

Breakout Session 3

UK Visas and Immigration update for International advisers

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VSI Study Operations

Operational Update

June 2023

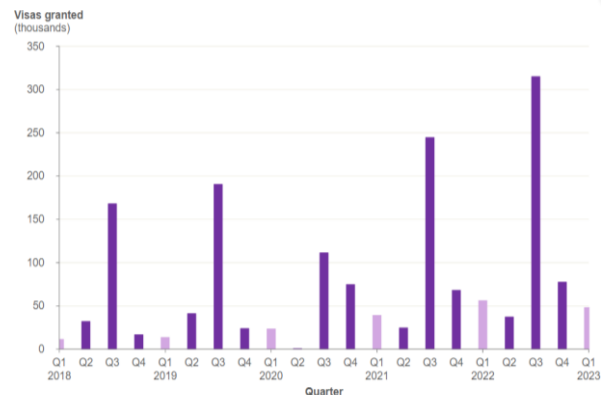
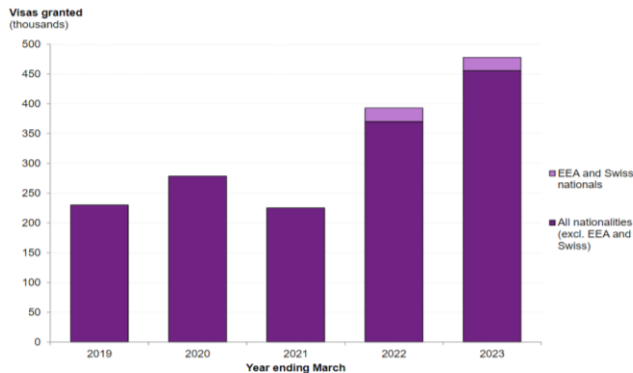


Reflections across 2022/23

- The make up of the event, what to expect and what not to expect.
- The backdrop of 2022 and the challenges across UKVI visa processing within 2023.
- UKVI system overhaul/refresh and current impacts on decision making.
- Delivering largest volume of student visas ever seen in 2022 & projected intake for 2023.
- Further planned reform across Study operations across 2023.
- Service Management focus within UKVI looking at full customer journey.
- Review of engagement activity and transparency of information.



Student Data Analysis (March 2023)

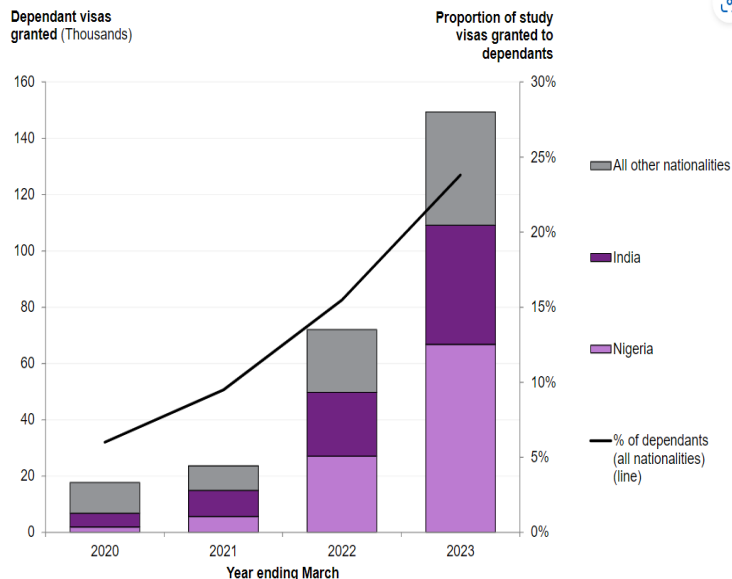


- For the year ending March 2023, there were 477,931 study visas granted to main applicants, this is 22% more than in the year ending March 2022 and 108% more than 2019, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2023 operational projections show a potential further growth up to c800k including student dependants.
- Indian student numbers (138,532) rose above Chinese (100,397) volumes. Chinese and Indian nationals together comprised half (50%) of all sponsored study grants. Nigeria, Pakistan and the USA comprised the rest of the top 5 intake list.
- EEA students totalled 22,457 with French (4,083) and German (4,040) and students accounting for the highest volumes.
- Significant increase in volumes attributed to both the quality of education on offer within UK institutions as well as the post-study offer of the Graduate route introduced in July 2021.
- Continuing close liaison with sector representatives as well as institutions directly on future forecasting.



