



BRITISH UNIVERSITIES' INTERNATIONAL LIAISON ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2020 - 2021



Another extraordinary year



96%

of BUILA members responding to our recent survey agree that BUILA activities help them in their work recruiting international students.

After yet another extraordinary year for the international Higher Education (HE) sector, we are glad to be able to celebrate all that has been achieved in partnership with members and stakeholders, to maintain UK international recruitment. BUILA has been delighted with feedback from members underlining how much they have valued our support through very challenging times. We have extended and expanded BUILA's reach, influence and services even more to help universities navigate their way through the challenges and sustain their recruitment activity.

Through continued close working relationships with key government departments such as DfE and the Home Office we have ensured that they have a real understanding of the issues the sector is facing, and are really pleased at the outcomes of working jointly to address these issues in 'real time'. We continue to work with them in anticipating issues that may arise in the new recruitment cycle and have great mechanisms in place both with the government and other key sector organisations to consider what needs to be implemented.



“By the sector for the sector remains BUILA's greatest strength.”

We are delighted that we have been able to reach more members than ever through our online training, Regional Interest Groups (RIGs), virtual Annual Conference and networking forums, not only in this country but right around the world, and looking forward we will continue a hybrid way of connecting members with the latest intelligence, information and networking opportunities.

Our priority in 2022 will be ensuring that we sustain this level of engagement with members and with key government and sector organisations to anticipate and react to all the challenges ahead.

Bobby Mehta, Chair of BUILA

BUILA - What we have been doing



Expanding reach, influence and services throughout the year



Our first virtual Annual Conference was the biggest yet, allowing us to reach overseas based staff, and enabling us to broaden our collaborations and content with excellent speakers and experts from around the world.

It was amazing to have access to such high-quality speakers with such a wealth of experience.



350

Annual Conference delegates from all over the globe.

16

Countries represented including United Arab Emirates, Australia, China, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Netherlands, Pakistan, South Africa, Thailand, United States.

5,400

Social shares and attendee messages.

12,500

Conference Session views.

Expanding reach, influence and services throughout the year

Training and Networking

BUILA's channels for members to exchange information and keep updated on the latest intelligence reached more members than ever during the year. WhatsApp users increased by 50%, and those attending Regional Interest Groups and training by over 20%. BUILA also delivered the first training session created especially for more experienced staff in international recruitment.

I'm based overseas, so this was a really great opportunity to learn more about international recruitment.

Great to know you are thinking about those in the 'middle' not just those new to the field and Directors.



375 Members attended our training sessions.

2,315 Regular users of BUILA regional WhatsApp groups.

2,100 Members attended our Regional Interest Groups.

Helping to shape and influence current and future policy impacting on international HE

- **Lobbying to maintain Covid flexibilities:** Throughout the year, and through continuing waves of the epidemic, BUILA has been a key partner in ensuring crucial policy flexibilities and concessions for international students in areas such as visas and Graduate Route eligibility were continued and extended.
- **Providing clarification and guidance on Covid related policies:** BUILA has worked closely with government, sector and specialist partners to clarify ever changing policies impacting on travel and isolation for international students and to ensure the messaging to these students and their advisors was as clear and up-to-date as possible.
- **Highlighting and overcoming visa and immigration issues:** A number of new ways of exchanging 'real time' intelligence around student numbers, visa centre capacity, TB testing, and visa refusals have been created with UKVI and across the wider Home Office. These have led to the successful resolution of current issues and instigation of measures to help anticipate potential problems arising in the future.
- **Creating foundations for Graduate Route success:** BUILA has convened a number of meetings with employer representational groups, AGCAS, UUKi, UKCISA and the Home Office, to understand and look at combating barriers to employers taking on international students under the Graduate Route. Working with members of the AGCAS Internationalisation Task Group, BUILA helped to create the initial elements for a tool kit for universities to engage employers with the Route.
- **Ensuring we have the right data to inform and support international student recruitment and employability:** BUILA has been working with UKCISA and AGCAS to lobby HESA around the proposed reduction of international student data collection. We will be looking at ways to ensure that graduate outcome data can be enhanced and available to inform and direct employability services and international student recruitment.

“BUILA always seems one step ahead on issues we are all facing, especially during Covid, BUILA has been a godsend!”

“BUILA brings a credible voice for the sector to political and government forums.”



Influencing UK HE promotion and communication to support international recruitment to students and influencers

Creating unified messaging

BUILA have been feeding into cross sector and governmental groups to create unified and consistent messages to Agents, Counsellors and Students around Covid and policy changes. As well as working with British Council on the ground to combat negative publicity, and ensure timely briefings directly to all of these audiences.

“BUILA have been particularly helpful in helping us remain connected to the changing global landscape of our students.”

