

Co Chairs' Welcome

Welcome to the spring edition of AISA Connect. We hope this academic year is going well for you and your students and that you found the chance to attend one of our regional meetings after the autumn surge.

Our November training day, which focused on vulnerable students and supporting students in crisis, and took place at Kings College London. It was very well attended and received lots of positive feedback. Those attending benefited from the trainer's wealth of experience, which included lots of useful examples and good ideas of how best to approach difficult circumstances.

We are currently busy putting together our annual conference, which will take place on 27th April at De Montfort University in Leicester. We hope to see many of you there. The focus will be on non-tier 4 immigration routes and common issues that we encounter when advising students who come study to with us via those routes. We will also explore how can help integrate 'non-standard' students into our institutional communities. Our keynote speaker will be from the UKVI policy team who will give an overview of the immigration changes and future developments that affect our students.

We are also planning sessions at the UKCISA conference to help celebrate their 50 years and hope to see you in Edinburgh.

Please remember, if you have any feedback about the work we do and how you think we can improve the service we offer our members, let us know.

Emma Gwynnett-Davies & Sally Saca



Connect With Your AISA Colleagues on LinkedIn!

AISA are now on linked in!

It would be great if you could join our group and network with your AISA colleagues around the UK. To ask to join, on the "Groups" page of your LinkedIn profile, just search for **"AISA: Association of International Student Advisers Forum"**

AISA Annual Conference & AGM 2018



Off the beaten track: exploring non Tier 4 immigration routes

Friday 27th April 2018 | De Montfort University Leicester | 10.00am-4.00pm
 Cost: **£95** (AISA members) **£155** (Non Members)

This year's conference will identify the immigration routes that students use that are non Tier 4. We will explore common queries that arise, and consider how we can produce effective resources to provide information and advice.

Delegates will have the opportunity to share good practice, examine resources already available, and consider how we can help to integrate students that we consider to be 'non standard' into our institutional communities.

Our Keynote speaker will be a representative from the UKVI policy team, who will give an overview of the immigration changes and future developments that affect our students.

10.00-10.30am Registration and refreshments
10.30-10.50am Welcome and AISA AGM

The AISA executive committee will present annual statements and any constitutional amendments put forward for consideration/ratifying.

10.50-11.50am Keynote speaker - UKVI Policy team

The UKVI will talk us through recent changes around short term study and other routes.

11.50am-12.30pm Workshop A

12.30pm-1.45pm Lunch

Delegates will be split into 2 groups to attend Workshops

1.45pm-2.45pm Workshop B or C

3.00pm-4.00pm Workshop B or C

4.00pm Conference Close

Workshop A: Who are our Non Tier 4 Students?

This will be an interactive workshop looking at the various types of non Tier 4 immigration route queries that we encounter in our daily work. Delegates will be asked to brain storm around producing effective resources for our institutions and will be provided with information about good practice and materials which are already available to us.

Workshop B: Immigration issues

Building on the examples which have been introduced in Workshop A, delegates will be invited to examine a selection of case studies to see how we apply UKVI regulations in practice. There will be ample space for discussion and it is hoped attendees will take away some ideas for use in their own working practices.

Workshop C: Creating Communities

With advisers being hard pressed for time and resources there is often a primary focus on supporting our 'standard' Tier 4 students. This session will look at how we can better support students and their families who fall outside of what we consider to be 'standard'. This could include students who are not studying full time, mature students and students who have dependants. We will explore ideas for improving engagement by involving them more fully in our institutional communities and allowing them to get the most out of their university experience.



Meet the... AISA Exec!

This edition we introduce you to Azadeh Madanian Mohammadi

Job title: Visa and Immigration Adviser

Years working at Sheffield & AISA: I worked at the University of Sheffield since September 2005! (Almost 12 years) however, I joined AISA Exec November 2016.

What one word best describes your role? Amusing, interesting, never a dull moment and every day's a learning day!

Why did you decide to work with AISA?

