Coronavirus (COVID-19) factsheet: guidance for sponsors
Monday 8 June 2020

Guidance on immigration provisions made by the Home Office for individuals affected by travel restrictions associated with coronavirus (COVID-19).

Key lines

- The Home Office has published guidance on GOV.UK on immigration provisions for individuals affected by travel restrictions associated with coronavirus (COVID-19).

Extending a visa

- If the individual already has leave in the UK and planned to remain and apply to extend their leave when it expired, they must continue to do this.

- No individual who is in the UK legally and whose visa expired between 24 January and 31 July 2020, or is due to expire, will be regarded as an overstayer or suffer any detriment in the future if they cannot leave the UK because of travel restrictions related to COVID-19.

- A visa will be extended to 31 July 2020 if an individual cannot leave the UK because of travel restrictions or self-isolation related to coronavirus (COVID-19).

- Individuals must update their records with the Coronavirus Immigration Team (CIT) if their visa is expiring and were not planning to stay in the UK. The Coronavirus Immigration Team will aim to reply to an individual's application within 5 working days.

- Individuals do not need to do anything else once they have submitted the online e-form and their status in the UK is secure from the point they have submitted. This requirement to contact the Coronavirus Immigration Team applies to individuals of any nationality whose leave expires between 24 January 2020 and 31 July 2020.

- Once you have requested an extension, you won’t need to make another request if UKVI extends visas further due to coronavirus. Their visa will be extended again automatically.

- Individuals are expected to take all reasonable steps to leave the UK before this date where it is possible to do so.

Completing their application
• Some UK Visa and Citizenship Application Centres (UKVCAS) will reopen for existing customers on 1 June 2020. Customers can [check which UKVCAS centres are open](#).

• Service and Support Centres (SSCs) are temporarily closed because of coronavirus (COVID-19).

• We have already contacted customers if they made an appointment to attend a UKVCAS or SSC that is temporary closed, to let them know it has been postponed. Customers will now be contacted when they can book a new appointment.

• A customer’s immigration status in the UK will not change as a result of them not being able to attend an appointment.

**NHS and frontline health workers**

• Some frontline health workers and their families will get their visas automatically extended because of coronavirus.

• There are also changes to the conditions of visas for some frontline health workers. These changes will apply to customers if they work for the NHS or independent health and care providers as a:
  
  o biochemist  
  o biological scientist  
  o dental practitioner  
  o health professional  
  o medical practitioner  
  o medical radiographer  
  o midwife  
  o nurse  
  o occupational therapist  
  o ophthalmologist  
  o paramedic  
  o pharmacist  
  o physiotherapist  
  o podiatrist  
  o psychologist  
  o social worker  
  o speech and language therapist  
  o therapy professional

• Individuals should check with their employer if they are not sure whether they work in an eligible profession.

• Individuals can work at any NHS hospital during the coronavirus outbreak if their sponsor can maintain their sponsorship duties.
The individual’s sponsor will not need to notify UKVI of the change in their place of work.

Individuals can carry out supplementary work in any role at any skill level during the coronavirus outbreak. There is no restriction on the number of hours they can work.

There is no longer a limit on the number of hours an individual can work or volunteer each week if they work for the NHS as a doctor, nurse or paramedic and they are a:

- Tier 4 student
- Tier 2 worker and their NHS job is a second job
- Visiting academic researcher
- Holder of a short-term visa and are permitted to volunteer

If an individual is a pre-registration nurse currently in the UK, the deadline for them to sit the Occupational Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) has been extended to 31 December 2020.

If individuals do not pass on the first attempt they will have until 31 May 2021 to pass the exam.

Absence reporting

We will not take enforcement action against sponsors who continue to sponsor students or employees despite absences due to coronavirus.

They do not need to report student or employee absences related to coronavirus.

This can include absences due to illness, their need to isolate or inability to travel due to travel restrictions.

They do not need to withdraw sponsorship if:

- A student is unable to attend for more than 60 days
- An employee is absent from work without pay for more than 4 weeks

We will keep this under review

Students who withdraw from their studies as a result of covid-19 will be discounted from future Basic Compliance Assessments

Tier 4 - Distance learning

They can continue to sponsor existing Tier 4 students who are continuing their studies through distance learning, whether they are in the UK or another country.

If a student has permanently withdrawn from their studies, or deferred their studies for reasons which are not related to covid-19, they must report this as usual.
• They do not need to withdraw sponsorship for new students who have been issued a Tier 4 visa but are distance learning because they have been unable to travel to the UK.

• New international students who have not yet applied for a visa but want to start a course by distance learning do not require sponsorship under Tier 4. This is because they do not need to travel to the UK.

• They do not need to tell the Home Office when students have moved to distance learning.

• These arrangements will apply until 31 July 2020, when they will be reviewed.

If sponsors have issued a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) or a confirmation of acceptance for studies (CAS) and the sponsored employee or student has not yet applied for a visa

• The employee or student will still be able to apply for a visa.

• The start date for the course or employment stated on the CoS or CAS may have changed. We will not automatically refuse such cases.

• For example, we may accept a CoS or CAS if they have become invalid because the employee or student was unable to travel as a result of coronavirus. We will consider this on a case by case basis.

