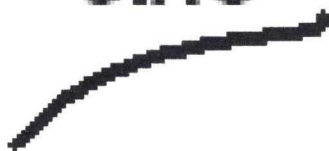


SIAU



Annual Report

and

Financial Statements

for the year ended 31 March 2023

for

Slough Immigration Aid Unit

funded by: -



**BERKSHIRE
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION**

THE
ACCESS
TO JUSTICE
FOUNDATION



#OneSlough

and the Louis Baylis (Maidenhead Advertiser) Charitable Trust
and the Mactaggart Third Fund

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for the year ended 31 March 2023

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Slough Immigration Aid Unit
General Information
for the year ended 31 March 2023

CHARITY NAME: SloughImmigration 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 2023

The Trustees of the Slough Immigration Aid Unit (also known as SIAU) present their Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2023.

Trustees

Ms S M Shutter (Chair)
Mr J R Barkley (Treasurer)
Mrs M A Knibbs
Ms P K Matharu (resigned April 2023)
Mr N A Rehman (resigned September 2022)
Ms N Shabir (appointed December 2022)
Ms S Saeed (appointed April 2023)

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 several grants, including £3430 carried forward from a restricted grant of £10,000 through the Access to Justice Foundation Community Justice Fund. We also received £12,196 from the Access to Justice Foundation, and unrestricted grants from the Berkshire Community Foundation, the Louis Baylis Charitable Trust, UNITE, the Mactaggart Third Fund, and the London Legal Support Trust from our participation in its sponsored walk. The #OneSloughfunding, administered by Slough Council for Voluntary Service, for £4,000 per year to provide immigration advice to Slough residents, replacing SPACE, continued through the year.

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

At the year end we held cash at bank of £20,334 which is unrestricted funding (including £6000 from the Mactaggart Third Fund for 2023-2024), 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

.....*Susan M. Shutter*.....

Ms SM Shutter (Chair)

.....19-12-23.....

Date

SIAU's work during the year April 2022 to March 2023

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 17 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 few years this was formalised through the Slough Community Network organised through Slough Council for Voluntary Service. This network 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 to appropriate advice and help.

This year our work largely continued in a hybrid way, because of the covid-19 pandemic and its after-effects. Since March 2000, 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 about sending 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. One member of staff was working from abroad for part of the year. We now normally have a presence in the office once a week to collect and retrieve documents and to see some clients, but most of our work continues remotely. There are difficulties and advantages; we are considering our plans for the longer term.

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 having more understanding of the complex process; 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 complexities of the EU Settlement Scheme to understand what they may be able to 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.

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. The fees for immigration applications were raised again in October 2023, to £2885 for settlement as a spouse or partner, £1048 for family extension of stay, £1846 for family entry clearance abroad, making the importance of preparing a case well and getting the application right first time of huge significance. Since April 2015, most 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. It is due to rise again in January 2024.

When immigration problems can be solved, people are able to continue their lives without this extra problem. 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 Nationality and Borders Act came into force on 28 April 2022. Rightly, the proposals to send asylum seekers to Rwanda to be processed and to deprive people of their British nationality without informing them received most hostile comment, and there were court challenges to them both. The Supreme Court declared the Rwanda policy unlawful on 15 November 2023. There are also positive provisions on nationality, enabling people to register to become British citizens without charge if historical injustice in the previous laws meant they were not born British. Then the Illegal Migration Bill was introduced to Parliament on 7 March 2023, including still more measures to stop "small boat" arrivals across the English Channel, and was enacted on 23 July 2023. Migration and asylum issues have frequently been in the news.

There were four separate Statements of Changes to the immigration rules from April 2022 to March 2023, including further codification of the rules on families and human rights. There were three linked Supreme Court decisions relating to immigration matters, on the assessment of the "serious harm" caused to British partners and children if their husband/father were to be deported. In June 2022 the Home Office introduced the possibility of waiving children's citizenship application fees, following a court challenge from the Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens.

The rules on family migration remain extremely complex and restrictive, and the cost of living crisis means many people are 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 the long-term effects of the pandemic have meant fewer people can qualify, and the Home Office's covid-19 concessions did not cover all issues. This 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. There are further proposals to increase the financial requirement. More people have needed to apply for their immigration 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 extremely detailed financial evidence and explanations.

