



BRITISH UNIVERSITIES' INTERNATIONAL LIAISON ASSOCIATION



ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2021 - 2022

## STATEMENT FROM THE CHAIR

The past year has been one of dramatic change and uncertainty; as a sector we have grappled with continued global pockets of lockdown restrictions, political uncertainty, changing working practices and a period of unprecedented growth in key recruitment markets. Throughout, BUILA has sought to sustain the level of services and support created during the pandemic for members and partners.

We are delighted that both members and partners have endorsed the work we have been carrying out and expressed their gratitude for our contribution in helping them navigate the continued challenges.

We are really grateful for our close working relationships with government departments, particularly the Department of Education (DfE), Home Office and Department for International Trade (DIT) and their openness to participate in frank discussions around issues our members are facing. This spirit of partnership has continued across the wider international education sector and real impact has been gained by this joined up approach to tackling emerging problems as well as in anticipating future difficulties and creating forward looking strategies. We are particularly pleased by the great steps that have been made towards a sector-wide Agent Quality Framework and are now looking to the next steps in ensuring we maintain the UK's high-quality standards.

93%

of members strongly agree or agree that BUILA activities help them in their work recruiting international students.

“

*BUILA has been fantastic in terms of championing those who work in international student recruitment.*

**Sir Steve Smith** - FAcSS, FRSA, UK International Education Champion

It was such a pleasure to meet up again with so many members and global colleagues at our hybrid Directors' Forum and Annual Conference, our biggest event yet! We look forward to continuing our hybrid approach to connecting members with the latest information, intelligence, and networking opportunities. Going forward, plans include the expansion of our regional interest groups' focus to include Transnational Education (TNE) and increasing access to our training sessions.

The only thing that is certain is the continued challenges we will all be facing in 2023. We are confident that BUILA, together with our valued partners and stakeholders, have the mechanisms in place to confront future challenges and help steer members through the times ahead!



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*I really value the work of BUILA, since the pandemic the information you deliver is so helpful, the absence of travel networking has been challenging and you capture the sentiments of the sector and share them widely which is welcome. Thanks for all your hard work! It is much appreciated!*

**Bobby Mehta**, Chair of BUILA

## BUILA ACTIVITIES



### ENSURING QUALITY AND BEST PRACTICE

*Developing a quality framework for working with agents and advisors to form the basis for a cross sector approach to best practice.*



### LOBBYING

*Shaping future policy through regular liaison with government departments and sector partners.*



### EMPLOYABILITY

*Working with partners to create tools to support and amplify communication to a business audience on international student employability.*



### INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT

*Working with Government Departments, the British Council and Study UK to help create and steer the strategy for promoting the UK sector internationally at key stages of the student journey.*



### KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Facilitating the exchange of ideas and best practice right across the sector.*



BUILA is a membership-led organisation, supporting UK universities and professionals to grow and manage their international student recruitment and partnership activities.

During the year we have done this by focusing on the issues that matter most to our members.

# BUILA ACTIVITIES



## LOBBYING

- Resolving visa and immigration issues at weekly meetings
- Providing intelligence and data for policy and resource planning
- Inputting into Blended Learning policy
- Providing a collective voice for the sector



## ENSURING QUALITY AND BEST PRACTICE

- Creating a **Good Practice Guide** for managing agents
- Creating a **Code of Ethical Practice** for agents
- Undertaking research into aggregator models
- Delivering member workshops to share good practice
- Delivering workshops for wider education sector partners
- Sharing trends and good practice with the Home Office
- Supporting the revamp of British Council agent training



## KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Delivering the widest reaching hybrid annual conference ever
- Expanding our Regional Interest Groups (RIGs) to nine
- Continuing our real time updates to members
- Expanding and enhancing members training
- Reintroducing face-to-face alongside virtual events
- Maintaining the increased number of Directors' Forums
- Increasing our partnerships with wider education sector



## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT

- Reviewing Study UK website and search engine
- Briefing agents and counsellors
- Exchanging sector information with British Council in-market staff
- Reviewing messaging to international students
- Supporting the creation of the agent and counsellor communication hub



## EMPLOYABILITY

- Supporting the targeting of MPs through the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for International Students, on international student employability
- Creating collateral to sell benefits of the Graduate Visa Route to employers
- Creating tools to aid members sell the Graduate Visa Route to employers
- Enhancing the response rate on international graduate outcomes
- Delivering employability best practice exchange sessions

## LOBBYING

### *Helping to shape and influence current and future policy*

During the year BUILA continued to work closely with a wide range of international education sector stakeholders and government departments. Real impact has been achieved by this joined up approach to tackling emerging problems, as well as in anticipating future difficulties. We have created forward looking strategies and mechanisms after these emerging issues to deal with these. Examples of this activity include:

- Influencing the Home Office's Blended Learning policy,
- Representing member views on the new student immigration policy,

- Highlighting and finding solutions to immigration policy and delivery barriers as they arose, especially during the peak recruitment period,
- Providing vital intelligence and data for influencing policy decisions and for forward planning (such as UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) peak period assumptions and staffing),
- Supporting with the organisation of the APPG for International Students, to highlight the issues and barriers to successful delivery of the Graduate Visa Route and international graduate employability more generally.



