



## **Experiencing Tier 4: the student perspective**

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## Stranded: the students and staff hit by the crackdown on 'bogus' colleges

As the coalition attempts to cut immigration, it stands accused of taking the equivalent of a machine gun to private colleges

**Jessica Shepherd**

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 [Comments \(9\)](#)



David Whittaker: 'The UK gave no protection or consideration to us.' Photograph: Frank Baron for the Guardian

Last year, David Whittaker used half his life savings – about £5,000 – to move from his native South Africa to study in Britain.



## **UKCISA's Tier 4 survey: October 2011**

- 4,500 responses from students who applied for a visa overseas and 720 from students who applied in the UK to extend leave to remain
- Largest groups by nationality were from China (26%), India (10%), USA (9%), Malaysia and Nigeria (5% each).
- Most were in HE (62% public, 18% private), with 5% in ELT, 4% in public sector FE, 3% in independent schools and 2% in private sector FE.
- 5% were accompanied by dependants
- 70% had applied after July 2011



## Key findings

Students were more satisfied than two years ago with the **speed and efficiency of visa processing**, especially overseas.

However, problems remain including:

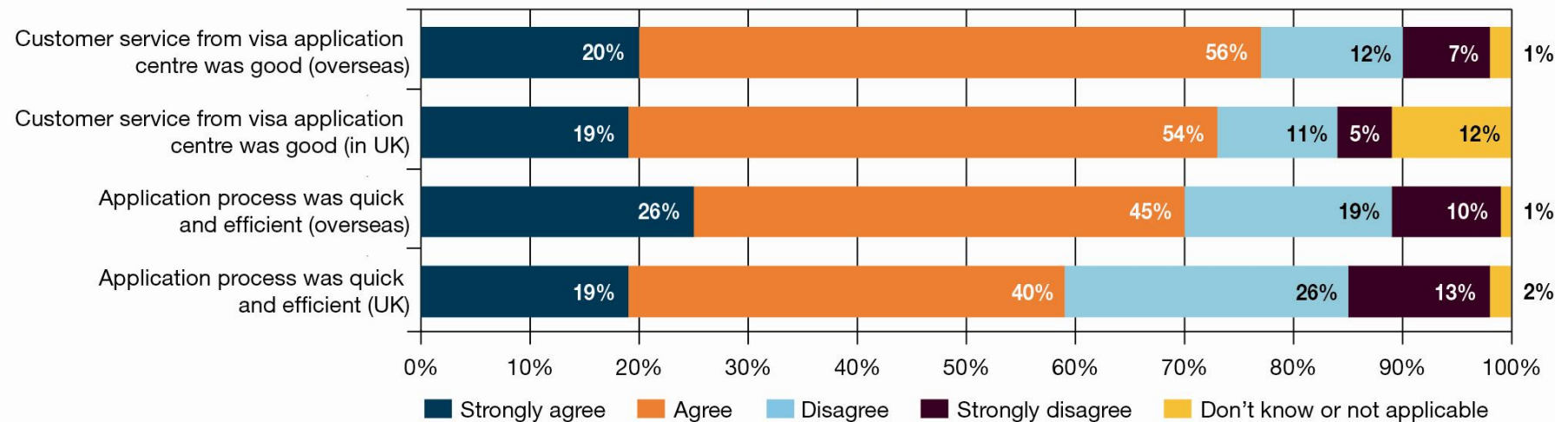
- confusion from the **frequent changes to the immigration rules** and guidance
- **lack of clear information and advice** for Tier 4 applicants
- **the cost and effort required to assemble the necessary supporting evidence** (of financial, language and qualifications) in the required format
- the cost and inconvenience of **travelling for biometrics**, or to deliver or collect documents from visa application centres
- the higher than necessary proportion of **applications which are rejected initially** on the basis of minor errors and omissions
- Perceptions that the **UK no longer welcomes international students**, especially in relation to abolition of the **Post Study Work route**