Student Dependant Data Analysis

Visas granted to dependants of sponsored study visa holders by nationality, and percentage of all sponsored study related visas for dependants, year ending March 2020 to 2023



- In the year ending March 2023, almost one quarter (24%) of all sponsored study related visas granted were to dependants of students (149,400), compared to 15% (72,062) in the year ending March 2022.
- Nigeria had the highest number of dependants (66,796) of sponsored study visa holders in the year ending March 2023, increasing from 27,137 in the year ending March 2022.
- 42,381 Indian dependants were granted visas in comparison to 22,958 in the previous year.
- Since 2019, both the total number of dependants and the proportion of all sponsored study related visas granted to dependants have increased. This may reflect a change in the composition of students, if for example there are a greater number of older students attracted to study in the UK.



Current Operational Position

Service Standards

Study Casework are currently considering Visa applications several days inside of the published standard application target of 15 days.

In-Country applications are taking approximately 3 weeks (SLA target 8 weeks)

Summer Surge Readiness Preparation:

Intake projections have been finalised with c450k applications expected during the summer surge. Recruitment and casework training has started and a number of projects are underway to implement lessons learnt from the 2022 surge periods.

Student Casework

June 2023

Engagement activity

Work continues on direct engagement with institutions and sector representatives to raise awareness of current risks being seen across student visa intake as well as developing future vision of engagement via the account manager function.

Wider Visa Routes

All Visa routes remain delivering decisions within published SLA.

These include Visit, Work, Marriage and Ukrainian Visas.



Surge Readiness Activities



RESOURCE:

- Secured support from a number of teams across UKVI
- Recruited and upskilled managers.
- Onshore support in advance of surge to ensure readiness
- Acted on previous surge review to make improvements in line with lessons learned.



TRAINING:

- Refreshed training package for caseworkers
- Remote training options to secure support from decision making hubs across the UK.
- Capability and quality training measures for trainers and samplers
- Quality Assurance board



COMMS:

- Regular service delivery calls for internal stakeholders
- Social media campaign.
- Sector Briefs and comms directly to students and sponsors with key messages



Operational Improvement for 2023

Service Management:

- A comprehensive **Summer Surge review**, with key recommendations for implementation in October 2023 made after interviewing all stakeholders and sector representatives.
- Commissioning of deep dives into the **customer insight** feedback.
- Improved feedback of **Quality Assurance** work to aid with error reduction activity, including new tools for decision makers and an improvement in feedback loops to learn from errors made.

Consideration of closing Premium Customer Service Team offering, replacing it with the formation of three new teams to aid the customer journey:

Continuation of **early life** comms, updating the leaflet on how/when to apply as well as ensuring key documentation requirements are clearly indicated.



PCST Reform

Why: The current offer, including fee has been the same for 10 years.

Analysis over a year showed queries received - **70%** - were “transactional” ie BRP Error/not received, application updates or Immigration History Checks.

Following extensive sector feedback, improvements were made including accommodation moves, large scale recruitment, training, a policy embedded lead and a cleanse of AMP.

A 3 tier offer was considered, with a gold, silver, bronze package developed.

One step further- a free service for all sponsors made up of:

- **Engagement team**
- **Customer service team**
- **Enhanced sponsorship team**

The intention is for increased efficiency and for queries to be routed direct to teams that deal with them for a faster resolution.

