



Annual Report

and

Financial Statements

for the year ended 31 March 2021

for

Slough Immigration Aid Unit

funded by **Louis Baylis (Maidenhead Advertiser) Charitable Trust**, and



THE
ACCESS
TO JUSTICE
FOUNDATION



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for the year ended 31 March 2021

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Slough Immigration Aid Unit
General Information
for the year ended 31 March 2021

CHARITY NAME: Slough Immigration Aid Unit

REGISTERED NUMBER: 1064293

ADDRESS: 52 Chalvey High Street
Slough
Berkshire
SL1 2SQ

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER: Ms P Grevett
Grevett & Co
Certified Accountants
346a Farnham Road
Slough
Berkshire
SL2 1BT

Slough Immigration Aid Unit

Trustees' Report **for the year ended 31 March 2021**

The Trustees of the Slough Immigration Aid Unit (also known as SIAU) present their Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2021.

Trustees

Ms S M Shutter (Chair)
Mr M D Connolly (until his death on 2 January 2021)
Mrs L E Simmons OBE (resigned April 2020)
Mrs M A Knibbs
Ms P K Matharu
Mr J R Barkley (Treasurer)
Mr N A Rehman (from 8 February 2021)

The Trustees are appointed at Trustees' meetings. The Charity is governed by the Trust Deed dated 18 December 1996 as amended by Special Resolution on 15 August 1997.

Objects

The objects of the Charity are to relieve hardship by the provision of free legal advice, assistance and representation to people who live or work or study in Slough and neighbouring areas, and their families, who have difficulties caused by immigration, nationality or refugee law and practice and who cannot afford alternative representation and to collaborate with others to improve such advice for the people of Slough.

In addition other objects are to provide information and education on immigration, nationality and refugee law to those who are most closely affected by them.

This work is clearly for the public benefit, as required under charity law. The Trustees have had regard to the public benefit guidance published by the Charity Commission when exercising any powers or duties to which the guidance is relevant.

Financial summary for the year

The Charity was funded through restricted grants from The Barrow Cadbury Trust Covid-19 Support Fund of £6,510 and The National Lottery Community Fund, distributed by the Access to Justice Foundation Community Justice Fund, of £8,680. The Charity was also funded through unrestricted grants from the Berkshire Community Foundation, the Mactaggart Third Fund, the Louis Baylis Charitable Trust, and the London Legal Support Trust from our participation in its sponsored walk. SPACE (Slough Prevention Alliance Community Engagement) funding, administered by Slough Council for Voluntary Service, for £4,000 per year to provide immigration advice to Slough residents, continued until March 2021, when it was replaced by OneSlough.

We continue to seek further grant funding for our work, and maintain our aim of having at least three months' running costs in reserves. The Charity is also funded by cost recovery fees from clients who do not qualify for a free service and by donations from individuals.

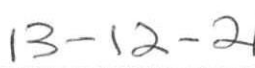
At the year end we held cash at bank of £23,905 which is represented by restricted funds of £2,154 for the cloud-based database system which was paid for in April 2021 and the balance by unrestricted funds, held to meet the running costs of the Charity's office and related expenditure.

The Trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

.....


Ms S M Shutter (Chair)

.....


Date

SIAU's work during the year April 2020 to March 2021

SIAU's work and aims

SIAU is a charity which provides specialist legal advice, assistance and representation to people who live, work or study in Slough and neighbouring areas, and their families, who have difficulties with UK immigration, nationality or refugee law and practice. We have done this work for over 15 years.

We provide a free service to people on low incomes, or no income, and who would have qualified financially for Legal Help, when this still existed for immigration matters. Where people's income or savings are too high to qualify for Legal Help, we may operate a cost recovery process, charging a fee towards our costs only – we do not make a profit.

We work closely with other groups giving advice in Slough and provide information and support to them. For the past four years this was formalised in the SPACE (Slough Prevention Alliance Community Engagement) consortium organised through Slough Council for Voluntary Service, of which we are an Associate. This is now called OneSlough. We have helped other voluntary and community organisations to understand the law and to help their members or refer them on. We have lobbied the Home Office for change and improvement in the law and practice.

