

**SEC17D025**

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**Issue**

The International Student Experience - Annual Report

**Recommendation**

Recipients are invited to note the contents of the report

**Resource Implications**

There are no resource implications

**Risk Implications**

There are no risk implications

**Equality and Diversity**

Issues of Equality and Diversity are carefully considered in relation to how they might impact on the activity and support provided by the International Students' Advisory Team. The Student Support Service works closely with the Students' Union and the University's Head of Equality and Diversity to ensure that all members of the international student community are fully considered in the development of policies, procedures and provision of service.

**Timing of decisions**

No decision from the Committee is required

**Further Information**

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**Background**

Annual report to the Student Experience Committee

**Discussion**

The Student Experience Committee receives an annual report from the Head of Student Services detailing key issues of note arising from the previous year in relation to the experiences of UEA's international students. This report includes the provision available to international students from the Student Support Service's International Students' Advisory Team.

## **International Student Experience Annual Report**

### **Overview of the International Student population at UEA**

There are currently 2741 overseas students studying at the University. From this group, 1420 are studying undergraduate degrees and 1321 are studying Postgraduate degrees.

There are currently 1048 EU students studying at the University. From this group, 728 are studying undergraduate degrees and 320 are studying postgraduate courses. The international student population represent over 100 countries. The three largest cohorts are from China, Hong Kong and the United States.

### **International Students' Advisory Team (ISAT)**

The activities of ISAT are underpinned by the following principles:

- To make sure that international students have the opportunity to focus on their studies by ensuring that they have the necessary visa permissions to remain at UEA.
- To help international students feel welcome, develop a sense of belonging and to get the most out of their time at the University.

ISAT offers advice and guidance to international students, mainly in the areas of immigration, but also in relation to general international student life matters.

The main activities of the team are:

- To oversee and administer the Visa Application Scheme.
- To enhance international student experience through trips and activities.
- To provide informal opportunities for international students to enhance their English skills.
- To play a major role in international Arrivals, Welcome Week and Orientation provision.

#### ***ISAT currently comprises:***

*Senior International Student Adviser (Team Leader)*

*(Vacant post) 1 f.t.e*

*International Student Adviser*

*Paul Hartzler 1 f.t.e*

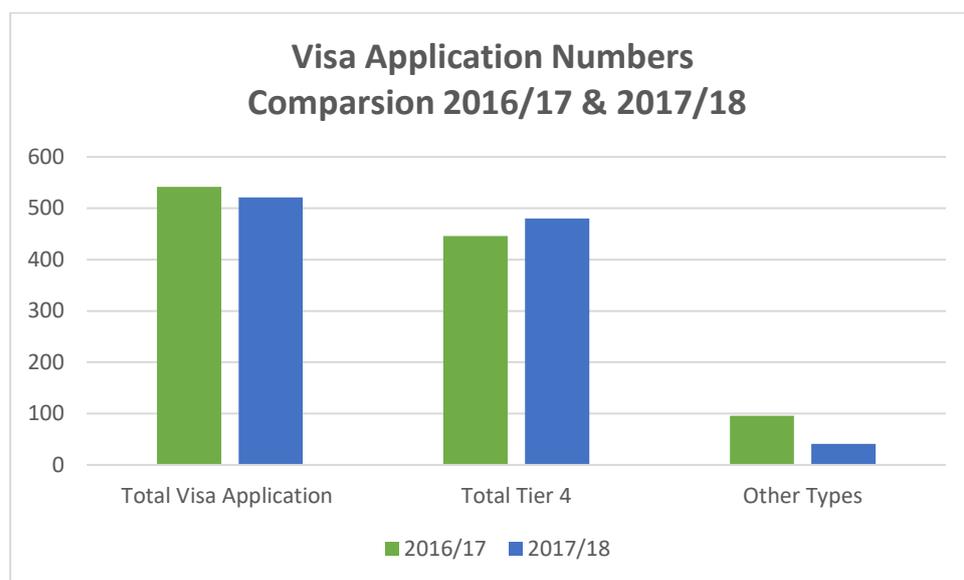
*International Student Officer  
Susan Peters Corbett I f.t.e*

**Contact ISAT**

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**Visa Application Service (VAS)**

ISAT support international students in applying for Tier 4 visas and the team administer the Visa Application Service.



*\* Still 4 months in data year. Visa application data year starts on 1 June.  
Between June 2017 and January 2018*

- 521 students applied to UKVI for visas via the Visa Application Service (ISAT)
- 24 applications are still outstanding
- 461 students received their new visas within 6 weeks

**Costs associated with Tier 4 visa applications**

- Visa application fee outside of the UK is £335
- Visa application fee inside of the UK is £457
- Immigration Healthcare surcharge (HIS) is £150 (annual fee)
- Biometric appointment in the UK is £19.20

UKVI have improved their processing times this year with most applications meeting the 8-week service standard. This means that students have not had to wait a long time to receive their visas and be without their passports. Almost all of those students who applied to UKVI in October received their visas by December and were able to travel abroad over the Christmas holidays.

Fewer PhD students were required to extend their visas this year due to the University now providing CASs covering an additional 1 year and 8 months. This has enabled

students to remain in the UK to attend viva and possible corrections. The additional time given to PGR students has been extremely popular and has meant that in most cases students have only got to apply for one visa to cover their whole period of study.

The visa workshops, this year, witnessed a much higher attendance of INTO students, progressing to UEA. However, WiFi on campus was not able to support 40-50 students trying to log-on to the Home Office website at one time. As the current delivery format of the workshops is for students to work through the online application form together, the WiFi issues made it difficult for students to successfully complete their applications in the group sessions. The workshops may need to take place in computer laboratories next year, if ISAT cannot find an alternative solution. This is undesirable because of capacity issues, availability limitations and it is harder for the facilitators to monitor what students are doing within the sessions.

