

## Extra time for visa applicants

International students in the USA wanting to change their F or J student visa for an H-1B worker visa were given an extension on the usual 30-to-60 day application period in July this year, after the H-1B cap for the 2004 fiscal year was reached in February, seven months before the start of the 2005 fiscal year.

Eduardo Aguirre, Director of the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, said that the extension period was introduced to allow students to "avoid the inconvenience of returning home, only to travel back to the United States in the near future". In July this year, 18,000 people were waiting for H-1B visas, according to the agency.

This year is the fifth year running that the cap for H-1B visas has been reached before the end of the year and the first year that the immigration agency has offered an extension to students. Victor Johnson from Nafsa: Association of International Educators welcomed the decision, saying that "it makes sense" for the USA to retain the students it educates.

# Rise in Chinese visa refusals

UK universities and education agents in China have been noticing increased levels of student visa refusals among their Chinese students this year, ever since changes were introduced to the visa application system in May.

Since this time, UK immigration officers in China have been basing their decision on whether to grant Chinese students a visa on documental evidence only, instead of a personal interview.

Lucy Shih from Haiyi Company based in Shanghai said that this was having a detrimental effect on visa acceptance rates, especially for those not used to the new system. "Many of the documents are poorly prepared if the students have no experience of filing an application, or some of the original documents from China don't look authentic [due to the poor printing quality in China,

which leaves a bad impression on the visa officer and causes its refusal," she said. "Agencies like us are very experienced with preparing good and persuasive documents to pass the paper screening process," she added.

According to a report in *The Guardian* newspaper in the UK, the Vice Chancellor of Luton University reported that visa success rates for their Chinese students were down from 70 per cent in 2003 to 30 per cent this year, while at Leeds University, 78 of its 81 Chinese applicants were refused a visa this year.

Many other UK education providers have also been reporting difficulties with Chinese enrolments this year. Rebecca Brown Forden from York College reported that the Chinese student market had been experiencing a "significant downturn" recently

due to "changes in the visa system in China, such as the abolition of visa interviews which gave students the opportunity to put their case forward".

UK visas confirmed that the applications process had been

toughened in order to deter those applying for a student visa in order to work in the UK.

According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency, 35,155 Chinese students came to study in UK universities in 2002/2003.

## Students choose Australia

The number of international students studying at Australian universities in the first semester of 2004 increased this year compared with the previous year, despite disappointing figures from traditional markets such as Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.

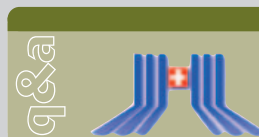
Latest statistics from IDP Education Australia show that, while student numbers from India and China increased by 52 per cent and 47 per cent respectively, numbers of Singaporean students decreased by five per cent, Indonesia student numbers decreased by four per cent and Malaysian

students increased by a marginal four per cent. Overall, the number of international students studying onshore in Australian universities increased by 13 per cent this year.

Charles Tyler from the University of Sydney, NSW, blamed the downturn in east Asian student enrolments on the rise in value of the Australian dollar, as well as fee increases by the universities themselves. "Since July 2002, the value of our dollar has risen by 36 per cent against the Indonesian rupiah," he said. "Combined with our fee increases, this makes the cost of studying

here 54 per cent more expensive for an Indonesian student than it was two years ago."

Many universities in Australia have also been directly targeting the Indian and Chinese markets. Gavin Hopper from the University of Ballarat, VIC, reported an "incredible increase" in Chinese enrolments recently. "Our articulation agreements are sending groups of students as opposed to individual students, [as] student complete a Diploma in China and then do [their] second and third years in Australia to get an Australian degree," he said.



**Full name:** Swiss Hotel Schools Association (ASEH)

**Year established:** 1986

**Organisation's main role:**

Quality assurance and professional accreditation, promotion inside and outside of Switzerland for quality hospitality management education and professional exchange among member schools.

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### What international student trends have you noticed among your members?

Swiss nationals or permanent residents represent about 22 per cent of the students [at member institutions]. Thirty per cent are from the EEA and 48 per cent from the rest of the world. This mix is, however, very different from school to school. Since 2002, total enrolments have not really increased and it seems that 2004 will not bring [significant] growth. Recently, the Swiss

authorities have made visa procedures in some markets more difficult and the Chinese market share has dropped by up to 50 per cent in some schools. New markets have been developed in Eastern Europe and countries from the former Soviet Union.