This year our work was carried out in a very different way, because of the covid-19 pandemic. The last day we were working in the office as usual was 19 March 2020. Since then, the majority of our work has been done from home, through phone and email and zoom and post. We have got used to working in this way, and explaining to clients why they have to send scans and photos of documents by email to us in support of their cases, and provide information on-line for us to be able to advise. We have occasionally gone to the office to collect documents and to see those clients who are not able to use the internet, but most of our work has been done remotely. It was difficult and we are still learning.

Why our work is so important

Immigration law is complex and can affect all aspects of people's lives. Access to competent immigration advice and representation can be vital, making the difference between, for example, a couple or family being able to live together in the UK or remain separated on different continents; an asylum seeker being recognised as a refugee or being refused and returned to danger; a grandmother being able to visit for her granddaughter's wedding or being refused a visa to come. It may enable people confused and worried by the EU Settlement Scheme to understand what they can do to secure their position; or elderly parents being able to live with their adult children here rather than left alone and in need of care abroad. The covid-19 pandemic has added another dimension of worry, with biometrics centres being closed, international travel restrictions and dangers.

Ignorance of the law can lead to serious and unnecessary difficulties. Not understanding the basis on which immigration decisions are made, or the importance of using the right forms and providing all the right documentation to the Home Office or to British Visa Application Centres abroad at the right time, can result in applications which could meet the requirements of the immigration rules being refused. For many months most Visa Application Centres were closed and existing entry clearance applications were paused, leading to much frustration and uncertainty. The fees for immigration applications remain very high - £2389 for settlement as a spouse or partner, £1523 for their entry clearance abroad since April 2018 – making the importance of preparing a case well and getting the application right first time of huge significance. Since April 2015, immigration applicants also have to pay a 'health surcharge,' which rose from £400 to £624 per year in October 2020, for access to the NHS, for which most of them will already be paying through their taxes.

When immigration problems can be solved, people are able to continue their lives in a normal way. Uncertainty about immigration status can cause poverty and exploitation. People who have at last been allowed to work and thus to support their family will be able to do so, and will have the security not to be exploited at work and to be able to access other rights. The basic security for people knowing that they are able to remain with their family and continue in their life enhances community cohesion and makes for a more unified and stronger society.

SIAU remains the only source of free specialist immigration and nationality law advice based in Slough. Such work is much needed in Slough; around half of its population is of minority ethnic origin, with the largest communities from Kashmir and the Punjab, but there are also significant African, East European, other Asian and Middle Eastern populations, as well as those from the Caribbean. There remains a large unmet need for immigration advice, information and representation.

Changes in the law

The Brexit transition period until 31 December 2020, and then the deadline for most people to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme of 30 June 2021 continued to play a large part in the Parliamentary and other discussion on immigration during the year. The European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act gained Royal Assent on 23 January 2020 and the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Act, ending free movement, on 11 November 2020. There were 12 separate Statements of Changes in the immigration rules from April 2020 to March 2021, including five further changes to the EU Settlement Scheme, other changes following on from the UK withdrawing from EU agreements, such as the Dublin Regulations, and to routes to work in the UK and the new scheme for British nationals (overseas) from Hong Kong. There were four Supreme Court decisions relating to immigration or asylum matters. The new revamped points-based system to apply to EU and non-EU citizens alike coming to the UK was in effect from 1 January 2021. It made few substantial changes to the current system for non-EU nationals and their families, the bulk of SIAU's work. The Law Commission report, *Simplifying the immigration rules*, was published on 14 January 2020 and the Home Office continues its programme of redrafting some sections of the rules in batches. Through its membership of ILPA, SIAU has contributed to comments and lobbying on this work.

The rules on family migration remain extremely restrictive, and many people are still unable to meet them as they do not earn the £18,600 per year required to be able to maintain their spouse, or cannot provide the very precise evidence demanded. The financial difficulties caused by covid-19 lockdowns and furlough have meant fewer people can qualify, and the Home Office's covid-19 concessions have not covered all issues. In the UK, it has meant an increase in family members who cannot meet the financial requirement getting permission to stay on the 'ten year route to settlement,' meaning they will not have a secure "settled" status in the UK for ten years. More people have needed to apply for their fees to be waived, and for their conditions restricting access to public funds to be amended. These applications are labour-intensive, as the Home Office requires very detailed financial evidence and explanations.