If you’re sponsoring a student who’s waiting for their Tier 4 visa application to be decided

Sponsors may allow students to start their studies before their visa application has been decided if:

• sponsors are a Tier 4 sponsor (other than Tier 4 Legacy Sponsors)

• sponsors have assigned the student a CAS

• the student submitted their application before their current visa expired and has shown their sponsor evidence of this

• the course they start is the same as the one listed on their CAS

• the student has a valid Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) certificate if required

A sponsor’s reporting responsibilities start from the date that sponsors issue the CAS, not from the date that their application is granted.

If the student’s application is eventually rejected as invalid or refused sponsors must terminate the student’s studies.

More information about the measures in place for students and their sponsors
If you’re sponsoring an employee who’s waiting for their Tier 2 or 5 visa application to be decided

Sponsors may allow employees to start work before their visa application has been decided if:

- sponsors have assigned them a CoS
- the employee submitted their visa application before their current visa expired
- the role they are employed in is the same as the one on their CoS

Sponsors reporting responsibilities for an employee start from the date the sponsor have assigned them a CoS, not from the date that their application is granted.

Sponsors will not be able to report information to us using the sponsor management system. Sponsors must however ensure that they record and maintain all the relevant information set out in the sponsor guidance on their own systems. Any changes that will impact the eventual consideration of the migrant’s visa application should be updated on the Certificate of Sponsorship, as normal.

If the employee’s application is eventually rejected as invalid or refused sponsors must terminate their employment.

If an individual’s 30 day visa to work, study or join family has expired

- If an individual’s 30 day visa to travel to the UK for work, study or to join family has expired, or is about to expire, individuals can request a replacement visa with revised validity dates free of charge until the end of this year.
- To make a request, individual's should contact the Coronavirus Immigration Team and include their name, nationality, date of birth and their GWF reference number with ‘REPLACEMENT 30 DAY VISA’ in the subject line. If they have already contacted the team about this, please let the team know in the email.
- Individuals will be contacted when our VACs reopen to arrange for a replacement visa to be endorsed in their passport.
- Individuals will not be penalised for being unable collect their BRP while coronavirus measures are in place.
- This process will be in place until the end of 2020.

UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) has set up a dedicated team for customers with immigration queries related to coronavirus, including questions about
urgent, compelling, compassionate cases. For more information visit: Gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents

Additional Information

Why are you opening UKVCAS now?

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on all UKVI services. Until now, the lockdown restrictions meant UKVCAS could not operate safely or effectively. The UK Government has started to lift certain restrictions and we recognise that customers are keen to complete their applications where they are able but given the level of disruption to our normal operating model, this process will take time. Services will not return immediately or at full capacity. Instead, UKVCAS will reopen in some locations to assure ourselves that we can open safely, protect customers and staff, and can ensure every part of the application process can be delivered effectively. Only when we are confident that this is the case will we move to open more locations. Customers will be kept informed of UKVCAS openings via GOV.UK and the commercial partner website.

An individual had an appointment at a UKVCAS that was postponed. Will they be prioritised as you reopen application centres?

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on all UKVI services. UKVI is taking a steady, phased approach to resuming operations, so we can be confident that we can open safely and deliver the service our customers expect. As UKVCAS reopen, UKVI will be prioritising activity to ensure those customers who had an appointment that was postponed as a result of the lockdown restrictions will be prioritised before we process new applications. Our commercial partner will contact you to arrange this new appointment as services resume.

Can an individual now apply to switch visa types in the UK?

If their leave is expiring between 24 January and 31 July 2020, they'll be able to apply from the UK to switch to a long-term UK visa, including if they would usually need to apply for a visa from their home country. They'll need to meet the same visa requirements and pay the UK application fee. This includes those whose leave has already been automatically extended to 31 July 2020.

They should apply online.

They will not be regarded as an overstayer or be subject to enforcement action if they're unable to attend a biometric appointment due to coronavirus or if there are delays in processing their application.

How do foreign nationals get a status letter confirming a visa extension, or a new Biometric Residence Permit with a revised expiry date?

All nationals who need evidence of their extension should can contact the Coronavirus Immigration Team by visiting Gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents
If sponsors are struggling to pay the required salaries to sponsored employees as they have temporarily reduced or ceased trading, what should they do?

Sponsor can temporarily reduce the pay of their sponsored migrants to up to 80% of their salary.

Any reductions must be part of a company-wide policy to avoid redundancies and in which all workers are treated the same.

Any reductions must be temporary, and the employee’s pay must return to at least previous levels once these arrangements have ended.

If a sponsor have issued a COS or a CAS and the sponsored employee or student has not yet made a visa application, what should they do?

Visa applications can still be made. The start date for the course or employment may be different. The Home Office will take a pragmatic approach to considering cases with significantly different start dates.

Where a CoS or CAS has become invalid as the employee or student was unable to travel the Home Office will consider exceptionally accepting that CoS or CAS on a case by case basis

What guidance does Home Office have for those who have a valid visa but haven’t travelled to the UK yet?

Applicants who hold a valid visa should check initially with their own government websites to ensure that they are up to date on latest travel restrictions from their current locations. There will be changes at the border because of coronavirus (COVID-19). Individual’s must check what they need to do before they travel.

If an individual has applied for a visa from overseas but would now like to withdraw their application, how do they do this?

If the customer wishes to withdraw their application before their biometric appointment and is overseas, they can do this in the same place as their application was made, on Access UK or Visas4UK.

Any customer who is overseas and wishes to withdraw an application after their biometrics have been taken should visit Cancel your visa, immigration or citizenship application.