## Applications and information

Figure 1

Satisfaction with the visa application process

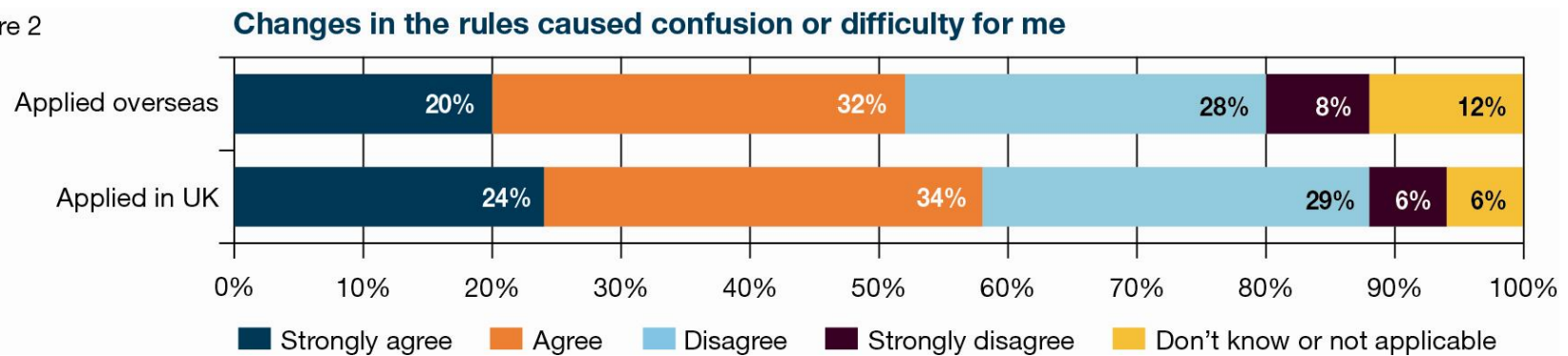


- 70% of students applying overseas found the visa application process **quick and efficient**, up from 59% in 2009
- 75% were satisfied with the standard of **customer service from visa application centres**



## The impact of rule changes

Figure 2



- Over 50% of students reported **confusion or difficulty resulting from changes in the rules**
- Colleges and universities were both the most widely used and the highest rated **source of information and advice** about Tier 4 visas
- Students repeatedly underline the **difficulties they faced in obtaining clear and correct information**, especially from UKBA

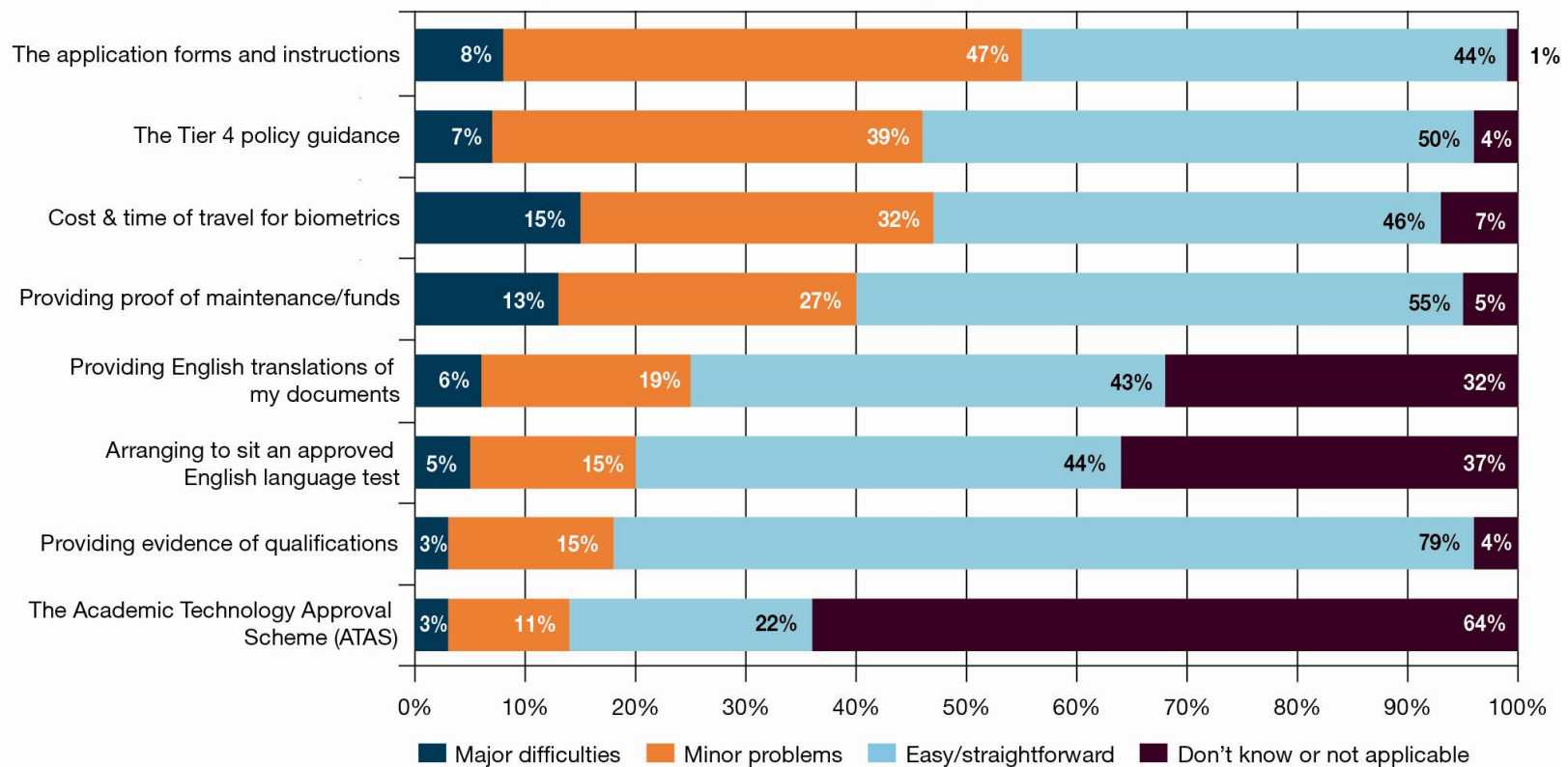
*It was difficult for me, when I was finishing the application and one day before I checked the website and it changed, not just the price, the application form as well.*