The 'hostile environment' created for people without immigration rights, renamed the 'compliant environment' by Sajid Javid when Home Secretary, continues under Priti Patel and affects others who have the right to remain. The most extreme injustice affected many from the 'Windrush generation' – with people still fighting for slow and inadequate compensation. It is likely that a similar situation will arise in future for those who do not apply under the EU Settlement Scheme, for whatever reason. The government's use of outsourcing to private sector providers to operate the immigration system, TLS Contact and VFS Global abroad, Sopra Steria in the UK, makes the processes less transparent and harder to deal with, and it is more difficult to find out where responsibility for problems caused to individual applicants lies.

SIAU helps people to understand the immigration law and rules and how to satisfy the authorities that they can qualify, or advises them how they can do so, but also explains when they do not. SIAU's work empowers people by helping them to be aware of their position under immigration law and to access their rights and by reducing the need for people to pay often expensive and incompetent consultants.

British nationality law is complicated and people often need help in understanding it, collecting the documents needed and making their applications to become British citizens. Naturalisation is always discretionary and the Home Office changes its criteria for using its discretion without publicity. Again, the naturalisation fee of £1330 is non-refundable if the application is refused. SIAU's specialist workers are able to help people through this maze. We have lobbied through ILPA on the nationality sections of the Nationality and Borders Bill, being debated in Parliament through 2021.

SIAU's advice work and casework

Our legal advice and representational work through the year continued. Our work is regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner, no. F200500137. OISC most recently audited SIAU's work in May 2016 and was fully satisfied.

During the year April 2020 – March 2021, SIAU records show we advised 441 people and families and took up 53 new cases to represent to the immigration authorities, with work continuing on many others.

Our records show that the people we advised were of 76 different nationalities - the largest numbers were again Pakistani (83) and Indian (34). There were 53 inquiries from citizens of other EU countries this year, often those of minority ethnic descent, the largest numbers were Romanian (9), Polish and Italian (8 each), and Spanish (5). Other nationalities include Ghanaian (23), Nigerian (22), Zimbabwean (15), Kenyan and Moroccan (13 each), Filipino and Gambian (10 each), and fewer than 10 people from each of the other nationalities.

Many inquiries, 57, related to the EU Settlement Scheme, including 31 about acquiring permanent residence, 16 about pre-settled status, many including non-EU national family members, 10 about EU SS family permit entry clearance. Many inquiries related to establishing or acquiring British citizenship, 37 in relation to adult naturalisation, 11 in relation to children, either registering as British or establishing the status of children born here. The majority of the other issues raised were in relation to family matters, 77 about spouses, partners and children in the UK, 30 about entry clearance for spouses, partners and children currently abroad. 4 inquiries related to other dependent relatives. 41 related to marriage breakdown and domestic violence and the immigration law effects of escaping a violent partnership or the possibility of qualifying to remain in the UK independently. 6 were related to asylum or discretionary leave matters. 26 people needed advice or help about their entitlement to benefits, or in trying to change the conditions on their stay that they cannot have recourse to public funds, and 20 about applying to waive Home Office application fees and the immigration health surcharge. Other matters included 11 people wanting advice about family members coming to visit from abroad, and matters such as long residence in the UK, NHS charges and obtaining travel documents and biometric residence permits.

In relation to the 53 people and families whose cases we took up to represent, they were of 26 different nationalities; the largest numbers were Pakistani (9) and Indian (7), Cameroonian, Ghanaian and Jamaican (3 each). Many couples and families have more than one nationality between them, and non-EU nationals married to, or children of, EU nationals, may have most difficulty in establishing their EU rights; we represented three such cases. Others included permission to remain with settled or British spouses (5) or parents of such children (6) or entry clearance to join family (4), applying to remain after experiencing domestic violence (16), applying for change of conditions on stay, to be able to access public funds (6) and applying for British citizenship (4).

