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Female Voice: You are now listening to the IELTS Podcast. Learn from tutors and ex-examiners who are masters of IELTS preparation. Your host, Ben Worthington.

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INTRODUCTION

Ben: You mentioned that sometimes you struggle with Task 2. Has that become easier now?

Student: Yeah. Like especially Task 2 now, I am getting more used to the way how I should generate the idea and how I can put it through the whole essay without getting distracted by other ideas.



Ben: Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial, we're going to hear from Ravina who's an expert regarding international study especially studying in the UK and she is representing studyin-uk.com and we're going to find out how corona has had an impact on students wishing to study abroad, what's happening in the UK, and how can SI-UK actually help you as students if you are interested in studying abroad namely in the UK. So, hello there Ravina and welcome to IELTS Podcast.

Ravina: Hello, Ben. Thank you for having me here.

Ben: My pleasure. My pleasure. So Ravina, could you just introduce yourself and Study in UK as well please just so the audience can get to know you a bit.

Ravina: Yeah. Sure thing. So yeah. My name is Ravina and I'm the marketing and events manager at a company called SI-UK which stands for Study in UK. So, we've got offices in London and about 47 other countries around the world. Yes. I personally grew up in Thailand and was an international student who came to do my masters in the UK about five years ago. So,



I've been working in the higher education industry for about four years now because I did one year of my masters and then four years of working at this company.

Ben: Interesting. So, you've actually-- you've gone through the system so to speak and you've actually--

Ravina: Exactly.

Ben: Yeah. Beautiful. Did you take IELTS by the way?

Ravina: I did. I in fact had to do my IELTS twice, not because I failed it the first time but in order to get into a university in Thailand, you need an IELTS requirement. So, since I did my undergraduate there, I did an IELTS and then four years later, it was expired. So, I had to do it again for my masters to come to the UK.

Ben: Wow! Okay. And how did you find that? What was the biggest area that you struggled with?



Ravina: Frankly, it was-- well, the thing was I'm used to speaking English back home, but it's not as much because I think I had a lot of Thai friends, a lot of international friends and then I have an Indian background. So, I wouldn't really speak English as often as I am doing it now. So, I think the speaking bit was the one that I was most concerned about.

Ben: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's a common problem area for the students. Okay. So, now then, could you tell us what is the current situation for a student who is looking at studying at the UK at the moment?

Ravina: I mean in terms of the current situation as we've heard from all other parts of other industries and things, it's quite complicated with the pandemic and the education industry traditionally has been quite slow to morphing and kind of changing quickly enough to be able to adapt to these things, but it's been quite amazing in 2020 how quickly universities have adapted and come to change their programs to incorporate online lessons and lectures and everyone has gone online.



It's not quite the same as being there in person because a lot of the appeal for international students who want to come to the UK is to experience UK as a whole. So, that's one aspect I think that they've not been able to tap into in any way, but the UK is still very much open. There are international students who have come in in September 2020 even for a Jan 2020 intake which has expanded quite a bit because a lot of students who couldn't come in in September have come in in January which has been more than it's been in previous years. So, it's still very much open for students. Yeah.

Ben: Interesting. Interesting. And you said that a lot of UK institutions you said have moved their education online. Is that a temporary situation until everything goes back to normal?

Ravina: I think nothing can really replace an in-person classroom and kind of in-person university campus experience. I think eventually we would all like to kind of progress towards going back to that, but if the universities are really advanced which they are becoming, I think it's going to be very much incorporated into the curriculum. And I can see some institutions are



now having full-fledged online programs where students can be in their home country say in India and be able to start and finish their university degree from back home without ever arriving at the university campus.

Ben: Wow! Wow! That's interesting. And has Brexit had any impact on what's happening?

Ravina: Certainly. For our particular-- because we've got offices in London and Manchester and we tend to deal with a lot of EU students just because of proximity, we are kind of the closest SI-UK office to EU. So, we've seen a massive impact because any students who don't have what they call a pre-settled status would now be paying international student fees. So, that market is not yet impacted how many students are applying, but we are expecting numbers for September 2020 to be much lower than it has been in previous years.

Ben: Ah, okay. That's because numbers-- okay. Because the 2020 enrollment has been delayed and it's still-- Is that right? The September 2020 has been delayed and that's why...



Ravina: It's been delayed and I also meant the September 2021 was actually what I meant that you might see an impact for EU students. Yeah. I apologize.

Ben: I was getting mixed up. I was like is this me? Sorry. Right. Okay. So, there's been a big fall in the 2021. Right. Got you.

