



BRITISH **UNIVERSITIES'** INTERNATIONAL LIAISON ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2019 - 2020

“In these extraordinary times, BUILA’s online meetings have allowed us to come together much more frequently and share best practice. The BUILA updates on government policies are hugely welcome, but more importantly being able to share institutional challenges has helped to reassure me that my institution, and team, are doing everything possible with regards to international recruitment and marketing.

Ian Thomson, Director, International Recruitment and Partnerships, External Relations, University of Glasgow



BUILA India Showcase - February 2020



Directors' Forum - November 2019

97%

of members responding to our recent satisfaction survey believe BUILA have been responsive to members' questions and concerns



Virtual Sales and Presentation Training - April 2020

140

member universities



Africa RIG - March 2020



India RIG - February 2020

WELCOME

This has been an extraordinary year for the international HE sector. As the membership association created to support, inform and amplify the work and interests of International Higher Education (HE) staff, BUILA has really intensified and expanded its efforts to support our members' priorities through this challenging time:

- **Shaping and influencing current and future policy at a national and regional government level:** through lobbying for flexibilities at the sector's weekly Covid-19 group and increased liaison with government departments, DFE, DIT and Home Office over policy going forward.
- **Connecting the sector and providing the practitioners' viewpoint:** by actively leading, encouraging and supporting collaborations with partners at key stages of the international student journey. Including working with partners on fast moving communications and messaging to international influencers, stakeholders and students; chairing the cross departmental and

sector communication and marketing group for Europe; driving and shaping the employability agenda, particularly the Graduate Route in partnership with UKCISA; and leading on research into the role of agents in the recruitment process.

- **Strengthening the sector by enabling the sharing of latest insights and best practice:** through more regular Market Briefings, Updates, Regional Interest Groups and Directors' Forums; increasing communication channels by creating WhatsApp groups for each key market; and via the establishment of a Covid-19 webpage, bringing all relevant information together.
- **Enhancing the knowledge and skills of our members through an increased training programme that responds to members' current and emerging needs:** including what makes a successful virtual fair, managing staff remotely, virtual sales and marketing skills.



As a sector you have been incredibly creative and flexible in adapting and responding to the major issues impacting on international higher education during the pandemic. At BUILA, we are delighted that 96% of respondents, think BUILA have been helpful to members during the Covid-19 period. We are also delighted to have been working closer than ever with our sector partners to create a unified approach to the crisis. A lot of lessons have been learnt and we look forward to working closely with you in the 'new normal' by continuing to enhance and expand our support whatever challenges emerge!

Bobby Mehta, *Chair of BUILA*

Helping to shape and influence current and future policy

- **Lobbying to help create flexibilities needed to mitigate the impact of Covid-19**

In response to the ever changing and constantly challenging, impact of Covid-19 on the sector, BUILA has been a key partner in a cross-sector working group which includes government departments, and other sector bodies. BUILA has been proactively promoting our members' comments and concerns to the group which has been instrumental in achieving crucial policy flexibilities, including a number of concessions for international students in areas such as visas and eligibility around the Graduate Route.

- **Helping to create guidance on policies emerging from Covid19**

BUILA has worked closely with UKCISA and UUKi in the creation of guidance for institutions on how to approach supporting international students in self-isolation. We have also shared insights with members on the process for chartering aircraft and have connected members with the relevant consortia and operators.

- **Clarifying the issues impacting on European recruitment pre and post Brexit deadline**

As Chair of the cross departmental and sector stakeholder communication group for Europe, BUILA has worked with partners to identify policy areas needing clarification and sought answers from government that have fed into the UUKi and UKCISA published Europe specific FAQs.

In conjunction with the British Council, UUKi and UKCISA, BUILA also ran a number of webinars for agents, school counsellors and university staff to answer queries about the pre and post Brexit regulations. The Europe Communication Group created a joint sector statement and produced a set of unified messages which have been amplified in key European markets.

- **Lobbying to help shape the new Graduate Route and raise the employability of international students**

Following BUILA's input into research commissioned to better understand international graduate career outcomes, BUILA supported two events aimed at sharing best practice on supporting international students into employment. An important part of these was to identify what needs to happen within universities to ensure that there are the resources to carry out this work, especially given the proposed inclusion of international students in graduate outcome figures and the introduction of the Graduate Route.

BUILA has worked closely with UKCISA to help influence policy around the new Graduate Route including lobbying for inclusion of TNE 2+2 Articulations.

- **Research to answer DFE and OFS concerns**
BUILA responded to DFE and Office for Students concerns around perceived harmful recruitment

practices by commissioning a major piece of research into the ways Agents operate. Consulting with Agents, students, sector stakeholders and members, the research supported by UKCISA, highlighted areas for improving best practice for agents and universities.