An online event has been held explaining the changes with a document and 2 FAQ's sent through amp to all premium customers. We will continue our monthly FAQ and in July share the intended customer service contact points, with a final offer submitted in August. Amp will continue to be used for transactional requests and refunds given to those who's contract expire following the new offering.

Following feedback from the sector around surge delivery, this will go live in **October**.

Risk updates

Current trends across the study sector:

- Student visa route continues to be a largely compliant route with low refusal rates. Typically the average refusal rate falls around 3% across the course of the calendar year.
- UKVI engage regularly with both sector representatives and institutions directly on emerging risks and challenges. Alongside sharing information with groups such as UKCISA, UUK, BUILA and Russell Group, UKVI student operations produce a quarterly 'Study Brief' which aims to capture and update the sector on emerging risks and challenges.
- Recent topics of engagement have included:
 1. Students arriving in the UK and claiming Asylum within a short period of time. Institutions impacted by these students have been engaging directly with UKVI.
 2. Individuals identified as having submitted forged documentation as part of their visa application, including bank statements, educational certificates and bank loan letters.
 3. Encounters with students either at the application stage or upon arrival at the UK border who don't have the relevant English language skills claimed.
 4. Funds being recycled by agents to satisfy the immigration rules. Students being left destitute due to not being able to access funds required to maintain & accommodate themselves, or pay their tuition fees.
 5. Increasing numbers of Indian students issued with visas who have then travelled to the UK and been reported by their sponsor as not having enrolled or showing poor attendance.
- UKVI takes varying approaches when engaging on the topic or risk dependant on the scale of the risk and information available to share. We continue to work with institutions directly affected to identify and address the root cause of the problem as well as sharing information with sector partners to help publicise such risk for others to be aware of.



Graduate Route

The Graduate Route launched on 1st July 2021.

Since launch we have received **194,973** applications from graduates who are seeking to extend their stay to either work, or to look for work, within the United Kingdom.

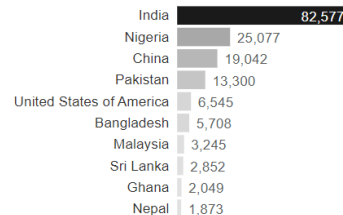
Over c148k applications were made from customers who have been able to reuse their biometrics from their last student application, with c46k customers attending Sopra to have new biometrics taken. Most in-person enrolment customers are dependants, or **students who have damaged/misplaced their original BRP card**.

On average, the Graduate Route has less than **1% refusal rate**. Our surge points so far have aligned to the student life cycle, with peaks in **September, January, and May**. We are currently working comfortably within SLA, however we are conscious that there are some longstanding technical issues impacting a small cohort of customers that are currently being prioritised and resolved. A review on priority service options remains under consideration.

Prospective Graduate Route students may be impacted by the marketing boycott. We have circulated a Q&A to help support students who might be impacted by this.

We would like to remind students that they must wait for their results before applying, and should wait until their **successful course completion** has been reported to UKVI. Although we continue to exercise some flexibility where the notification is due shortly after application, if they apply too early, their application may be refused.

EU / EEA / Nationality



Key messaging for 2023

- We expect high demand for UK student visas this summer. Apply for your student visa as early as possible - as soon as you have received your Certificate of Acceptance for Study (CAS) from your education provider. You can apply 6 months before your course start date.
- August is the peak month for UK student visa applications. Beat the rush and apply before August, if possible, to allow time to travel for September course start dates.
- For the latest student visa decision waiting times see: www.gov.uk/guidance/visa-decision-waiting-times-applications-outside-the-uk
- Complete your student visa application correctly – check you have included all necessary information and documents. Your decision could take longer to be assessed if your application is incorrect or incomplete.
- Students wishing to travel in a hurry may be able to pay for a faster decision on their visa. Find out more on Gov.uk: www.gov.uk/faster-decision-visa-settlement/applying-outside-the-uk
- Full information on requirements and eligibility can be found on Gov.uk: www.gov.uk/student-visa



Questions