**2<sup>ND</sup>**  
on the list of  
BUILA member  
priorities.

“

*The lobbying done on behalf of the sector and the willingness to engage with the membership to canvas opinions, views and desires is greatly appreciated.*



## ENSURING QUALITY AND BEST PRACTICE

### *Developing a quality framework for working with agents and advisors, a cross sector approach to best practice*

BUILA made considerable progress in the creation of a quality framework for working with agents and advisors, building on the recommendations coming out of our extensive research to answer DfE and Office for Students (OfS) concerns around the quality of recruitment practices, which saw the development of:

- The National Code of Ethical Practice for UK Education Agents,
- The Good Practice Guide for UK Providers Using Education Agents.

Our focus has been to help embed these important tools right across the international education sector whilst developing additional tools for agents, counsellors and students.

#### **Work has included:**

- Commissioning the creation and delivery of a training programme for international higher education (HE) staff to help embed the code and practice within each member institution,
- Instigating discussions with cross sector internationally facing education organisations on adopting a common approach, and developing a series of workshops for their staff to encourage adoption and share good practice,



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*The training really challenged universities to think critically about how we approach our work with agents, enabling us to build on an already solid base of expertise and focus on where we can add value to these relationships.*

90

member organisations attended the Agent Quality Framework sessions.



*As the role of agents comes under greater external scrutiny, the framework and the supporting training has provided an easy toolkit to ensure that our practices put the needs of our students at the centre of the work we do and has enabled us to demonstrate to both senior management and external stakeholders that we are taking our responsibilities seriously.*

**6,000**

agents signed up to new agents training.



- Conducting research to help members understand the different aggregator models and how aggregators fit into the quality framework,
- Increasing the dialogue and information exchange with UKVI to identify trends and highlight poor practices,
- Working closely with the British Council to deliver webinars in each key recruitment region to introduce the code and best practice to agents, counsellors and advisors,
- Commencing engagement with key aggregators to discuss how the code can be embedded into their operations,
- Commissioning the creation of a Good Practice Guide for agents and top tips for students in using agents,

- Supporting the British Council with a revamp of their agent training and the development of an agent communication portal.

**Going forward BUILA will be:**

- **Launching the Good Practice Guide for Agents** and running training sessions to encourage engagement,
- **Launching a student ‘top tips’ guide** and working with partners to achieve maximum exposure of the tool,
- **Commissioning research into next steps** including accreditation options.

## THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS AND BEST PRACTICE

*Enhancing the knowledge and skills development of our members wherever they are based, facilitating the exchange of ideas and best practice*

During a time when opportunities for face-to-face interaction continued to be limited, BUILA worked hard to ensure that members were able to access a variety of channels and opportunities to exchange and share best practice, network, learn new skills and gain knowledge.



### **Networking and Information Sharing:**

Responding to member requests we:

- Increased the number of Regional Interest Group and WhatsApp Regional Groups to include International Marketing, South Americas, and East Asia,
- Continued our real time communications to members around policy updates and market intelligence,
- Created specific member groups to help inform and share experiences around refugee groups such as those from Ukraine and Afghanistan,
- Delivering bi-monthly Directors' Forums which included expert updates and information from partners and sector stakeholders.

**94%**

of members rated their Regional Interest Groups experience as excellent or good.

**100%**

of attendees rated their overall experience of the BUILA Conference as Excellent or Good.



*Regional Interest Groups have been instrumental in staying in touch with the region during virtual times - thank you for keeping us going! Meetings are chaired by international HE staff, for international HE staff, so all content is relatable.*





**96%**

of members rated the training experience as excellent or good.

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*Being able to offer so many services (lobbying, training, networking etc) under one umbrella makes for a streamlined and harmonious approach to strengthening and promoting the sector which no other organisation can do.*



**Going forward BUILA will be:**

- **Exploring a joint TNE Interest Group** and events with UUKi,
- **Appointing an Executive board member to oversee the Regional Interest Groups** to ensure they are vehicles for capturing and raising issues to partners and government.

**Training**

- Listening to member feedback we enhanced our already expanded training programme, creating new sessions:
  - 102 Training aimed at supporting staff at middle management level,

- Working with Counsellors and Advisors’ Recognising the growing importance of these influencers,
- ‘Remote Working/Campus Overseas’, reflecting the new working patterns of international staff.

**Going forward BUILA will be:**

- **Exploring a mentoring scheme,**
- **Looking at mechanisms** to expand access to the training sessions.



## RE-CONNECTING WITH MEMBERS

BUILA were delighted to be able to re-connect with so many members face-to-face at our Annual Conference in Wales after such a long time. We were also delighted to welcome attendees from around the world to our first hybrid Conference. In terms of reach, attendees, speakers, sessions and sponsors it was our biggest and most ambitious yet.

### Going forward BUILA will be:

- **Creating a one-day Conference for senior international staff** at the end of the calendar year,
- **Continuing investment into a hybrid Annual Conference** to allow greater accessibility for all international staff.



