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Sent: 18 August 2020 10:46
Subject: Coronavirus (Covid-19) immigration update

Good Morning,

Since our last Coronavirus (Covid-19) communication to you on 5 August, we would like to share some recent updates with you.

Whilst more of our services have resumed and we move closer towards 'business as usual', the impact of Covid-19 continues to be felt in different ways across our UK and overseas operations.

Overseas VACs

Whilst the majority of our overseas Visa Application Centres have reopened, there remain some locations that are closed due to locally imposed restrictions, or where our commercial partner is unable to move staff or mobile equipment across regions to deliver services at smaller Temporary Enrolment Locations ('TELS').

Please be aware that the reopening of locations continues to be subject to local conditions, and that customer or staff exposure to Covid-19 may affect our ability to operate. VACs are only being opened when it is safe, and customers and staff are protected. As we are sure you can appreciate, this remains a fluid situation that we continue to keep under daily review.

As ever, to ensure you always have the most up to date information on which VACs are open, please check the relevant commercial partner website.

- Europe, Africa and parts of the Middle East visit: uk.tlscontact.com
- All other countries visit: vfsglobal.co.uk

Please also note our [updated guidance](#) for customers outside of the UK who may be affected by VAC closures, that states:

"If your VAC is still closed due to coronavirus restrictions, you can visit a VAC in any country worldwide, subject to that country's entry requirements, to submit your application and biometrics. You'll be able to make any type of application.

This temporary concession will be reviewed by 30 November 2020."

This means that overseas visa customers whose usual VAC remains closed can apply at another VAC in any country, regardless of the type of application they are making. Whilst some VACs remain closed, or if some suspend services again due to imposition of additional local restrictions, paragraph 28 of the immigration rules will not apply to affected customers.

Tier 4 guidance and concessions

The latest [guidance for gov.uk on Tier 4 temporary concessions](#) has been published. This includes details on the following:

- The ATAS (Academic Technology Approval Scheme) concession is no longer in place
- Where SELT centres have re-opened the SELT concession is no longer available

- Confirmation that Distance Learning will be in place for the entirety of the 2020/21 academic year
- Clarification that the concession allowing students to apply for further leave in the UK isn't restricted to individuals whose leave expires on or before 31 August. The concession has been extended until the launch of the Student route.
- The concession regarding the period during which a new course must commence after the expiry of current leave has been extended until 31 December.
- A concession has been added that permits students to downgrade to a lower level of an integrated course within the UK.
- Confirmation that students who are undertaking distance learning are considered to be in term time and are restricted to the work hours stated on their visas.
- Confirmation that the applicant must have arrived in the UK on or before 31 July to be able to switch from the Short-term study or visit route to the student route. Those applicants arriving after that date cannot switch under the concession.

A reminder also that a link to the 'collection page' of all guidance for those affected by changes to UK immigration and borders due to Coronavirus remains live at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-immigration-and-borders>.

Changes at the border and travel corridors

We would like to remind all stakeholders and customers that changes at the border because of coronavirus (COVID-19) mean that [all individuals should check what they need to do before they travel](#). Guidance on [Travel Corridors](#) continues to be updated to reflect which countries and territories you can travel from to England and may not have to self-isolate.

As ever, please do keep referring to [gov.uk](#), alongside [NHS](#) and [Public Health England](#).

In-country biometric reuse and launch of UKVCAS 'IDV app'

For UK based applicants, UKVI has temporarily changed the way it processes applications in response to Covid-19. For some customers, this involves reusing biometrics (fingerprints and photograph) that have been recorded in a previous application as part of the process to verify an applicant's identity. This new process, and the technology to support it, will begin rollout this week.

As part of this new digital process, UKVI and UKVCAS (UK Visa and Citizenship Application Services) have worked together to develop a way to submit facial images using a new Identity Verification app, known as "IDV app". Customers who are eligible for biometric reuse will be invited to use the IDV app in a phased approach. This temporary measure will benefit many customers who have been affected by Covid-19 related closures of UKVCAS service points, and the reduced capacity of those that have reopened, since March this year.

Further details are attached for your information. Stakeholders who would like to find out more about this new process for eligible in-country customers, who have submitted an application since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, can join us for a teleconference Stakeholder Update this **Thursday 20th August at 10.00am**. Joining details and an option to submit questions in advance of the meeting will be sent to those attending.

To register to join this Stakeholder Update, please email us at VCStakeholderEngagement@homeoffice.gov.uk

Stakeholder Engagement Updates and Survey

Thank you to those of you who completed the 2-minute survey we included in our last update to you. This helps us to understand how you'd like us to engage with you in future. The survey will remain open until 21 August so please take the time to complete it if you haven't already.

Survey Link: https://homeoffice.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2lzn7tcub8ATXYV

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Pam Kalley.

Regards

Harpreet Sareen

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Premium Stakeholders & GREAT Club

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