The 'hostile environment' created for people without immigration rights, officially renamed the 'compliant environment' by Sajid Javid when Home Secretary, continues 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. A similar situation is now arising for those who did not apply under the EU Settlement Scheme, for whatever reason, as late applications are continuing. From 9 August 2023, such late applications are almost automatically rejected. The concentration on asylum issues, and dealing with the backlog of asylum applications, still drains resources from other immigration areas so that family human rights applications are taking 12 months on average to process. The government's continued 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, raised to £1580 on 4 October 2023, is non-refundable if the application is refused. SIAU's specialist workers are able to help people through this maze. We have advised and represented people on applying under the new sections of the law aimed at rectifying historical injustices, and for children's fee waivers.

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 2022 – March 2023, SIAU records show we advised 347 people and families and took up 76 new cases to represent to the immigration authorities, with work continuing on many others.

Our records show that the people we advised were of 70 different nationalities - the largest numbers were again Pakistani (43) and Indian (26), but there were 85 from different African countries and 14 from the Caribbean. There were 49 inquiries from citizens of 14 other EEA countries this year, often those of minority ethnic descent; the largest numbers were Polish and Romanian (9 each), Spain (8) and Italian (5). Other nationalities include Ghanaian (13), Kenyan (10), Nigerian and Jamaican (9 each), and fewer than 9 people from each of the other nationalities.

Many inquiries, 39, related to the EU Settlement Scheme, often including non-EU national family members. Many others related to establishing or acquiring British citizenship, 25 in relation to adult naturalisation, 17 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, 48 about spouses, partners and children in the UK, 26 about entry clearance for spouses, partners and children currently abroad. 32 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. 15 were related to asylum or discretionary leave matters. 14 people inquired about qualifying to remain on long residence grounds. 20 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 12 about applying to waive the Home Office application fees and the immigration health surcharge. Other matters included people wanting advice about family members coming to visit from abroad, and matters such as NHS charges, proving the right to work or to claim benefits and obtaining travel documents and biometric residence permits.

In relation to the 76 people and families whose cases we represented, they were of 29 different nationalities; the largest numbers were Pakistani (23) and Indian (7), Nigerian (5), Ghanaian and Filipino (4 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 SS status; we represented 4 such cases. Others included permission to remain with settled or British spouses (12) or as parents of such children (8) or entry clearance to join family (3), applying to remain after experiencing domestic abuse (26), long residence applications (6), applying for change of conditions on stay, to be able to access public funds (2) and applying for British citizenship (8). We represented 12 people in successfully obtaining fee waivers for their applications.

The majority of people we advised and helped were local. 189 came from Slough, 26 from High Wycombe, 20 from Maidenhead, 17 from Reading, 17 from Bracknell, 6 from Windsor, others from a bit further afield, such as Wokingham, Ascot, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, and west London, and a few from other areas, usually by email or phone. 53 people self-identified as having a person with a disability in the family, ranging from mobility difficulties to mental health issues, autism, HIV+, or had a medical condition such as cancer, diabetes or heart failure.

A family we helped

Mr R and Mrs D are Zimbabweans who have been in the UK since September and December 2001 when they had to leave due to political violence and intimidation. They left their five-year-old son in the care of Mr R's sister, thinking it would not be long before he could join them. But Mr R's asylum application was refused and nothing seemed to happen about Mrs D's. They are both HIV+ and the drugs they were on would not have been available to them in Zimbabwe. In 2014 they had a daughter born in the UK. Mrs D's sister in the UK has been helping and supporting them, and they had foodbank vouchers. They contacted SIAU in mid-2021 to ask how they could sort out their immigration stay. We applied for fee waivers for them all, and then for permission to stay on long residence grounds, and because of their daughter. After over 15 months their application was at last successful.

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 continued to work for one day a week for most of this year; Parveen Akhter, OISC Level 2 regulated, worked temporarily full-time from March to October 2022 then returned to four days a week. Shabana was away in Pakistan for personal reasons for some months; she has been able to work remotely from there. Sue Shutter, level 2 regulated, volunteered more frequently, dealing with advice queries and some casework from home. We have not been able to support admin volunteers but Nazia Shabir and Amina Akhter have provided some vital volunteer casework support, supervised by Parveen Akhter, and Magda Harris some legal research. There is a huge demand for our work, which we have continued remotely, through email and phone, through 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 Citizens Advice East Berkshire, working in Slough since October 2021, Slough Refugee Support, Hestia, SEWAK refuge, The Dash Charity (Domestic Abuse Stops Here), SHOC (Slough Homeless Our Concern), 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 and in-person meetings. As an OISC-regulated organisation, we hold their Slough Quality Protects Platinum level accreditation.