The majority of people we advised and helped were local. 259 came from Slough, 28 from High Wycombe, 25 from Maidenhead, 22 from Bracknell, 14 from Reading, 11 from Windsor, others from a bit further afield, such as Wokingham, Amersham, Surrey, Buckinghamshire, and west London, and a few from other areas, usually by email or phone. 69 people self-identified as having a person with a disability in the family, ranging from mobility difficulties to mental health issues, autism, HIV+, suffering heart attacks or stroke, or had a medical condition such as cancer or heart failure. 8 claimed either personal independence payments or carer's allowance.

A family we helped

Mrs A is a Nigerian healthcare worker, a lone parent with two children born in the UK, now aged 12 and 10. She has faced huge difficulties in caring for them, and continuing to work, through the pandemic, and could not make ends meet and pay her rent. She had permission to stay because her elder child is British, but without recourse to public funds, and asked SIAU what could be done. We helped her to make an application to change her conditions of stay, providing very detailed financial evidence and arguments to the Home Office, and this was successful. She then told us that she could not afford the fees to apply for permission for her younger child to stay in the UK. SIAU explained that she could apply to waive the fees, and again represented her son in doing so. That fee waiver was granted, and he was given an extension of stay in line with his mother. She would like to register her son to become British, to which he is entitled as he has lived in the UK for the first 10 years of his life – but there are no fee waivers for nationality applications. The fee is £1012. SIAU has advised her to wait for the outcome of a pending challenge to the level of this fee in the Supreme Court, in the hope that this case is successful and the children's citizenship fee is changed.

SIAU's information and lobbying work

SIAU's staff are highly skilled and experienced and their expertise can make a significant difference to chances of success in an application. Shabana Bokhari, OISC level 3 regulated, has worked for SIAU since January 2018, for one day a week for most of this year; Parveen Akhter, OISC Level 2 regulated, returned to SIAU in September 2019, working three days a week initially, and four days from February 2021. Shabana was away in Pakistan for personal reasons for many months from November 2020; she has been able to work remotely from there for several months. Sue Shutter, level 2 regulated, volunteered more frequently, dealing with advice queries and some casework from home. We were unable to provide work and support for our admin volunteer Naseem Abid remotely, but Meghan Curran was able to do some casework support, supervised by Parveen Akhter. There is a huge demand for our work, which we have continued remotely, through email and phone, through the remainder of this year.

SIAU continues to work with and receive referrals from other local organisations and community groups doing complementary work in Slough and the surrounding area, including Shelter, Slough Advice Centre (which both closed at the end of June 2021, with Citizens Advice providing only a skeleton telephone service since then), Slough Refugee Support, Hestia, SEWAK refuge, The Dash Charity (Domestic Abuse Stops Here), Slough Foodbank, neighbouring Citizens Advice Bureaux and others. The council, Slough Children's Services Trust, and the Slough MP's office, as well as community groups, may also refer people to us for help and advice. We continue to be a member of the OneSlough (formerly SPACE) consortium of voluntary organisations funded by Slough council through Slough Council for Voluntary Service, to deliver advice and social support in Slough. We participate in their regular zoom meetings set up for groups to remain in contact during covid-19 lockdowns and, as an OISC-regulated organisation, hold their Slough Quality Protects Platinum standard.

SIAU has participated in responses to government consultations, either through our membership of the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association, or direct. We responded to the government's New Plan for Immigration document in April 2021. We participate in on-line discussion groups of immigration advisers and lawyers sharing ideas and information.

SIAU expects to continue all our areas of work into the future, as we anticipate the need for it will remain and increase as more parts of the new immigration system comes into effect. The EU settlement and pre-settlement scheme and its June 2021 deadline, and people travelling in small boats across the English Channel and the Mediterranean keep migration in the forefront of public debate. We have advised many EU nationals and their families worried about their status, or applying late, along with others having difficulties caused by the family migration rules. Restrictions on eligibility to claim benefits, and the level of Home Office fees have added to difficulties this year, and fee waivers and change of conditions applications are an increasing proportion of our work. The restrictions on our working because of covid-19 and the need to work remotely, and to rely on email, internet, phone and post, and the inability to meet people, add to the complications of our work. We continue to attempt to mitigate some of the worst effects of the laws and practice for our clients and their families and to help them to achieve their aims.

