

## A smoother journey

The British Council's role in  
visas and immigration

# Enhancing the international student experience: pre-departure, immigration and orientation

## Introduction

Working closely with the UK Border Agency (UKBA), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UKCISA: the UK Council for International Student Affairs, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), educational institutions and other sponsors and partners, the British Council aims to ensure that visa and entry arrangements are more user-friendly for international students and strives to make their stay in the UK a positive experience.

We do this by offering guidance and information to students, agents and the education community worldwide and by sharing information and best practice with UKBA and other stakeholders.

Here is an overview of our work in supporting the introduction of the new points-based visa system and a recap of our general support for students who are preparing to come to the UK.

## Sharing information

As a major stakeholder the British Council was invited by UKBA in 2006, to participate in the Joint Education Taskforce (JET) to develop and share research, resources and insights that support the aims and objectives of the Taskforce and the new points-based system:

[www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/workingwithus/stakeholders/jet](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/workingwithus/stakeholders/jet).

Feedback on visa issues from our overseas offices and educational institutions in the UK are discussed once a month at the UK-based British Council Communications Group (chaired by Sheila Lumsden, Head, Contracts and Projects, Training and Scholarships, UK) and fed through to JET and UKBA senior staff, which helps to highlight the main issues worldwide.

Two online questionnaires were sent to British Council staff on hub and spoke/immigration issues. Their responses helped to improve collaboration between visa sections and the British Council; they also help to raise awareness of the problems faced by overseas applicants, and measure volumes and approval rates.

The British Council has been conducting its student decision-making research since 2007, benefiting from the co-operation of UKBA. This research gathers the opinions of prospective international students and tells us that, above all, potential students value a low-cost, quick and transparent visa application process. See:

[www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-information-student-decision-making.htm](http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-information-student-decision-making.htm).

UKBA has reviewed official consultation documents and listened to our views and those of other JET members at JET meetings and at meetings with government ministers. As a result of this feedback, a number of changes were implemented to their policy guidance in relation to the new points-based system. These changes can be found on the UKBA website at:

[www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/pbs-new-forms-for-students](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/pbs-new-forms-for-students).

The British Council is also represented on the Training and Advice Policy Committee of UKCISA, the Public Diplomacy Strategy Board, the Education UK Partnership Board and the Prime Minister's Initiative Board.

The British Council has licences for a number of projects, under Tier 5 of PBS, to support specific UK government objectives. We offer colleagues (project managers) guidance and support with registering for sponsorship. We also maintain a database with details of all British Council Tier 5 projects, which includes dates licences were issued, rating, clients, key contacts and other 'sponsor management' roles.



## Providing guidance to students, agents and the education community worldwide

The British Council provides information about immigration and living and working in the UK to international students, education providers and agents.

### Pre-departure and orientation support

Pre-departure briefings are organised by the British Council in many overseas countries for students coming to the UK to study to help them prepare for their trip:

[www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-pre-departure-briefings.htm](http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-pre-departure-briefings.htm).

### Publications

The British Council has updated and distributed the joint UK Border Agency/British Council/BIS suite of materials produced for students and UK education institutions to reflect the new immigration and working regulations.

- **First steps – a pre-departure guide for international students coming to study in the UK** – Covers immigration, fees and maintenance costs; preparing for their travel to the UK; arrival in the UK; settling in; and useful organisations. There are also supporting booklets *HIV and Aids* and *Sources of funding for international students*. This guide is sent to all British Council overseas offices and given out at pre-departure briefings overseas. Latest issue 2009.

Available from:

[www.educationuk.org/pls/hot\\_bc/page\\_pls\\_user\\_advice?d=4461](http://www.educationuk.org/pls/hot_bc/page_pls_user_advice?d=4461).

- **Comfort Zone – Making sure that your time in the UK is safe and enjoyable** – This booklet is about personal safety for international students who are studying and living in the UK. It was researched by the British Council and written in partnership with the Home Office and the Police Association of Higher Education Liaison Officers and the British Transport Police. It has been issued to all British Council scholars in the UK and overseas.