## The application process

Figure 4

What was your experience of the following aspects of the Tier 4 visa application process?

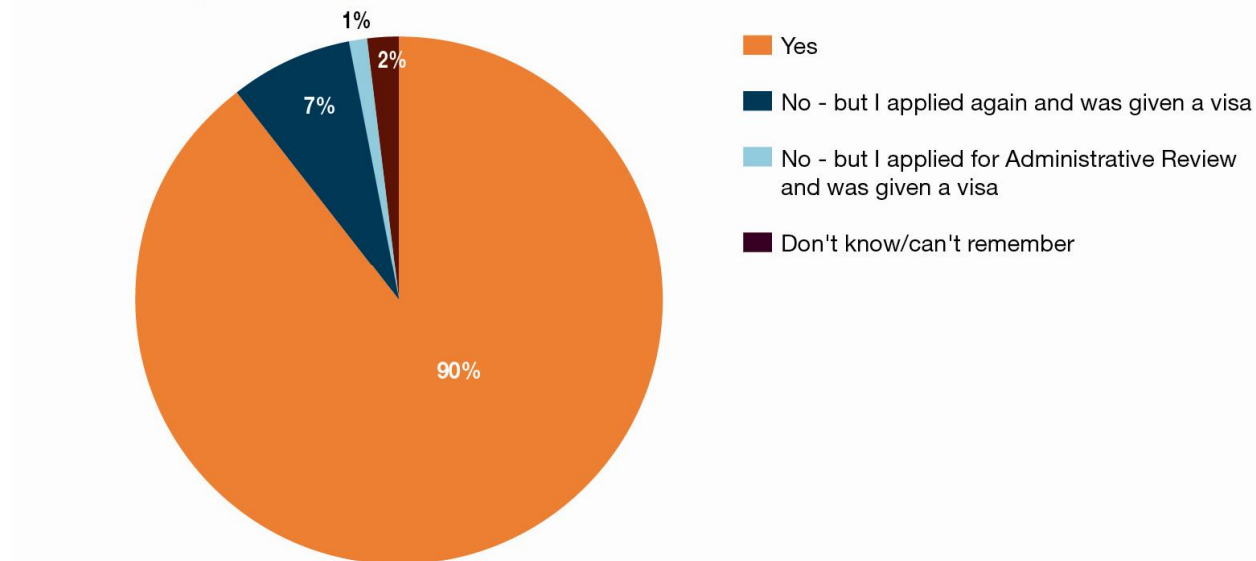






## Unnecessary rejections and refusals

Figure 7 Was your visa application successful first time?