SIAU's staff

Parveen Akhter, Shabana Bokhari

SIAU's volunteers

Naseem Abid (to March 2020), Meghan Curran (to September 2021), Sue Shutter

SIAU's Trustees

Sue Shutter (chair), Ray Barkley (treasurer), Mike Connolly (to 2 January 2021),

Mai Knibbs, Parvinder Matharu, Nisar Rehman (from February 2021)

We were deeply saddened by the death of Charles Blake in September 2020, a long-standing committed and knowledgeable trustee who resigned in February 2020 due to ill-health, and by that of Mike Connolly, from covid-19, in January 2021. We miss them both greatly.

Slough Immigration Aid Unit

Independent Examiner's Report
to the trustees of Slough Immigration Aid Unit

I report on the accounts of Slough Immigration Aid Unit for the year ended 31 March 2021, which are set out on pages 10 and 11.

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 144(2) of the Charities Act 2011 (the 2011 Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- 1* examine the accounts under section 145 of the 2011 Act
- 2* to follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act
- 3* to state whether particular matters have come to my attention

Basis of independent examiner's report

My examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair view' and the report is limited to those matters set out in the next statement.

Independent examiner's statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

- (1) which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:

- * to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the 2011 Act and
- * to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the requirements of the 2011 Act

have not been met or

- (2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.


Ms P Grevett FCCA


Date

Slough Immigration Aid Unit

Income and Expenditure Account
for the year ended 31 March 2021

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	2021 Total funds £	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	2020 Total funds £
Income						
Grants	19,370	15,190	34,560	15,400	-	15,400
Donations	1,069	-	1,069	5,245	-	5,245
Fees recovered	6,175	-	6,175	12,165	-	12,165
	26,614	15,190	41,804	32,810	-	32,810
Other income						
Deposit account interest	3	-	3	29	-	29
	3	-	3	29	-	29
Total income	26,617	15,190	41,807	32,839	-	32,839
Expenditure						
Rent	5,040	-	5,040	5,040	-	5,040
Wages	7,309	13,036	20,345	18,905	-	18,905
Cloud based data system & training	-	2,154	2,154	-	-	-
Course fees & books	-	-	-	-	-	-
Telephone & internet	1,469	-	1,469	1,312	-	1,312
Post & stationery	637	-	637	1,034	-	1,034
Travelling	-	-	-	521	-	521
Professional indemnity insurance	203	-	203	203	-	203
Employers liability insurance	160	-	160	157	-	157
Sundry expenses	228	-	228	404	-	404
Accountancy	1,000	-	1,000	1,000	-	1,000
Membership fees	270	-	270	150	-	150
Professional fees	1,290	-	1,290	1,290	-	1,290
Bank charges	72	-	72	72	-	72
Nest pension	260	-	260	871	-	871
	17,938	15,190	33,128	30,959	-	30,959
NET INCOME	8,679	-	8,679	1,880	-	1,880
Reconciliation of funds						
Total funds brought forward	13,669	-	13,669	11,789	-	11,789
Total funds carried forward	22,348	-	22,348	13,669	-	13,669

Slough Immigration Aid Unit

Balance Sheet
for the year ended 31 March 2021

	2021		2020
	£	£	£
FIXED ASSETS			
Computer equipment	1,710		1,461
CURRENT ASSETS			
Debtors	210		560
Prepayments	150		854
Bank deposit account	18,728		8,516
Bank account no. 1	902		1,204
Bank account no. 2	4,275		2,477
Cash in hand	-		-
	24,265		13,611
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Creditors and accrued expenses	3,627		1,403
NET CURRENT ASSETS	20,638		12,208
NET ASSETS	22,348		13,669
REPRESENTED BY:			
Restricted funds	-		-
Unrestricted funds	22,348		13,669
	22,348		13,669