Available from:

[www.educationuk.org/pls/hot\\_bc/page\\_pls\\_user\\_advice?d=4062](http://www.educationuk.org/pls/hot_bc/page_pls_user_advice?d=4062) and [www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en](http://www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en).

In addition, over one million hard copies have been distributed overseas and in the UK to international students. Latest issue 2009.

- **Creating confidence – International student safety survey July 2007** – This questionnaire includes 2,000 responses from self-funded students and British Council-administered scholars and fellows, giving an independent and objective review of students' experiences and thoughts about safety issues in the UK: [www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-immigration.htm](http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-immigration.htm).
- **Find your way to work – international students: working in the UK** – This guide gives international students the facts they need to know about working in the UK. Latest edition 2008: [www.ukvisas.gov.uk/resources/en/docs/1903076/findyourwaytowork](http://www.ukvisas.gov.uk/resources/en/docs/1903076/findyourwaytowork).
- **Cultural connections** – For educational institutions, a guide to cultural issues for staff working with students. Latest issue fourth edition 2007: [www.britishcouncil.org/cultural\\_connections\\_order-form.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.org/cultural_connections_order-form.pdf).
- **Welcome to the UK: briefing material for scholars and fellows** – For British Council staff in the UK regions and overseas. Latest issue 2009.
- **Essential guide to UK Education** – These handbooks are distributed globally to British Council offices, students, education agents, UK institutions and other relevant parties. Latest issue 2009.

The British Council also works closely with the UK Border Agency to set up links between each other's websites to ensure that students have the information they need to help them make their applications for entry clearance and to prepare for their stay in the UK.

In addition, we give updates to students and agents on immigration and pre-departure matters through [www.educationuk.org](http://www.educationuk.org), *Club UK* magazines and through our newsletters and local outreach.

## Sharing best practice

The British Council has been raising awareness about student issues by attending and presenting at the UKvisas/UKBA annual conference. We also contribute to the visa work streams that feed into the main Joint Education Taskforce.

The British Council also supports, jointly with the Association of Colleges (AoC), a Beacon Award for International Student Support. The award recognises best practice in supporting international students from recruitment through to completion of qualifications. It is awarded to further education colleges that have developed and maintained consistent and caring procedures for the support of students who are studying in the UK.

[www.aoc.co.uk/enaoc\\_charitable\\_trust/beacon\\_awards](http://www.aoc.co.uk/enaoc_charitable_trust/beacon_awards).

### Previous winners include:

2009–10	Coleg Llandrillo
2008–09	Stevenson College Edinburgh
2007–08	Bridgwater College
2006–07	Boston College
2005–06	Sussex Downs College
2004–05	Bournemouth and Poole College
2003–04	Broxtowe College
2002–03	John Leggott College
2001–02	Pembrokeshire College
2000–01	Dudley College
1999–00	Chichester College
1998–99	Broxtowe College

The British Council offers a meet and greet service for UKCISA and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) as well as offering its premises in Manchester for training courses. British Council premises are also made available to the Joint Education Taskforce for meetings in London, which are attended by main sponsors and senior contacts.

British Council staff, both in the UK and overseas, are also provided with training, publications and support and advice on immigration and pre-departure issues, so that they can, in turn, give the best support to students and agents. British Council staff keep up to date via the 'Visa news' on the Education iCentre – an internal communication network to share expertise between British Council education colleagues in the UK and overseas – and receive regular training and visa presentations and updates via podcasts.

Jointly with UKBA, the British Council is encouraging much closer co-operation between British Mission staff in visa sections and British Council staff overseas. Examples of good practice from a number of countries include:

- Education iCentre – 'Hot topics' – 'Visa news' – 'Visa training'
- job shadowing, staff induction briefings/orientation
- sharing of visa information and changes in education and demand
- exhibition stands at education fairs and pre-departure briefings
- field trips to local institutions
- joint questionnaires/market intelligence on trends of students
- visits by educational staff
- agents' visits/training/conference/newsletter
- joint media updates/road shows and leaflets
- use of UKBA marketing website/resources overseas.

For further information, please contact:

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