- Although 90% were successful on their first application, **7.5% had to apply a second time** and a further 1% were successful in administrative review

*One small mistake on 120 pages resulted my wife's and my own applications being sent back just to be sent again.*



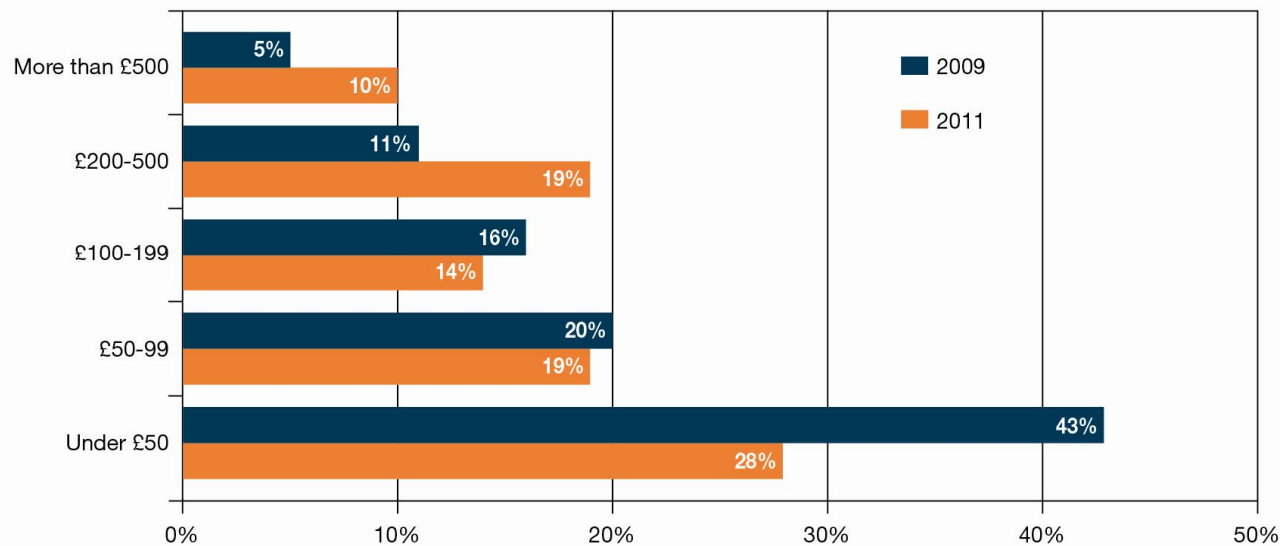


## Costs

- Of those applying from overseas, **only 28% found the cost of a visa reasonable** in 2011, down from 33% in 2009. 35% of those applying to extend visas in the UK **strongly disagreed that the cost was reasonable** (compared to 30% of those applying overseas)
- The **additional costs of obtaining a visa have risen steeply**. For those applying outside the UK, the proportion with extra costs over £200 has increased from 16% to 29%. For those applying in the UK, those incurring more than £200 additional costs rose from 23% to 46%

Figure 9a

Additional costs, applying for visas overseas





## Language requirements

- More than 10% of students were affected by the **changes in English language requirements**
- As a result of the new English language requirements, **5% had to repeat a test to get a higher score, 4% had to take a different language test** because UKBA would not accept the test which the institution had originally accepted and **3% of respondents unexpectedly had to attend a pre-session course**
- **One in ten of all respondents required two visas** in order to attend a pre-session English course prior to their main course

*I wrote TOEFL and had a good score of 99. But was told I had 1 mark low in writing.. So 3 weeks of pre-session course.*

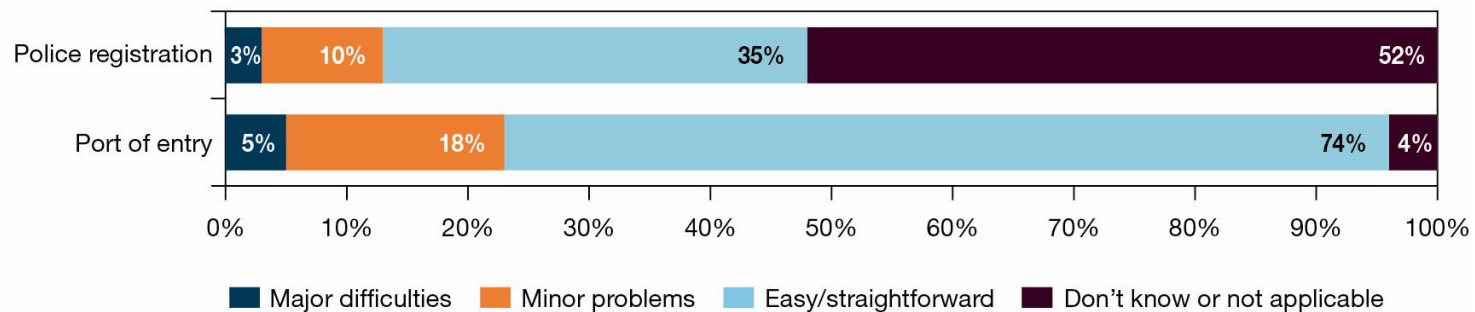
*It was not easy to get a language test and as all of my schooling was in the English medium including my GCE 'O' & 'A' levels it seems quite crazy that I had to sit a SELT.*