Reviewing communication and recruitment activity during Covid

BUILA commissioned a review of what was and wasn't working with communication and recruitment activity in key markets during the first phase of the pandemic. The findings provided vital insights for university recruitment activity.

Enhancing lead generation

BUILA has been helping to steer a review of the Study UK website and exploration of search engines linked to better lead generation for universities.

Providing reassurance and welcome messaging to international students

Working with UUKi on the #WeAreTogether campaign, BUILA helped to amplify messages of reassurance around safety and welfare to international students during the lockdown and the first wave of Covid. BUILA continues to support the British Council's current campaign with content and messaging.



WeAreTogether



Undertaking research and providing real time market intelligence and insights to support recruitment

Creating a quality framework with agents

Building on the comprehensive research undertaken to improve best practice for agents and universities, BUILA has worked extensively across the whole of the education sector to include Pathway Providers, Independent HE, and Further Education in the next steps in creating a quality framework. During the year we have developed:

- A good practice guide
- Code of practice
- The step by step guide for students on how to use agents, and
- Undertaken a review of agent training as well as aggregators.

BUILA will be working with partners to embed these elements within agent and member policies and processes throughout the next financial year.

Enhancing communication with agents and counsellors

BUILA has worked closely with the British Council to identify ways to enhance existing communications with agents and counsellors who are so vital to the UK international student recruitment process.

Going forward we will be supporting the creation of a central communication website for agents as a depository of information, as well as formalised timely briefings for agents and counsellors.

Facilitating the exchange of ideas and best practice across the sector through events and forums

This year BUILA has continued to extend channels and mediums for members to exchange information and keep updated on the latest intelligence. With 2,315 members now using the WhatsApp groups, the introduction of twice weekly updates, more frequent Directors' Forums and a 20% increase in the number of members attending Regional Interest Groups. Members have fed back that this has been invaluable to them in their planning and recruitment activity.



The open conversation amongst supportive peers is indispensable and completely inimitable by other organisations.

The RIGs and weekly updates have been exceptionally useful especially throughout the pandemic and Brexit.

Enhancing the knowledge and skills development of our members through training and conference

Responding to member needs

BUILA's expanded training programme for the year centred around topics which responded to issues raised by members and included a session created especially for more experienced staff working in international. We are looking to build on its success by introducing a mentoring programme for this level.

Extending our outreach

This year's BUILA Annual Conference broke all records with 350 delegates from 16 different countries. By hosting our first virtual Conference, we were able to expand our reach to overseas delegates and broaden our collaboration and content with excellent speakers and experts based around the world. Virtual training also meant that we welcomed university staff from other campuses that have never been able to join our training before.

Wow BUILA, best Conference session I have EVER attended. So inspired. Congratulations!



Recorded Conference sessions meant that members from all time zones were able to tune in and offering continued access for six months has allowed members time to digest the content and share the relevant information with their teams at their own pace.

Increasing virtual networking

With networking and peer to peer interaction at the forefront of this event, the online Conference included various themed networking opportunities allowing participants and sponsors to connect no matter where they were. Next year we will continue to offer virtual and hybrid events to further expand our reach to staff around the world.

The closest thing to a 'real' Conference since going online, good networking and thought-provoking sessions. We'll be back next year.



Lovely to meet so many people at different stages of their career and learn from one another. Also the agenda was just excellent. Really relevant to what we all do.

Balance Sheet

As at 31 July 2021

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 annual membership fees, sponsorship generated to support and enhance the Regional Interest Groups overseas, training fees (which assist to achieve a break even cost for our training programme) and a small amount of bank interest. Due to the cancellation of the Annual Conference income was down for the year.

The main streams of expenditure were for activity and services costs such as continued investment in our training programme and expanded research activity, including the work carried out to establish a UK Framework for Education Agents.

Plus administrative costs such as the Project Manager and Communication Co-ordinator; office expenses and website support.

Profit and Loss Account		2021
		£
Income for the year		177,166
Activity and service costs		112,653
Administrative expenses		63,843
		2021
		£
Net surplus for the year		689
Divided as follows:		
Member universities		689
	At 1 August	Share of surplus
	2020	At 31 July 2021
	£	£
Member universities	19,283	689



“BUILA is an important partner for UKCISA in our work to enhance the international student experience. By working together, and sharing insight and resources, we’ve been able to benefit our mutual membership, as well as the international students they work with.

Anne-Marie Graham, CEO, UKCISA

“Working with BUILA has been invaluable. Their insight, professionalism and sector expertise has helped shape the future of our work in international student mobility and marketing.

Maddalaine Ansell, Director of Education, British Council

“BUILA are a highly valued partner for UUKi, providing essential insights from their networks of Directors and Heads of international. We work together on key projects, campaigns and lobbying asks - and by doing so achieve so much more than we could alone. We very much look forward to continuing to work together.

Vivienne Stern, Director, Universities UK International (UUKi)

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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