Ravina: Correct. Yeah.

Ben: Got you. Interesting. And that's because normally EU students would be able to get the study loans and everything like that because of the EU basically. Is that right?

Ravina: Precisely. Yeah. So, they were paying the exact fees as a home student or a UK student would, but that privilege has now being taken away from them. So, they're going to have to pay international fees unless they've got a pre-settled status.

Ben: Right. Interesting. Okay then. And moving on to corona, I mean we touched on this base a little bit before, but are there more or less opportunities now for international students?



Ravina: I think that's a very difficult question to answer. In general, I would say there's still an equal level of opportunities. I don't think it's more or less, but I think there are different opportunities. So, there's an option for students who are probably not able to travel here are able to do like a course from beginning to end online. Students are able to take blended learning options which means part of their lessons would be online and part would be from back home. And universities are being very flexible with when students can arrive on campus.

I think this was something institutions have always been quite strict with in the past that they need to arrive by xyz date and now that's changed where students are arriving two months or three months into the course starting just because of the pandemic and they're not allowed to travel. But in terms of overall opportunities, I don't think the UK has kind of shut down in any way. There's still equal opportunity for all international students to study here.



Ben: Interesting. And you said the universities are being a bit flexible with when the students arrive. Has that flexibility stretched into like IELTS requirements or study requirements? Are they being a little bit more flexible perhaps?

Ravina: Yeah. So, I think one of the impacts of the pandemic was the IELTS centers closing down around the world. A lot of students were very worried when that started to happen. So, I think very quickly IELTS released the IELTS Indicator Test which became an alternative, but then universities stepped in and started to accept a lot of different alternate English language tests and they even had their own internal English language test. So, they did become really flexible with English language requirements in general.

Ben: Interesting. And has that changed the cost? I mean I'm guessing it's probably fallen the cost of studying in the UK with the arrival of blended options. Is that right? Or blended study options.

Ravina: That was I think one thing that I was a bit surprised by because I think there was always this debate that if students are not actually on campus and not visiting classes, using equipment



depending on what they're studying, then the cost of studies should be relatively lower, but the universities have surprisingly not taken that step. So, the cost of all the online programs are still pretty much the same as what a student would pay if they were to study in person.

Ben: Interesting. Okay. Interesting. Could you give us any other examples of-- well actually, let's just go back to that. Why do you think the universities have kept the price the same? Is it because they're actually in a difficult situation themselves or they expected to go back to normal or they don't want to cannibalize what they've set up already? Do you have any insights about that?

Ravina: I would say all of the above. Now, I'm going to be speaking from kind of my own personal opinion on this. So, I think we have been speaking because we work with so many UK universities. So, we've kind of talked to them and got insights from them.

And a lot of them tend to say that the level of education that they're providing, the quality of materials, apart from the experience, what the student is getting at the end of the day is pretty much what they would get if they were studying on campus at the university.



So, I think that's the reason why they don't want to reduce the fees because they feel it kind of shows that they're probably offering a different product than what they actually are. It's the exact same thing, but it's just online. So, that seems to be a key reason.

The other reason which I would say maybe like more unofficial is probably they've got their own costs that they need to maintain. I don't know if doing these kind of online lessons and setting up everything has probably come at a lot of cost to the universities and it's probably cost them more staff than normal to set up all these things online. So, that would definitely be a cost factor as well for the institutions.

Ben: Very interesting. Very interesting. Great insight there. Yeah. And could you give us some examples of how the UK universities have adapted? I mean it seems like a lot of them have gone online. Are there any other examples of what the UK universities have been doing?

Ravina: I think in general what I found was like I said the education industry especially the higher education industry and universities in the past if we ever wanted to get anything changed



or anything suggested, it would take a very long time, but the pandemic has really changed that and accelerated how quickly universities operate and how closely they've worked together.

So, I think as an agency, we worked quite closely with universities and one thing I found is that they're very supportive of students and they're very understanding of the situation. So, there was a lot of we're here to help kind of messages that came out from the universities. They were very flexible with entry requirements. They very quickly I think within two or three months we saw online programs starting lowering of entry requirements and there was a lot of data that was constantly being sent to the students very quickly.

Ben: Very interesting. Does any university specifically come to mind as an example?

Ravina: I think the key was that some universities were already very well-versed in online education. So, I can think of like Imperial College, London had a lot of their programs online. I think they've got an entire section called executive education which is for working professionals that's completely online. So, I think they just adapted that model to other parts of their university



and other faculties. So, they kind of had a relatively easier time compared to other institutions who had never done an online thing before. So, I think Imperial College was really good at rolling out things very quickly.

