Immigration Compliance Network
Inaugural Meeting, 12 June 2014, London Metropolitan University

Meeting report
Around 60 people attended a very lively and successful meeting on 12 June.

Establishment of the ICN

Coordinating Committee
The initial working group is seeking five additional members to form the national coordinating committee. Anybody interested in joining the committee should submit a paragraph outlining why they would like to join and what they would bring to the committee to n.stevenson@adm.leeds.ac.uk by 11 July 2014. If more than five expressions of interest are received we will organise an election.

Regional Groups
Short regional meetings were held on the day, with some regions better represented than others, mostly for geographical reasons. Our apologies, though, to colleagues from the North East who were at a Home Office event. We didn't know about the clash of dates. Thanks to Joy for holding the fort and also to Sinead and Alison who travelled from Northern Ireland and Scotland respectively. London and the South East were so well represented that two groups may form.

The following members have agreed to act as initial points of contact for regional groups:

London and SE - Sophie Ferguson, London Metropolitan University s.ferguson@londonmet.ac.uk and Rachel Maguire, City and Islington College Rachel.Maguire@candi.ac.uk

Midlands - Jo Cully, Birmingham City University Jo.Cully@BCU.AC.UK

North East - Joy Grenyer, Northumbria University joy.grenyer@NORTHUMBRIA.AC.UK

Northern Ireland - Sinead Murtagh, Queens University Belfast s.murtagh@qub.ac.uk

North West – Reena Modasiya, INTO Manchester, Reena.modasiya@into.uk.com

Scotland - Alison Young, Robert Gordon University a.young9@rgu.ac.uk

South West and South Wales - Jim Price, University of Exeter J.R.Price@exeter.ac.uk

Yorkshire & Humberside - Alex Warren, University of Bradford A.Warren1@bradford.ac.uk

Please email your regional contact to ensure that you are invited to regional meetings and included in any related correspondence. You can choose which region to join regardless of the location of your institution. Regions can then appoint their regional lead(s) etc when they meet.
We hope that in the future agenda and minutes for regional meetings will be stored in a central, accessible location to enable members to visit other regions as they wish.

Note about membership

It is an important principle of the ICN that we aim to provide a peer-led, peer-supporting, safe environment for people to discuss concerns openly. We therefore expect, in the first instance at least, that members of ICN will be educational institutions who are UKCISA members. ICN membership will in the first instance be arranged via the regional contacts.

Notes from themed discussions

1. Preparing for an audit

Conduct internal audits and regular spot checks on records
Collate and maintain a sponsor compliance file
Consider "cross-audits" – e.g. with another institution or Tier 2 colleagues, or get help from colleagues who audit other activities
Develop a communications plan from the moment notification of audit is received through to audit and feedback

Prepare files in readiness – whether hard or soft copies, records must be accessible
Explain how student records system works a the beginning of the audit
Be aware of weaknesses rather than letting auditors highlight them
Explain/show your plans to address weaknesses
Show compliance governance including audit trails of decision-making processes
Be aware of anomalies such as non-Tier 4 students and be prepared to show records relating to them too
Make available paperwork relating to branches/partners and agents
Be prepared for Tier 2 files to be requested too

2. Research students and temporary absence

Good idea to provide a document outlining students' rights and responsibilities
Use panels rather than individuals to consider complex cases

Confusion and variation around how different institutions define and use suspension/interruption of study and "authorised absence"
SMS reporting options don't really accommodate
Why report absences? Some institutions do, some don't.
What about fieldwork? Some report, some don't.
Is it different if supervision continues during a period when a student is not actually on campus?
Challenges of treating students equitably, particularly during pregnancy, illness etc.

3. HEI discretion to assess English language competence

Tracking academic progress of students who are accepted with non-SELT qualifications to create body of evidence to demonstrate English level is appropriate for degree-level study.
Could ICN coordinate this sector-wide? Safety in numbers!

4. Record-keeping for non-Tier 4 students

Checking all students' passports and leave regardless of course, and keeping copies for audit purposes
Getting departments to ensure all courses (however short) recorded on student record system to facilitate tracking and enrolment
Restricting visa support letters to specific teams to keep track
Sanctions if people don't present evidence of renewed leave