

Welcome to AISA Connect

It goes without saying that International Student Advisers (ISAs), and others working in the international student sector, are continuing to face a huge number of challenges in supporting international students.

Whilst as an Association we are keen to ensure that we do not overlook the wider welfare support remit to international students, immigration and particularly Tier 4 continues to dominate.

We have faced the introduction of 30 day vignettes, changes to academic progression, increases to maintenance funds, right to rent as well as the removal of work rights for students in FE with more changes on the horizon for Tier 2 and other work related categories. This is all against the backdrop of the Chancellor's Spending Review in which he has highlighted the vital importance of international students to the UK economy by setting a target to increase numbers by 50,000 by 2020.

It is also a difficult time for many of students from regions affected by the refugee crisis including those from Syria, Iraq and Libya. Staff may be seeing these students in the context of their worries about their options to remain in the UK after the end of their studies or needing leave of absence due to inability to concentrate on their studies due to the stress of financial and emotional worries. Balancing the compliance agenda with the humanitarian needs of these students has never been more challenging.

It is within this context we are delighted to announce our Annual Conference on 11 April 2016 whose theme this year is Compliance with Compassion: Challenges and Opportunities which is covered in more detail elsewhere in this newsletter.

I am pleased to say that as an Association we are continuing to grow with new members joining us to share the benefits of coming together at a regional level as well as having access to a national network through our conference and training. We do however acknowledge these are hard times for colleagues in Further Education who have been particularly hard hit by a series of immigration changes which have severely impacted on international student recruitment. Our membership is also low within Students' Unions which in part reflects the low numbers of immigration support posts in this sector.

We will be looking for new members to join our wonderful Executive Committee as we have a number of vacancies coming up from April 2016 and would like to encourage nominations from all our members but particularly from those in FE and SUs. Watch out for announcements in your in box. In the meantime if you would like to discuss joining the AISA Exec please contact me for an informal chat. All the Exec contact details are on our website.

Finally, just a heads up to let you know we are doing a membership survey to find out what you as members would like to see more/less of from AISA. We would love to hear from as many members and non-members as possible so that we can continue to develop our networks and services to best meet your needs.

Jo Holliday, Chair of AISA

Appeal for AISA Executive

AISA is a members led organisation and to be relevant, we need the Executive to be representative of that membership. There is a diverse group of you out there who help international students – ranging from those working in International Offices, Student Services, Students Unions, and also within both HE & FE!

The Executive aims to represent this diverse group of members by facilitating communication between them and the various regions, organising training events and lobbying on behalf of the sector. We now need to recruit more people to the Executive. So, if you're passionate about making a difference to the international student experience and want to have an influence on policy, then please put your name forward. We need to make

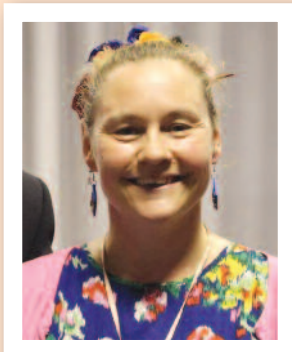
sure the Executive is diverse and represents the range of institutions and roles within International Student Advice/Support.

If you are interested and want to know more, please feel free to contact Alan Edwards at alan.edwards@bangor.ac.uk or 01248 388070.



Meet... the AISA Executive

This edition we introduce you to a member of AISA Executive



Name: Emma Gwynnett-Davies

Job title: Manager, Immigration & International Student Advice

Years working in international: 10 years

Year on the AISA Executive: 1 year

What one word best describes your role? Challenging

Why did you decide to sit on the AISA executive? Those that know me know that I cannot help but get involved! It is virtually impossible for me to shut up and keep quiet and AISA provides me with a great opportunity to share ideas and (hopefully) drive change and positivity in the sector. I also love the chance it has given me to network more closely with the other people on the executive and I've met some great people through that.

What does AISA mean to you? AISA is very important to me as it is a group populated by international students workers for international student workers. No-one else quite understands the pressures and frustrations that our roles can bring and I think AISA is incredibly important in helping us feel supported. The times I have walked away from AISA regional meetings and thought 'I'm glad it's not just me' are too innumerable to count. I also appreciate being able to go to training and chat with other about stuff that is not specifically to do with immigration and Tier 4...

Describe a 'typical work day' for you? A typical day for me can start with a cross University Tier 4 compliance meeting, include dealing with a serious student pastoral or legal issue, working with colleagues about University policy and process, judging a USW 1World cookery competition, assessing student documentation for visa extensions, developing Student Mobility strategy, putting Agent resources together, building and developing community links, running staff appraisals, worrying about my budget, delivering staff/student cultural awareness and communication sessions, putting the AISA Connect newsletter together and then rounding it all off with a student Twmpath! My remit is huge and varied and I never stop looking for development opportunities and ways to improve the position of my team and the student experience

What one thing in your office could you not function without?