I found out about AISA and their trainings which are very useful therefore I decided to join to help and share my experiences and good practices and learn more from other advisers if possible.

What is the best thing about your job?

Have the pleasure to meet students from all over the world! Every day is different and the unpredictability of the job keeps me on my toes and makes it interesting!

What is the worst thing about your job?

UKVI's rules and regulations which some are not clear!

Describe a 'typical work day' for you

I start work around 8am by dealing with visa-immigration/CAS/compliance queries that I receive. Around 9am, students are arriving so I usually have appointments (visa/immigration or visa extension) with them and not necessarily pre-booked appointment so can be ad-hoc ones. Looking at CAS statistics and check our basic compliance assessments and ensuring that all refusals are reported. Deal with special circumstances forms, advise affected students and report to UKVI if necessary. Work collaboratively with our Welfare Team to ensure our services meet our students' needs and have meeting to look into any issues needed attention and process improvement if needed.

I line manage 4 member of administrative team and I am the English Language Teaching Centre's CAS (ELTC) team leader which part of my day is to evaluate and delegate jobs and making sure their needs are met and one to ones etc. As I am the only adviser at the English Language Teaching Centre (for over 2500 students annually) then my days during summer school are filled with various immigration/visa queries whilst we work through planning and CAS issuance of the next English cohort. I am also UCU's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Representative so I either attend meetings/committees or working with other representative on issue risen by members.

I absolutely love my job and thrive under pressure and days that I have back to back appointments are my best days as I can interact with students and I know that I have solved their issues (hopefully) so those days are my happiest day.



We are now planning for 1500 visa document checking session. These sessions are for all pre-sessional students who have an academic offer at the University of Sheffield so they will book one appointment and will be seen by member of my team and this sessions are running only between 11th September to 15th September (from 9.30am to 4pm) and given last two years results and very low refusal rates, I must say that this service has been the most successful one.

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

I don't think our office would function this good if we weren't working collaboratively so working collaboratively and willingness to help students and going extra mile are the key for having a good team.

If you could do any other job what would that be?

Being an adviser for sure...

Tell us something interesting we might not know about you?

I am very good at cooking and dancing and I love to sing!

Training & Conference Update

On 27 November 2017, we held our annual training event: 'Working with vulnerable students: Supporting international students in crisis' in the Council Room, The Strand, King's College London.

The session was delivered by Christopher Tucker who has been Head of Campus and Residential Support at the University of Sussex for the last 15 years and Tim Ditchfield, the Chaplain at Kings College London.

Christopher delivered an extremely engaging presentation providing practical advice on how to deal with situations when we encounter students in crisis. The session encouraged colleagues' participation and included scenario based exercises in different areas including student death, sexual assault and mental health. Tim then rounded the day off with a very interesting and succinct take on the idea of community and supporting international students drawing from personal experience that resonated to colleagues around the room.

It was great to see over 40 attendees there and we have had some positive feedback including "A wealth of experience and examples from both presenters", "Very helpful content for aiding students at crisis point, and helpful detail on how to consider the individual in a particular instance" and "Excellent trainer! Beautiful venue". It was also good to see a number of colleagues who do not specifically work with international students, such as colleagues from welfare and well-being teams at different institutions take up the opportunity to attend the event, and we hope they found the training event useful. Hope to see you at the conference on 27th April!



Meet the... AISA Exec!

This edition we introduce you to **Polly Penter**

Job title: International Advice Manager

Years working at City: Two at City, thirteen in the sector

What one word best describes your role? Busy!

Why did you choose to work at City?

The job was a promotion, but I had also heard good things from people who already worked there. It's a supportive and very social place to work.

What is the best thing about your job? The students

What is the worst thing about your job?

Theresa May's stubbornness over the immigration figures

Describe a 'typical work day' for you

It varies depending on the time of year, but generally lots and lots of emails, either giving or preparing for a talk/training session, and a nice run along the canal at lunchtime.



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

If you could do any other job what would that be?