Going forward BUILA intends to:

- Continue to ensure that the interests and concerns of the sector are represented in regular meetings with government around the continuation of policy flexibilities and concessions during the second wave of Covid-19 and beyond;
- Work with members and key stakeholders to identify and resolve barriers to international work in key markets;
- Take forward the recommendations from the Research on Agents, to develop a stakeholder wide recognised code of practice; good practice guide for universities and agents; and a revised agent training programme informed by members;
- Work with key stakeholder organisations on the delivery of the newly revised UK International Education Strategy through the new International Strategic Advisory Board;
- Work with UKCISA, UUKi and other partners to create an Employer Engagement Framework to aid and support universities with the implementation of the Graduate Route, and more broadly international student employability.

“BUILA continue to be a vital partner for UUKi. In our Covid-19 work and beyond, BUILA provide valuable sector insights which help drive our direction and focus.

Vivienne Stern, Director, Universities UK International (UUKi)



British Council India, Facebook Live

96%

of members responding to our recent satisfaction survey agree that **BUILA updates are a useful source of information** regarding recruitment and sector issues



Agents Briefing Delhi - February 2020



BUILA India Showcase - February 2020



Employability Workshop - January 2020



BUILA, British Council, Agents and Counsellors Webinar, Africa

“UKCISA values its work with BUILA. It’s a partnership that helps support practitioners working with international students across our membership. We share intelligence and work collaboratively on a range of projects including our International Student Employability Group, which identifies ways we can deliver a high quality experience for international students who come to the UK. We look forward to working in partnership in the future.

Anne-Marie Graham, CEO, UKCISA

Influencing International marketing and communication at key stages of the student journey

During the last year communication to stakeholders, influencers and students has been more important than ever and BUILA has worked very hard to ensure our members' expertise is used to keep all these audiences informed. BUILA has continued work on key messaging around recruitment and international promotion with government and partners.

- **Creating unified messages to key audiences**

BUILA has worked regularly with a cross departmental and sector group to establish a set of frequently refreshed key messages to go out to stakeholders, influencers and students in key recruitment markets.

In conjunction with partners, British Council and UKCISA, BUILA ran a series of webinars for school counsellors and agents in response to demands for clarification and up to date information on the situation in the UK. The regions targeted included MENA, China, South Asia, North America, Europe, and Africa.

- **Continuing to support the 'Open for Business' message to students**

BUILA were asked to provide the university voice in a number of live virtual events with key players in the sector such as UCAS, British Council, IDP, Studypartals and Edvoy, who were all seeking to

reinforce the message that UK HE was open for business and still waiting to welcome students.

BUILA has continued to work with Study UK and the British Council at both national campaign and regional activity level to help steer messaging, collate case studies and work on targeting local media.

In response to the need to support current international students during lockdown and to help prospective international students to feel more confident to continue with their plans to study abroad, BUILA has been actively working with UUKi and the British Council on the #WeAreTogether campaign. Again, helping to steer messaging, collate case studies and work on targeting local media.

- **Amplifying the depth and breadth of the UK HE offer to potential partners and collaborators**

As a wraparound event to our India Regional Interest Group and agent briefing, BUILA worked with members to create a showcase for stakeholders in India to promote collaborations between Indian and UK universities whilst promoting the imminent reintroduction of post-graduation work through the new Graduate Route. The panels outlining the amazing joint projects made an impressive backdrop

to the reception co-hosted with the British Council and did a lot to demonstrate the depth and breadth of UK universities and how the UK is working with India on global priorities such as sustainability.

We are also grateful to the Alumni that came on the night to bring the Studying in the UK message alive. We were pleased to welcome over 300 guests including, Indian universities, some key government officials and Indian business representatives. Both attending members and BUILA continue to develop relationships with these stakeholders going forward.

Going forward BUILA intends to:

- Work with key stakeholders to commission and implement research into a review of what communication and recruitment activity has and has not worked during the pandemic and to identify what is needed going forward.
- Lead on the creation of a number of cross sector marketing and communication groups for key regions such as South Asia, East Asia, and MENA, to develop integrated communication plans and the mechanism for a quick response to changing market circumstances.

Enhancing the knowledge and skills development of our members

Sharing experiences and keeping in touch through unprecedented circumstances has been really important to our members in the last year. Although due to Covid-19 restrictions the Annual Conference had to be cancelled, BUILA has taken steps to ensure that members have a number of new channels through which to exchange and share best practice with each other, alongside access to an increased number of existing opportunities for networking, interacting and learning.

- **Increasing the mechanisms for communication and networking**

BUILA has increased the frequency of member Directors' Forums to monthly and expanded the format to include break out groups for discussion and networking. We have also increased the number of regional interest groups to quarterly, and created 14 new regional WhatsApp groups for members to discuss issues as they happen.

BUILA has invested in a new communication role which has led to twice weekly regional updates highlighting key issues and information from partners to members. A Covid-19 international insights page has also been developed with industry updates, webinar recordings, student sentiments and useful resources segmented by region.

- **Expanding the markets represented by Regional Interest Groups**

During the year BUILA has expanded the number of markets covered by Regional Interest Groups to include MENA, South Asia, North America, and Europe as well as continuing to run events both face-to-face and online for China, India and Africa. We have sought where possible to enhance these sessions through collaborations with key regional partners and were delighted to be able to integrate the Africa group into the 7th Commonwealth African Summit at what was to be our last face-to-face event of 2020.