Ben: Interesting. And if a student wants to study in the UK, for example, and they're based in Thailand, for example, what is the actual process and how does Study in the UK help them?

Ravina: So, we are what we call like an education agency. So, we've got a branch office in Thailand as well. So, you could kind of visit our office or contact us and we just sit there and kind of advice you on which-- depending on the courses you're interested in, we can look at university ranking, subject rankings, help you figure out which would be your kind of top 3-5 universities you want to apply to and then support you from beginning to end in your application process.

So, we're kind of the official registered center with UCAT. So, we work very closely with them and support student applications. And at the end of the process basically, the student is able to



choose whichever university they want to go into. We even help students kind of appeal rejections and just kind of make sure that their application is kind of spic and span for the university they want to get into.

Ben: Super. And what if a student is in a country where there isn't a SI-UK office. What's the process then?

Ravina: So, we've got-- that's the thing because we are operating globally, we obviously haven't got an office in every country around the world. So, the way our systems work is suppose you're based in Brunei and you come looking for SI-UK. You probably come across the SI-UK Thailand website because you're just in closer proximity and then our Thai office supports students from Brunei as well.

Ben: Ah okay, okay. So, it's like even though it's country specific, that specific office would probably cover the neighboring regions as well.



Ravina: Yeah. We basically don't turn away any students.

Ben: All right. Super. And is there anything else that you would like to add? This has been fantastic. Lots of insights. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish?

Ravina: Not particularly that I can think of. I think we as an organization have also changed a lot in the past year. So, I think we were quite very much heavily reliant on face-to-face events and kind of universities visiting our offices, holding open days and fairs. So, I think this whole pandemic was a bit of a shock to the system, but we've kind of transitioned very nicely to virtual events and we had one on last Saturday where we had about 916 appointments where students met with universities one-on-one and it was all done on Zoom. So, that's been an incredible process that has not slowed us down. It's just changed the way we operate.

Ben: Interesting. And this online event the students there they could meet with tutors and admissions experts and get some advice. Is that right?



Ravina: Absolutely. So, we had 63 universities at the fair on Saturday and we're going to have another one coming up in May and we're constantly doing online events and it's all there on the studyin-uk.com website.

Ben: Beautiful. Beautiful. So, do you have the exact dates the one in May?

Ravina: Yes. So, it's on the 15th of May. We'll probably have again a similar set of universities. So, we will probably be 50-60 UK institutions there. And it runs from 11:00 to 4:00 UK time.

Ben: Right. And the students can just sign up for free I guess. They're not charged, are they?

Ravina: No. The students are not charged at all, so they can come in. On average, I think some students speak to each university for 15 minutes, so they end up speaking to 10, 15 institutions. Some unis even do on-the-spot offer. So, they can kind of have a quick look at your application and give you like a provisional offer as well.



Ben: Interesting. And just my final question; what's the situation regarding like financial support? Are there scholarships available or does a student have to be completely self-funded?

Ravina: So, scholarships is kind of a big area where it really depends on where the student is from. There are different kinds of scholarships available at different universities, but yes. In short, there are scholarships available. It's just for us to figure out which one would be applicable to you.

And because we work so closely with the unis, there's also some SI-UK exclusive scholarships where if you kind of apply via us then we kind of offer scholarships for certain programs or certain institutions. It always depends on which institutions have a shortage on certain programs that they want to push for that year. So, they'll encourage students to apply for those.

Ben: Very interesting. Very interesting. And I guess the students could get more information about this in the next big online event so the next big webinar I guess.



Ravina: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. There's a scholarships page on our website as well. So, if they wanted to get some information on applying for scholarships, they can most certainly access that or they can contact us on the website. We'd be happy to advise them.

Ben: Beautiful. Beautiful. Well, that's it from me and I think you've been an absolute fantastic guest, Ravina. I really appreciate you taking the time to do this. And if any student is considering studying in the UK it's SI-- what's the website again?

Ravina: It's studyin-uk.com.

Ben: Beautiful. Beautiful. Okay. Well, thank you very much. And remember, IELTS students, if you are struggling with the IELTS, you can go to ieltspodcast.com, sign up for our newsletter, and then you will be offered a whole range of different helps; eBooks, PDFs, and special offers for the online course. So, just keep that in mind. You're not alone and we can get through this. And good luck with your IELTS.



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