Professional stand-up comedian

Tell us something interesting we might not know about you?

I am adopted and a few years ago was tracked down by a brother I never knew I had. Since then I have been on the radio a lot talking about it! (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p055fjch>)

'Bounce Back'

Increasing international students' access to student wellbeing services.



From November 2016, The University of Sunderland started to run a series of workshops for international students to help support their transition into university life with particular focus on mental health and personal wellbeing.

Leaflets were also created for pre-arrival and current students to raise awareness of The Student Wellbeing Service. The project was awarded with a UKCISA grant and met with success – the project will be rolled again in the coming year – and here Kayleigh Munday who helped run the project gives us an insight.

Hello Kayleigh. Well done on successfully achieving a UKCISA grant for the 'Bounce Back' project. What was the key motivating factor that led to you setting this up?

Thank you – The University of Sunderland has over 2,500 international students. Our monitoring figure identified, that engagement in Student Wellbeing Services did not reflect this figure with approximately only 9% of all referrals received coming from international students (2015-6) It was reported that there was a lack of awareness of Health and Wellbeing's presence on campus and an initial reluctance to engage due to pre-conceptions of the service as well as not considering themselves to have emotional or mental health difficulties.

Our aim was to help international students recognise what wellbeing is and the factors that may affect wellbeing.

It was also a good opportunity for students to meet other students who were also feeling a bit isolated in their first semester. It was a good opportunity for students to make friends.

What did the project involve?

Every other Wednesday afternoon for 6 weeks we hosted different types of workshops.

Each workshop had a theme.

Workshop 1 – 'Get to know' – looked at the common struggles of being an international student and what it is like being in a new country studying for the first time.

Workshop 2 – 'Get to Learn' – looked at how to adjust to a new environment, new places, and new faces and how to cope with the new challenges in a new country.

Workshop 3 – 'Get support' – focused on the different types of support the University offers. The workshop also focused on different types of relaxation methods.

Each workshop had to be carefully structured so all topics were covered. For our 3rd workshop we invite our University Chaplin to the session to do some relaxation exercises that students could use when feeling anxious.

Did you find it challenging to get students to engage with the project. If so, how did you overcome this?

To advertise the event posters were distributed to student accommodation and targeted emails were sent new international student. Leaflets were also issued at events. A coffee afternoon was also organised in which student could find out more about the project.

12 students attended all three workshops. To keep the workshops interesting and fun we ordered Dominos pizza and Krispy Kreme to the workshops. We also made stress balls! The content was largely activity based and included group discussions. The sessions were informal to make students feel at ease.

We noticed as student got to know us more, they felt more comfortable talking about their experiences. By workshop 3 there was definitely more engagement compared to workshop 1.

How did you find implementing 'Bounce Back' alongside your day to day work?

We held regular meetings between Health and Wellbeing an International Student Support. Tasks were shared out between Ashley and I. The project was the responsibility of a single member of staff with support from myself. It was challenging to fit the work in around the demand of staff roles.

What is the biggest change you have seen since implementing 'Bounce Back'?

Questionnaires were completed after the workshops. These showed an increase in personal wellbeing and a slight positive shift in attitudes to help-seeking behaviour. All of the respondents stated that they found the workshops helpful and that they would recommend the event to a friend.

Here are some of the comments made by students since the workshops:

"I will try and stop procrastinating and worrying about failing"

"Helped me manage my life better"

"I learnt new ways of coping with stress."

I understand that you will be rolling out 'Bounce Back' again in the coming year, will there be any changes to how it is run in the future?

We are keeping the lay out of the workshops the same. So there will be three individual workshops held every other week.

The Sports Development team have agreed to support our sessions. The team are employed by the University and focus on engaging students in exercise and sports. One suggestion was to host an introduction to cricket or volleyball as these tend to be more popular among international students.

As it's scientifically proven that exercise boosts mood levels, we have organised to take the group paddle boarding for the second part of our 2nd session!