**452**  
Global  
Attendees



**51**  
International  
Speakers

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*It was the best run hybrid event I have attended.*



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*It was a fantastic chance to (re)connect with colleagues from the sector, learn about market changes/trends and I left with so many ideas to implement in the next cycle.*

**42**  
Hybrid  
Sessions



## PROMOTION

### *Influencing international marketing and communication at key stages of the student journey*

Communication to students, influencers and stakeholders has continued to be important during uncertain times and BUILA have been seeking to ensure that all messaging reflects the current situation and needs of our members. This has included:

- Feeding back on the revamped Study UK website and search engine,
- Contributing to emerging strategy focusing on UK representation at British Council international events,
- Inputting into the development of an agent communication hub,
- Consideration of messaging at a market level through the Regional Interest Groups. Highlighting issues for communication in each market,

- Delivering webinars to agents and counsellors updating them on the UK prospective,
- Working with British Council country staff to counteract negative media coverage.

#### **Going forward BUILA will be:**

- **Working with partners such as UCAS to create messaging to potential students** at key stages of their application,
- **Reviewing priority markets and messaging** for the Study UK campaign,
- **Creating a communication plan for agents and advisors** with the British Council.



*BUILA, and their network of practitioners, truly understand international student recruitment have been invaluable as we continue to develop our work with international students and those that influence them.*

**Maddalaine Ansell**, Director of Education, British Council



## EMPLOYABILITY

### *Working with partners to create tools to support universities and amplify communication to a business audience on international student employability*

UKCISA convened a cross HE sector group during the year to focus on international student employability and to ensure the success of the Graduate Visa Route. Through our role as chair of the Employer subgroup BUILA have been working closely with partners from the AGCAS International Task Group to share best practice on engaging employers, create tools to help universities communicate the benefits of employing international students and help to improve the data and intelligence around this area.



#### Activities have included:

- Creating materials to promote the benefits of the Graduate Visa Route and international students more generally to employers,
- Inputting into, and the promotion of, research looking at capturing quantitative data on the success of the Graduate Visa Route and the creation of case studies for marketing purposes,
- Inputting into improving international graduate outcomes capture and collating responses in light of the cessation of international graduate calling, with HESA, Jisc and British Council,
- Awareness raising and sharing of best practice amongst international staff on how to engage employers to fulfil recruitment promises through BUILA workshops and Conference sessions,
- Inputting into DfE commissioned research looking at the government's response and priorities around this theme,
- Supporting with the organisation of the APPG for International Students to highlight the issues and barriers to successful delivery of the Graduate Visa Route and international graduate employability more generally,
- Presenting to attachés and embassy staff on employability, as they are important communication channels to international students in key markets.



## VOTE OF CONFIDENCE



*It is a pleasure to work with BUILA on key campaigns and lobbying asks for the sector, helping to ensure we speak as one collective voice on important issues. They are a valued partner and trusted source of expertise and insight. At UUKi, we look forward to continuing collaborating with BUILA on behalf of students, universities and the wider sector.*

**Jamie Arrowsmith**, Director, Universities UK International



*The Department of International Trade Education Team is pleased to report a very positive relationship with BUILA and helpful collaboration in terms of working together to deliver the International Education Strategy.*

**Sarah Chidgey**, Education Sector Lead, Department of International Trade



*Our partnership continues to generate insight from our networks that helps inform our mutual advocacy for a sustainable and student focused recruitment process, and UKCISA values BUILA's ongoing support to ensure the best possible experience for international students in the UK.*

**Anne Marie Graham**, Chief Executive, UK Council for International Student Affairs



*UKVI enjoys a continued good relationship maintained over the last couple of years that has clear benefit to both UKVI, BUILA and its members' in helping to raise issues/concerns and work together for a swift conclusion.*

**UK Visas and Immigration**



*BUILA provides our department with vital information, especially around international student visa application concerns and issues from across the globe.*

**Department of Education**

# BALANCE SHEET

As at 31 July 2022

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 Annual Conference, training fees (which assist to achieve a break even cost 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 our training programme, work carried out to enhance and embed the UK Framework for Education Agents, plus administrative costs such as the Executive Director and increased support roles, running costs and website support.

	2022		2021	
	£	£	£	£
<b>Turnover</b>		369,050		177,166
<b>Cost of sales</b>		(234,609)		(97,498)
<b>Gross profit</b>		134,441		79,668
Administrative expenses		(90,732)		(78,998)
<b>Operating profit</b>		43,709		670
<b>Other income</b>		69		19
<b>Surplus for the year</b>		43,778		689

	Notes	2022		2021	
		£	£	£	£
<b>Current assets</b>					
Trade debtors		57,718		1,951	
Cash at bank and in hand		252,641		240,713	
		310,359		242,664	
<b>Current liabilities</b>					
Trade creditors		29,668		5,750	
<b>Net current assets</b>			280,691		236,914
<b>Members' funds</b>	3		280,691		236,914

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BUILA's Executive Committee would like to thank all 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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