SIAU's information and lobbying work

SIAU has participated in lobbying on the Illegal Migration Bill, and raising issues of concern, through our membership of the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association. 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 and the ever-increasing legislation come 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 and the Rwanda policy keep migration in the forefront of public debate. We continue to advise many EU nationals and their families worried about their status, or applying late, along with others having difficulties caused by the family migration rules. Domestic abuse remains a large proportion of our casework. Restrictions on eligibility to claim benefits, and the level of the Home Office fees have added to difficulties this year, and fee waivers and change of conditions applications remain significant proportion of our work. We continue mainly working remotely, and rely on email, internet, phone and post, as well as meeting people in the office. 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

Amina Akhter (to October 2022), Magda Harris (November 2022 to March 2023)
Nazia Shabir, Sue Shutter

SIAU's Trustees

Sue Shutter (chair), Ray Barkley (treasurer), Mai Knibbs, Nazia Shabir, Shabana Saeed

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 2023, 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

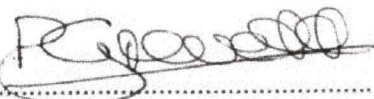
In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

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

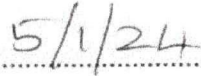
- * to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the 2011 Act
- and
- * to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the requirements of the 2011 Act

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 2023

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	2023 Total funds £	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	2022 Total funds £
Income						
Grants	23,619	-	23,619	13,624	10,000	23,624
Donations	7,391	-	7,391	5,266	-	5,266
Fees recovered	6,785	-	6,785	5,235	-	5,235
	37,795	-	37,795	24,125	10,000	34,125
Other income						
Deposit account interest	139	-	139	10	-	10
	139	-	139	10	-	10
Total income	37,934	-	37,934	24,135	10,000	34,135
Expenditure						
Rent	5,040	-	5,040	5,040	-	5,040
Wages	27,170	3,430	30,600	19,530	6,570	26,100
Cloud based data system & training	480	-	480	480	-	480
Professional services	1,750	-	1,750	-	-	-
Telephone & internet	1,634	-	1,634	1,530	-	1,530
Post & stationery	636	-	636	972	-	972
Professional indemnity insurance	235	-	235	231	-	231
Employers liability insurance	182	-	182	165	-	165
Sundry expenses	451	-	451	385	-	385
Accountancy	1,000	-	1,000	1,000	-	1,000
Membership fees	195	-	195	435	-	435
Professional fees	1,646	-	1,646	1,290	-	1,290
Bank charges	74	-	74	73	-	73
Nest pension	443	-	443	288	-	288
	40,936	3,430	44,366	31,419	6,570	37,989
NET DEFICIT	- 3,002	- 3,430	- 6,432	- 7,284	3,430	- 3,854
Reconciliation of funds						
Total funds brought forward	15,064	3,430	18,494	22,348	-	22,348
Total funds carried forward	12,062	-	12,062	15,064	3,430	18,494

Slough Immigration Aid Unit

Balance Sheet
for the year ended 31 March 2023

	2023		2022	
	£	£	£	£
FIXED ASSETS				
Computer equipment		1,710		1,710
CURRENT ASSETS				
Debtors	665		920	
Prepayments	150		150	
Bank deposit account	14,159		13,989	
Bank account no. 1	1,460		1,071	
Bank account no. 2	3,900		2,282	
	<u>20,334</u>		<u>18,412</u>	
CURRENT LIABILITIES				
Grant received in advance	8,483		-	
Creditors and accrued expenses	1,499		1,628	
	<u>9,982</u>		<u>1,628</u>	
NET CURRENT ASSETS		10,352		16,784
NET ASSETS		<u>12,062</u>		<u>18,494</u>
REPRESENTED BY:				
Restricted funds		-		3,430
Unrestricted funds		12,062		15,064
		<u>12,062</u>		<u>18,494</u>