My team ❤️

Tell us something we might not know about you? I am a trained aromatherapist and I still love going raving!

Note regarding UKCISA/AISA communication via the regional meetings....

UKCISA and AISA are formalising how we communicate to ensure that we keep each other informed and up to date.

UKCISA is aware that there are issues raised at regional meetings that regional chairs may wish to discuss with them. In addition, AISA members gain insights into the impact of rules or policies directly in their institutions.

UKCISA ask that advisers continue to use the advice line for individual cases, but where a regional group is concerned about a trend arising amongst the group, then there will now be a dedicated communication route with UKCISA. The regional chairs have this contact so please make sure that as an AISA member you are going along to the regional meetings to ensure that your concerns are raised.

Your help please... AISA Survey

We are very keen to find out what YOU think about AISA, so that this can inform our strategic direction and development of resources/training etc. In order to help you have your say, we have developed a short survey which consists of 18 questions. We understand that you are all extremely busy but would really appreciate you taking 5-10 minutes to complete the survey and help us to better provide service and support that is useful to you (we have made half the questions multiple choice for quickness sake!).

You will be able to find the survey at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/AISA2016 and we will also be sending it out as a click through link via email.

Thank you in advance for your support.

AISA Executive

AISA Conference 2016



Monday 11th April 2016, 10.30am-4.15pm

At International Student House (Park Crescent Conference Centre)

Great Portland Street, London W1W 5PN. Visit: www.pccc.co.uk/contact/

Theme: **Compliance with Compassion: Opportunities and Challenges**

This year our conference will look at the challenges and opportunities for us as advisers within the context of George Osborne's Autumn Statement which pledged an increase in international student numbers of 55,000 by 2020.

Speakers/workshop presenters:

- Jo Atwool, Policy Adviser, UUK
- Oliver Carlisle, Head of Student Casework and Sponsorship, UKVI

- Ollie Rae, Assistant Director, Student Casework and Tier 4 Premium Customer Service Team, UKVI
- Nichola Carter, Principal Solicitor, Carter Thomas Solicitors
- Mostafa Rajaai, International Officer, NUS
- Richard Melia and Jim Price, Immigration Compliance Network
- Jo Holliday, Chair, AISA
- Sarah Woods, International & Housing Adviser, University of Sheffield Students' Union

Time	Session	Further information
10.30am-11am	Registration and refreshments	
11am-11.30am	Welcome and AISA AGM	AISA Chair Jo Holliday will open proceedings, annual statements will be presented and any constitutional amendments put forward for consideration/ratifying.
11.30am- 12.15pm	Opening presentation	Jo Atwool from Universities UK (UUK) will be delivering an update on immigration changes and areas of development and lobbying in which UUK are currently involved.
12.15pm- 1.15pm	Workshops (<i>delegate to choose one</i>)	<p>a) Right to rent. Sarah Woods (Sheffield SU) will be looking at the new scheme and asking what impact it could have on our students. Participants will be encouraged to share their own experiences or concerns and to brainstorm ideas around what steps institutions could take to mitigate against any potential issues.</p> <p>b) Applying discretion in difficult cases. Jim Price from the International Compliance Network (ICN) and members of the AISA Executive will lead this session which will enable advisers to explore the use of sponsor discretion in exceptional circumstances. This session will be run within strict confidentiality guidelines in order to promote free discussion and sharing of casework.</p> <p>c) Improving the student experience of Tier 4. Ollie Rae, Deputy Director of Student Casework and Tier 4 Premium Customer Service Team will present on the new Tier 4 casework systems. AISA will then lead an open discussion regarding visa peak periods and how we can seek to improve our own processes and student experience.</p> <p>d) Supporting students in crisis. This session will be led by Adrienne Clarke who is currently doing a major rewrite of the UKCISA Guide to Supporting International Students in Crisis. It will be an opportunity for advisers to share best practice on how to support students facing difficulties for example as a result of a range of financial, political crises or natural disasters.</p>
1.15pm-2pm	Lunch	
2pm-3pm	Workshops (<i>delegate to choose one</i>)	Delegates have the opportunity to choose a second workshop from the selection outlined above
3pm-3.15pm	Refreshments	
3.15pm-4.15pm	Closing plenary Question: Is it possible to have a compassionate but compliant approach?	Speakers will talk on the topic for 5 minutes each and then the question will be opened to the floor. Chair: Dominic Scott (UKCISA) Speakers: Oliver Carlisle (UKVI) Nichola Carter (Carter Thomas Solicitors) Mostafa Rajaai (NUS) Richard Melia (ICN) Jo Holliday (AISA)

Cost: **£95** (AISA members) | **£120** (non members)

Please note: in the case of over subscription, priority will be given to AISA members. See the AISA website for booking: www.aisa.org.uk/Workshops/

Spotlight on... South East and London

33 AISA members from 21 institutions met at the regional meeting for South East and London at the London School of Economics on 06 November 2016.