## Procedures after entry

Figure 10

Experience of police registration and immigration at port of entry



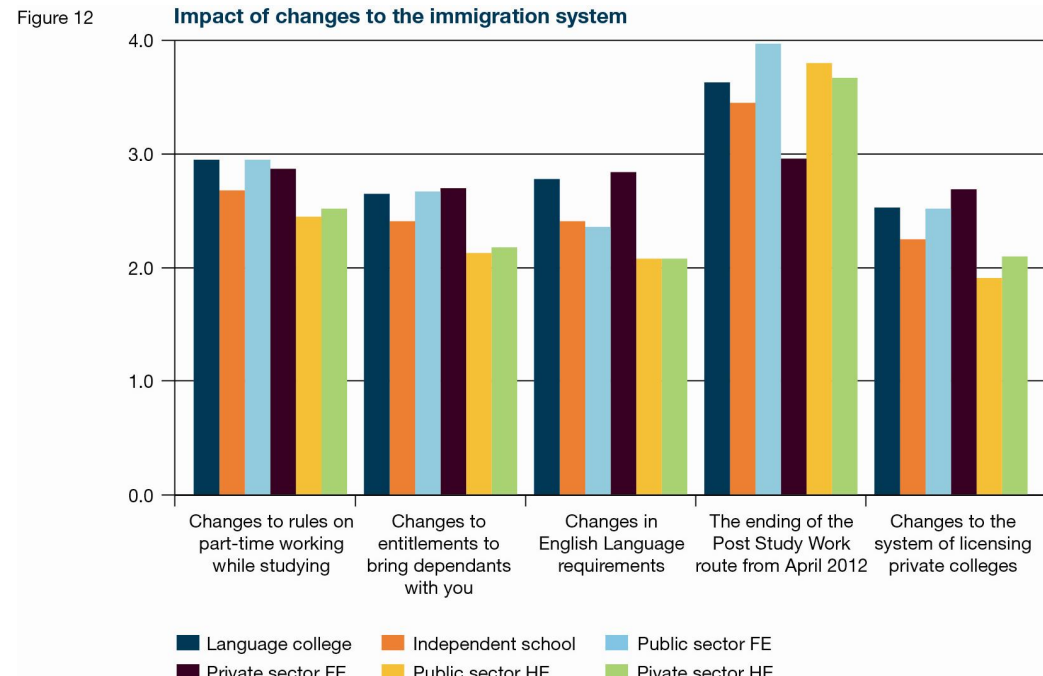
- 74% of students said they **found immigration procedures at port of entry** easy and straightforward
- A quarter of those who had to **register with the police** reported problems
- Most students were aware of **receiving information from their sponsor institution** about their responsibilities as a Tier 4 student but 16% weren't sure, or thought they had not received information on this



## Perceptions of the UK welcome

- Of the recent rule changes, the **abolition of PSW** was rated as having most negative impact on their decision to study in the UK (in all sectors), followed by changes to the **rules on working while studying**
- About 60% of students believe that **the UK welcomes well-qualified international students**, but 20% neither agree nor disagree and a further 19% actively disagree

Figure 12





## **Additional issues since April 2012 changes**

- Tier 2 minimum salaries and employer awareness levels
- Retrospective introduction of 5 year limit on degree-level study
- Sudden hike in maintenance requirements and £1000 cap on accommodation payments counting towards maintenance requirements
- Fallout from HTS and sponsor licence suspension/ withdrawal



Future developments: introduction of online application forms