, London N1 9LQ.

UKCISA gratefully acknowledges the financial support it receives from the Department for Education, and from the Scottish Government.

**UK Council
for International
Student Affairs**

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