From September 2017, students have been able to print their Biometric Enrolment letters, at the end of the online application process, rather than having to wait between 1-5 weeks to receive the letter by post. Students have to give this letter to the Post Office in order to enrol their biometrics. This change has contributed to reducing the visa processing time.

There is still an issue regarding the number of students who have either lost their Biometric Residence Permits (visas) or whose permits have been stolen whilst they are abroad. Students have to wait between 2-5 weeks to receive a new permit and this means that students are not able to return to the UK whilst waiting for their replacement BRP. ISAT assisted 39 students in applying for replacement BRP cards last year.

In addition to supporting students applying for Tier 4 visas, ISAT also provides immigration information, and in some cases advice, on the following visa categories:

- Short-term study visas
- Visa corrections and replacements
- Family visas
- Doctorate Extension schemes
- Working during studies
- Tier 1 and Tier 2 (working) visas

All ISAT staff are regulated by the \*Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC).

ISAT saw an increase in EU students wanting information and advice about settling in the UK. This year students have seemed less concerned with more reassurance from the government regarding the impact of Brexit.

#### **Student Feedback - Visa Application Service**

*“Thank you very much for your email and important information. You are really very kind and great. You provided smooth and kind start for very stressful and painful process. It means a lot for me. I will contact with you again after my wedding ceremony.”*

*“As a new international student, I will faced on many problems, but I think I do not worried about it, because we have your help.”*

#### **Student Support Representatives (SSS Reps)**

ISAT has recruited and trained 76 students, this year, to support the work of the Student Support Service in delivering projects and events. The SSS Reps undertake a

range of paid and unpaid work which includes supporting the Arrivals and Orientation programmes, Buddy Schemes, events for new students, social trips. Next year the SSS Reps will also be supporting SSS and ARM in Applicant and Open Days

### **UEA Friends Buddy Programme**

The *UEA Friends* Buddy scheme for international students continued this year. Two hundred and twenty one new international students requested a buddy and many of the students are still in regular contact with their buddies. Although slightly fewer students have engaged in the programme this year, it has been very popular with those who have been involved.

### **Language Support Buddies**

The Language Support Buddy Programme enables students who do not have English as their first language to meet weekly with fluent English speaking students. This year, 382 students were matched with 173 volunteers (137 Language Support Buddies and 36 SSS Reps). The Language Support Buddy programme has once again proven to be very successful in terms of participation and students feeling that they are more confident in speaking English in social settings. The challenge for ISAT is that they must increase the number of student volunteers next year if the scheme is to meet the demand experienced this year.

*\*The provision of immigration advice is regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) which sets the principles to which immigration professionals must comply in a Code of Standards and the Commissioner's Regulations*

<https://www.government/collections/regulations-that-immigration-advisers-must-follow>

### **Conversation Club**

The Conversation Club offers a 'language café' style evening in the Multifaith Centre, where students are able to practise casual conversational English with fluent English speakers and other international students. The Conversation Club is organised by student coordinators and supported by SSS Reps. The coordinators are recruited, trained and managed by ISAT. The club meets one evening a week throughout the academic year, on a drop in basis, and attendance varies from week to week, although there are usually between 40–50 participants per session.

### **International Welcome Week and Orientation Programme**

A number of changes have been made to the Orientation Programmes this year. Student feedback from previous programmes has shown that many new students do not want to sit in a Lecture Theatre, when they first arrive, listening to fifteen 30 minute talks over two days, but instead would prefer a programme delivering short and memorable messages interspersed with a few longer sessions delivered by key staff. In addition to this, new students want the opportunity to meet experienced students as soon as possible to hear "*what it's really like to study at UEA*". For this reason, the introduction talks were shortened, this year, and a number were delivered by SSS Reps rather than members of staff.

The number of social activities and events were increased, during Welcome Week, which meant that students were given more opportunities to meet each other. The breakfast club was a particularly successful new event where 230 students attended.

### **New Student App**

To enhance the promotion of the International Orientation Programme to new students in September 2017 and January 2018 and to provide ease of access to key University information and resources, ISAT created a mobile app, this year, with funding from the Alumni Fund. Currently, the app has 1106 downloads and it has been used 30,631 times.

The app contains the Orientation Programme, further details about all the Orientation talks and events, information about getting to the University, maps of the campus and city, in-app messaging and other useful resources to help students settle into UEA.

#### **Student Feedback – new international students’ app**

*“I have downloaded the app and I think it's great! It's really clear and easy to use. The schedule is also really handy. I am sure everyone will love it.”*

#### **Social Events**

In addition to the social events offered to new students at the International Welcome Weeks, ISAT deliver an annual year-round social programme. This year, the programme has also been promoted through the **Do Something Different programme**. This year’s ISAT trips and tours are:

- Norwich Pub Tour
- Cambridge Daytrip with walking tour (September)
- Norwich Ghost Tour
- Hyde Park Winter Wonderland trip
- Cambridge Daytrip with walking tour (January)
- Harry Potter Studio

#### **Other New Initiatives**

##### **PhD Network Group**

This new group was set-up to address the isolation issues that PGR students report that they frequently face. The group met for the first time on 19 January 2018 and are due to meet on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of each month. This group gives students the opportunity for peer to peer support.

##### **#WeAreInternational**

This year, ISAT is contributing to the #WeAreInternational and #WeAreOne sector-wide campaigns which focus on valuing international students and making sure their contribution to our economy and culture is recognised. So far, 160 Universities, education institutions and international organisations are supporting this campaign.

*Jane Amos, January 2018*