### What was your association's most important achievement last year?

ASEH is known for its quality assurance within the non-controlled Swiss private school market. All Swiss hotel schools are private and the federal government does not accredit most of the English teaching schools, therefore, ASEH plays a very important role and this is being recognised. Our standards of accreditation are rigorous and membership is becoming valuable for all hotel schools in Switzerland.

### How does your association work with international education agents?

ASEH provides standards on agent relations for all members. These can be found on our website along with by-laws, annual reports and statistics.

## International enrolments stagnate at UK schools

The Independent Schools Council annual survey for 2004 shows that new international enrolments at UK independent schools stagnated, compared with the previous year, with numbers showing a decrease of one per cent.

Despite the less than buoyant figures, however, some nationalities performed very well last year. New enrolments from Chinese students increased by 13 per cent while enrolments from Germany increased by 11 per cent. The number of new students enrolling from Hong Kong, the largest student market for UK independent schools, decreased by two per cent on the previous year and North America, Japan, Africa and Russia all also showed a slight decline in student enrolments in the survey.

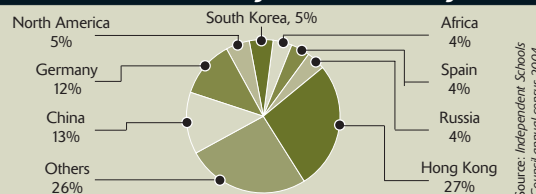
The census revealed that tuition fees had risen by nine per cent compared with 2002, a factor that may well have had an effect on international enrolments. A spokesperson for the Boarding Schools Association added that the

increased student visa charge of UK£155 (US\$275) "has more than likely contributed to the nil rise in overseas recruitment".

However, international enrolments for the current academic year look healthy, according to some schools. Brian Martin from Queen Ethelburga's College in York reported a "pleasing increase [in international enrolments] this coming academic year compared to last". He added, "The Chinese market remains naturally the largest followed by America and then Australia. There is no change for us in this regard from previous years."

Brian White from Malvern College in Worcestershire said that they had experienced no problems in recruiting international students in recent years. "We have seen an increase this year because we were willing to accept a few more. As a school that offers the IB [International Baccalaureate], we continuously find that demand from overseas students for places exceeds supply."

### New international enrolments at UK independent schools between January 2003 and January 2004



### New policy in India

The Indian government has overthrown a requirement that all Indian universities seek permission from the Ministry of Education before forming partnerships with foreign universities.

The move comes in preparation for India's membership of the World Trade Organisation next year, when the country will be able to operate educational institutions abroad and will be required to open up its own education sector to potential foreign partners.

### Adelaide welcomes students to state

South Australia's first international study brand was launched in July this year in order to attract more international students to study in Adelaide's schools, colleges and universities.

The brand, Study Adelaide: Australia's Best Learning Environment, was launched by the State Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education, Stephanie Key.

"This is a bold and aspirational claim that will make an important contribution to the government's goal in the State Strategic Plan to double [the state's] share of overseas students within the next 10 years," said Key. Adelaide currently attracts 13,000 international students each year.

### International summer school in Korea

An international summer school, offered for the first time this year at Korea University in Seoul, is the first summer programme in Korea to provide college courses for both Korean and international students.

The six-week summer programme, which is delivered at the specially designed International Summer Campus, offers nearly 50 courses in subject areas from economics to the Korean language and is modelled on the international colleges in Singapore and Hong Kong.

### Russia improves higher education

The Russian Ministry of Education and Science has begun a campaign to improve the quality of higher education available in the country by revoking the accreditation of institutions that employ unqualified instructors and admit more students than they are licensed to teach.

Investigators identified a number of problem institutions earlier this year and have so far revoked the accreditation of nine universities and partially revoked the accreditation of seven others. Andrei Fursenko, Minister of Education and Science, said that new licences would not be granted to universities in the foreseeable future.

### Canadian university branches out

Simon Fraser University (SFU) in British Columbia is to launch a satellite campus in China that will deliver courses to both Chinese and Canadian students, according to a report in a Vancouver newspaper earlier this year.

Nello Angerilli at SFU International said that the project was unique among Canadian universities. The new Chinese campus is due to open in September 2005 and will form part of a campaign to encourage more Canadian students at SFU to study overseas.

### New UK admissions tests

New admissions tests have been introduced for students wanting to study law and medicine at some of the UK's top universities.

The BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) was launched in 2003 for 2004 entry into a number of medical degree courses, while prospective law students for some universities will be required to sit the National Admissions Test for Law (LNAT) for the first time in November this year for 2005 entry. International students will be able to sit the BMAT test at schools, colleges and British Council offices around the world while the LNAT test will be available in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong.