

## UK Visas and Immigration networking session for local stakeholders

SIEM, India team organised a networking and information event in collaboration with UK Visas and Immigration for Education agents and UK University India offices on 23 March 2015

The event was divided into two sessions – the first half was for education agents while the evening session was for UK University India offices. This event was held at the Claridges, New Delhi and was attended by over 65 education agents and over 30 UK University India offices

The session for education agents began with a presentation on 'Overview on British Council's strategic engagement in Education' delivered by Richard Everitt (Director, Education & Society, British Council India) followed by a session by Ottolie Wekezer (Regional Director, SIEM South Asia) who gave an overview on the SIEM strategic priorities in the region. The session progressed with an update on the GREAT campaign and Agent engagement in India by Suchita Gokarn (Head, Education and Promotion, India) which was well received by the audience.

The highlight of the event was a session by the UK Visas and Immigration. Natasha Woollcombe (Regional Communications Manager Central Asia, South Asia and Turkey) gave an update on the upcoming changes in the Tier 4 visas. All participating agents were requested to send over questions in advance to which they sought clarifications from UKVI, which were then compiled and answered in the session.

Natasha's presentation included details about changes in the [NHS](#), introduction of the [Biometric Residence Permit](#) (BRP) card for International students and the [changes](#) in IELTS processes. Click [here](#) to get a list of Approved Secure English Language Tests and Test Centres

This was followed by an open Q and A section where agents commented positively about the issue of priority visas in Bangalore and requested UKVI to make provisions for priority visa applications for students in other visa centres as well. Agents voiced their concerns on the maintenance of funds and expressed their anxiety over the existing negative environment amongst Indian students about the UK. Despite certain negative news about the UK, most agents showcased a encouraging attitude towards sending more students to the UK. They also mentioned the downfall in student enquiries in India post closure of Post Study Work (PSW) and highlighted that more initiative needs to be taken by the UKVI to improve the UK's brand image in the International student market.

Highlights of the feedback received:

- More than 85% agents gave feedback the event met their expectations.
  - Session by UKVI colleague received mixed feedback wherein 38% agents mentioned the session was 'Good' while 23% found the session to be an 'average' one.
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The evening followed the same format as the morning. It began with registration over tea/coffee, followed by presentations by Richard Everitt, Ottolie Wekezer and Suchita Gokarn.

Natasha Woollcombe (Regional Communications Manager Central Asia, South Asia and Turkey) delivered a session on the forthcoming Tier 4 changes and addressed concerns on visa issuance and rejection which were shared by the India offices in advance.

During this session, the India offices requested further explanation on the Bio metric card including its delivery and procedure to report lost cards. Similar feedback and concern was voiced during this session about the negative impact on the India student market due to closure of the PSW scheme in April 2012.

Further, there were suggestions on the introduction of the fastrack visa process for students, concerns about administrative review and clarification on the surcharge on NHS.

The session ended with a networking over dinner.

Highlights of the feedback received:

- 54% officers mentioned that the event met their expectations
- 63% officers remarked that Natasha Woollcombe's session was 'Good' and 27% mentioned that the session was 'average'.

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The SIEM India team created a platform for agents and the UK India offices to network with the UK Visas and Immigration to receive latest updates through direct interaction. Additionally the session was aimed to understand and get clarifications on the queries and concerns raised by both audiences. This was an important engagement opportunity for our partners who work with us towards positioning UK as one of the best study destinations in the world, and it was important for us to provide this forum where important stakeholders could meet and discuss challenges as well as strive to work together towards our common objectives.