It was a packed meeting (both in terms of the number of people attending and the agenda). Discussion ranged across many topics including:

- The distribution of BRPs for those granted entry clearance.
- Academic progress, changing institutions and the mixed messages from PAMs about what was acceptable
- Impending landlord immigration checks
- Issues with the difficulty of getting refunds for overpayments and other issues with the Immigration Health Surcharge
- Impending new maintenance requirements
- Worrying refusal decisions on credibility
- Changes to guidance on how early CASs can be issued
- The possibility of new applications forms in the new year
- CASs for students re-sitting/resubmitting
- Very large numbers of Entry Clearance Errors

The membership of the South East and London region is very diverse. It includes private, public, small, large, FE, HE, old and new institutions. The South East and London meetings last half a day and include lunch. There's usually a social gathering afterwards.

AISA members are welcome to attend any regional meetings that they choose, if you would like to attend Southeast and London at their next meeting, it will be held at International Student House on Friday 11 March 2016 and you should contact the Regional Co-ordinator introduced below:

Regional Co-ordinator

Name: Martin Donkin

Job title: International Student Adviser

Years working in role/international: 6 years in current role, 10 years as an International Student Adviser

Years as an AISA Regional Co-ordinator: 1 year

What one word best describes your role? Demanding

Why did you decide to become an AISA Co-ordinator?

Someone told me that it was my turn.

What does AISA and the regional meetings mean to you?

The AISA meetings are one of the most valuable resources for international student advisers. The candid discussion of issues faced by advisers lets you know what might be coming your way.



Describe a 'typical work day' for you?

Do I have a typical work day? I find the work changes quite a lot. There are things that happen most days, such as checking e-mails and client casework, but I'm often doing other things. Depending on the time of year, this could be developing our guidance, giving talks or preparing and delivering staff training. I'm sure most advisers can relate to coming into work with a plan for the day only to find a steaming pile of fresh Immigration Rules in your inbox! At least there's little chance of getting bored.

What is the funniest or weirdest thing that a student or staff member has ever asked or said to you?

A colleague, who I'd only ever talked to on the phone, when we met in person said "I imagined you as being older, with a beard". (I am now older and have a beard).

What one thing in your office could you not function without?

The regular supply of cake from my wonderful colleges!

Tell us something we might not know about you?

I'm a Bass singer in the London Gay Men's Chorus (come see one of our shows: www.lgmc.org.uk) and when I'm not doing that I'm looking after my honey bees in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park.

Resource Corner

A space for signposting resources which might come in useful for our AISA members

Supporting students affected by the refugee crisis

With the crisis unfolding on a daily basis on our TV screens it is sometimes hard to think how we as advisers might contribute to helping students affected by the huge political turmoil back home.

Many universities are now ramping up their efforts to provide help by offering scholarships to asylum seekers. We are also dealing with the challenge of supporting students affected by the refugee crisis whether this be financial, emotional or legal.

For example, Sheffield Students' Union has brought in a Human Rights/Asylum lawyer to do a presentation to current students on options to remain in the UK on the basis of asylum/human rights. We have also published a specific web page aimed at such students which covers the support on finance, academic, immigration and general welfare matters: su.sheffield.ac.uk/student-advice-centre/immigration/refugees.

If you have found a helpful website, organisation or other resource please contact us at the email below so we can share with our wider membership.

What is clear is that for many students asylum remains a last resort. Switching to a work visa is the objective for some of these students but with the proposed changes to Tier 2 this may become even more difficult. It may be time for government to consider options for these students to remain under discretionary routes as was the case with Libyan students in 2011 and latterly for Syrian students.

There is a special forum for such issues to be considered which is co-ordinated by the department for Business, Innovation and Skills known as the RISC Committee (Responding to International Students which brings together sector representatives including NUS, UUK and UKCISA.

If you are interested in these issues and supporting students more generally in crisis look out for the dedicated session at our Annual Conference on 11 April 2016.

Jo Holliday

Chair, AISA, International Student Adviser, Sheffield Students' Union



Contact details

You can find the AISA website at: <http://www.aisa.org.uk/About/>

If you'd like to contact us with any stories, feedback or questions we'd be delighted to hear from you via:
aisa@ukcisa.org.uk