Following up on our pledge to explore delivery of RIGs in-country, BUILA held an India group in Delhi which attracted over 100 in-country, and travelling international staff. We also took the opportunity to carry out an agent briefing event focusing on good practice and the Graduate Route. Over 100 agents attended from all over India. It was a chance for us to inform them of all the latest developments, share issues raised by universities and to hear their feedback. The session was very well received and although we could not replicate the event face-to-face due to Covid-19, we will continue running virtual agent briefing events in other key regions.

- **Responding to a shifting recruitment environment**

During the year BUILA has trained nearly 300 international staff through 13 face-to-face and online training sessions. 96% of attendees rated the sessions as good or excellent with many members commenting on the relevance of the topics, the quality of the speakers and the opportunities to network with other practitioners, even if remotely.

As well as transferring our most popular workshops online, in response to the changing recruitment environment and feedback from members, BUILA has introduced new sessions to reflect the new skills needed, adding 'what makes a successful virtual fair?', 'managing staff remotely?', and 'virtual sales and presentation skills', to our training suite.

Going forward BUILA intends to:

- Create a hybrid Conference including live streaming that allows all staff - wherever based - to network, access expert input, and share experiences and good practice.
- Develop a 102 session for experienced staff to look to the next stage of their career.
- Explore different platforms to enhance the experience of our members in all our networking and training activity.

ENHANCED COMMUNICATION AND NETWORKING

REGIONAL WHATSAPP GROUPS

BUILA created 13 Regional WhatsApp groups with members to communicate and share region specific updates. Total number of users

1,989



WEBINAR BRIEFINGS

25

webinars to help inform influencers, members, students, counsellors, agents and advisors. These webinars provided regular COVID19 updates and a chance for questions to be addressed live during the events.



REGIONAL INTEREST GROUPS

6

BUILA has expanded the number of markets covered to include MENA, North America, South Asia, East Asia, Africa and Europe.



TRAINING SESSIONS

Training given to over

250

university staff with a total of 13 online workshops delivered.



BUILA have continued to support the professional and personal development of our members' staff throughout COVID-19. 96% of staff rated the sessions as excellent or good.

I really enjoyed the opportunity to engage with managers working in similar situations across the world, and learn from them, as well as understand that I am not alone!

The workshop was fantastic; it was great to network and see real solutions to issues faced.

ACCOUNTS

Balance Sheet *As at 31 July 2020*

The following accounts have been subjected to an 'independent examination' rather than a full audit in line with our role as an association. The four main income streams during the financial year were from the annual membership subscriptions, sponsorship generated to support and enhance the Annual Conference, training fees to assist in a break even for our training programme and a small amount of bank interest.

The main streams of expenditure were for activity and services costs such as continued investment in an expanded training programme, research for the sector and lobbying activities. Plus support costs such as the Project Manager, and Training Co-ordinator, and BUILA Executive costs*. Funds were used to underpin our Annual Conference; Directors' Forums; Regional Interest Groups; and events such as the India Regional Interest Group; Agent Event and Showcase in Delhi.

* These relate only to travel, and subsistence costs incurred by the Executive Team in their liaison roles with partners, these unpaid officers continue to represent excellent value for money.

Profit and Loss Account	2020	
	£	
Income for the year	136,601	
Activity and Service Costs	50,965	
Administrative Expenses	66,694	
Partners' current accounts	2020	
	£	
Net surplus for the year	19,283	
Divided as follows:		
Member Universities	19,283	
Partners' current and reserve accounts	At 1 August 2019	Share of surplus At 31 July 2020
	£	£
Member Universities	216,942	19,283

VOTE OF CONFIDENCE

INSIGHTS AND NETWORKING

Cambridge has valued its BUILA membership for the access to networking, training, and briefing opportunities. The pandemic has sharply re-focused BUILA's essential role of providing support and insight to the sector. The virtual training has been a huge success, and the regional updates invaluable to our recruitment planning and

efforts during a time of such change and uncertainty.

Amy Roberson,
Regional Manager,
Cambridge University



OUTSTANDING VALUE



95%

of members responding to our recent satisfaction survey believe BUILA membership is **good value for money**

SHARING AND SUPPORTING

The coronavirus pandemic created great uncertainty for the whole UK education sector. This year the British Council has deepened its collaboration with BUILA - with both organisations benefitting from working together on briefings to influencers such as agents and counsellors, sharing vital research and insights in key markets, and supporting sector engagement in Europe 2020 and beyond.

Jacqui Jenkins, Global Relationship Manager, British Council



BUILA's Executive Committee would like to thank all of our partner organisations, both national and international, who have worked collaboratively with BUILA over the past year; and the many individuals and companies that have supported our activities through the donation of their time, professional advice and sponsorship.

BUILA would also like to thank all the incoming and outgoing Executive Team for their amazing hard work, conducted in addition to their 'day job'. Plus all their employing institutions for allowing them to devote the time needed to work on our members' behalf.



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