Good Afternoon,

**Stakeholder Engagement Team Update – 23 October 2020**

This update includes information on:

* UKVCAS status update
* Demand for in-country appointments
* Guidance for customers who have already submitted via the IDV app
* Service standards for in country applications
* Update on overseas Visa Application Centres
* Changes to the Immigration Rules
* EU, EEA and Swiss citizens
* V & C Stakeholder Engagement Team becomes **V&C External Relations Team**

**UKVCAS status update:**

UKVCAS has been designated an **essential service,** with staff considered key workers. This means that service points throughout the UK will not be impacted by changes to lockdown restrictions, or by regional variations implemented under the UK Government’s COVID-19 tier system.

As an essential service, and as all the UKVCAS locations are Covid secure, services will continue to be open and available to customers; even in higher tiers. Customers can continue to book and attend appointments to progress their visa applications and travelling to a Service Point is legal, even if it is in a different Tier area. This essential designation is also in place for UKVCAS services impacted by the Welsh firebreak where leaving home is permitted to access medical services or other public services.

Robust safety measures remain in place at all UKVCAS sites to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Staff sit behind Perspex screens, wear face visors/masks, maintain social distancing and regularly use hand sanitizer. For more information on the essential designation, and Q&A, please follow this [link](https://www.ukvcas.co.uk/flash-messa%20%20link%20%20ge-detail?flashmessageId=74833)

Customers seeking to book appointments at a UKVCAS centre are advised to continue to check [here](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ukvcas.co.uk%2Fflash-message-detail%3FflashmessageId%3D56249&data=04%7C01%7CPaul.Billinge%40homeoffice.gov.uk%7C3a08188d1a8242948e4308d874de8dfa%7Cf24d93ecb2914192a08af182245945c2%7C0%7C0%7C637387846490767043%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=7am1ez8LgUE1KqmBZ1PYsWq3iv1xUw5dUWTDru7MYoA%3D&reserved=0) for the up to date list and operating status of our Service Point locations.

**Demand for in-country appointments:**

We are aware of the high demand for UKVCAS appointments, particularly for new applications, and continue to review availability across our sites. Customers are reassured that appointment availability is not linked to the COVID-19 tier system or regional lockdowns. Appointments are being managed in the usual way.

Over the forthcoming weeks, additional free and chargeable appointments are to be introduced daily at the majority of UKVCAS core sites.

UKVCAS continue to provide regular service status updates and customer Q&A that can be accessed [here](https://www.ukvcas.co.uk/home-internal)

We welcome any feedback from our stakeholders relating to this increase in demand for appointments linked to new in-country applications and any insights on what is driving that. If you would like to provide any insight or comment on this matter, please e-mail us at: [VCStakeholderEngagement@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:VCStakeholderEngagement@homeoffice.gov.uk)

**Guidance for customers who have already submitted via the IDV app:**

Where customers have been identified as being eligible to submit their biometric information via the IDV app, and have completed the IDV process, they should not book a further appointment at a UKVCAS service centre to repeat the biometric submission process. Those customers who have been invited to use the IDV app and have not yet done so are encouraged to complete this process as soon as possible.

By not booking an appointment, customers who have already submitted via the IDV app will avoid incurring any additional costs associated with paid slots or making unnecessary journeys to service centres.

UKVI will continue to monitor appointment availability and cancel those appointments made by customers who have already completed biometric enrolment requirements via the IDV app. This will allow customers who are not eligible for biometric reuse the best possible opportunity to secure an appointment slot.

It is important to reiterate that the purpose of the IDV app was not to increase decision speed, but to reduce the pressure on the in-country appointment system and to keep people safe by limiting the requirement to travel at a time when social distancing measures remain in place.

Customers continue to be reassured that their immigration status remains unaffected whilst their applications are in progress.

**Service standards for in country applications:**

We are working hard to process in-progress applications and work through those cases impacted by service point closures and reductions in capacity, including those submitted using the IDV App. All applications submitted between March 2020 and 18th September 2020 are now either completed, or in the process of being assessed by UKVI.

As outlined in our previous update, From 24 September 2020, UKVI returned to usual, pre COVID-19 service standards for *new* applications under the Study, Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) and Citizenship routes. We will provide further updates on service standards for other routes, but customers continue to be reassured that their immigration status remains unaffected whilst their applications are in progress.

**Update on overseas Visa Application Centres:**

As of 23 October, 210 Visa Application Centres (VACs) have reopened with 21 VAC locations currently closed due to local restrictions and second wave closures. For the most up to date information on locations customers are advised to check the relevant commercial partner page:

[TLS contact](https://uk.tlscontact.com/) if you’re in Europe, Africa and parts of the Middle East

[VFS global](https://www.vfsglobal.co.uk/) for all other countries

Priority and Super Priority services are only available in some locations. Where Priority and Super Priority services are available, customers will be able to purchase these products when booking their appointment.

**Changes to the Immigration Rules**

On 22 October, Legislation was laid in Parliament which sets out a number of changes to the [Immigration Rules](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/updates).

These changes provide the foundation for the UK’s new Points-Based Immigration System, which will apply from 1 January 2021, including to newly arriving EU, European Economic Area (EEA) and Swiss citizens (except Irish nationals). These changes build upon the measures already outlined in the [policy statements published by the Government in February and July 2020.](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-points-based-immigration-system-further-details)

The new Student Route and Child Student route are now live. These opened as planned on 5th October. Further routes, including the Skilled Worker Route, will open between 1 December 2020 and 1 January 2021.

**EU, EEA and Swiss citizens**

We recognise that the end of free movement and the introduction of a Points-Based Immigration System is a big change for EU, EEA and Swiss citizens, and have therefore created a range of [introductory guides](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-points-based-immigration-system-employers-and-eu-citizens) for those planning to enter the UK from 1 January 2021. We have also created [individual country pages on GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-uks-points-based-immigration-system-information-for-eu-citizens) with translated information across 24 EU languages. These pages will be updated in the coming weeks with further guidance.

EU, EEA and Swiss citizens arriving in the UK on or before 31 December who wish to work, study or visit the UK should not apply through the Points-Based Immigration System. If they want to stay in the UK after 30 June 2021 they should apply to the [EU Settlement Scheme](https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families) upon arrival in the UK.

**V & C Stakeholder Engagement Team becomes V&C External Relations Team:**

We have rebranded and slightly restructured the V&C Stakeholder Engagement team and are now the V&C **External Relations Team**. The External Relations Team will continue to focus on maintaining and developing the best possible relationships with our stakeholders and partners across government.

To maintain continuity in delivery, the primary contact address for External Relations Team will remain: [VCStakeholderEngagement@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:VCStakeholderEngagement@homeoffice.gov.uk). Please continue to direct your enquiries to this address.

The External Relations Team will continue to provide regular updates on work being undertaken across the Visas & Citizenship command.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Stakeholder Engagement Team at:

[VCStakeholderEngagement@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:VCStakeholderEngagement@homeoffice.gov.uk)

Kind regards,

V & C External Relations Team

