



Home Office

# The resumption of substantive asylum interviews

Version 1.0

# Contents

Contents.....	2
About this guidance.....	3
Contacts .....	3
Publication .....	3
Phased resumption of interviews .....	4
DI/VC Interview scheduling process.....	5
Allocate and schedule an interview.....	5
Appropriateness of DI/VC interview .....	5
Interviews timings.....	5
Invitation to interview.....	5
Legal representatives .....	6
Interpreters.....	6
Childcare requirements .....	6
Day of the interview.....	8
Arrival of attendees.....	8
Reception duty .....	8
BRP enrolment.....	8
Interpreters.....	8
Preparation .....	8
Room Control.....	9
Ending an interview.....	9
Late running of interviews – impact on scheduling.....	9
Interview transcripts .....	10

# About this guidance

This guidance informs you of the planned process to resume substantive asylum interviews, mainly via video conferencing. This guidance does not replace the [Asylum Interviews guidance](#), and should be read and implemented in partnership with that guidance.

## Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager, Technical Specialist or Senior Caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email the Asylum Policy team.

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email the Guidance Rules and Forms team.

## Publication

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was published:

- version 1.0
- published for Home Office staff on 06 August 2020

## Related content

[Contents](#)

# Phased resumption of interviews

In line with the Home Office's commitment to protect the health and wellbeing of its staff and customers as a top priority, we made the decision to cease face-to-face, substantive asylum interviews with effect from Thursday 19 March 2020. Having worked with delivery partners, to develop and enable the use of a video interviewing solution across most of the asylum estate, we are now ready to resume substantive asylum interviews. The planned phased resumption of interviews outlined below will ensure adherence to government guidance on Covid-19, and ensure the safety of all participants, including claimants, legal representatives, interpreters and interviewers.

There will be a phased resumption of interviewing which utilises remote interviewing via video conferencing, but we are aiming to resume face to face interviews as soon as we are able to do so.

Initially, in order to minimise the use of public transport by participants in the interview process, those within close proximity of a United Kingdom Visas Immigration (UKVI) or Visa Facilitation Service (VFS) location will be asked to attend an asylum interview. Then, when it is safe to do so and in-line with government guidance on Covid-19, we will resume face to face interviews.

Due to the practical difficulties of arranging video conferencing interviews for unaccompanied children, coupled with the restrictions brought in through wider Covid-19 guidance, this resumption of interviews will not routinely include unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. In cases where it is very clearly in the best interests of the child to be interviewed without further delay, the Home Office will consider what arrangements can be made to facilitate a video conference interview as soon as practically possible. Any such request must be been made in writing. We recognise that any unnecessary delay to dealing with claims from children is likely not to be in the child's best interest so we will seek to minimise the length of time before commencing face to face interviews for this cohort.

We are currently working on measures regarding the management and upgrading of interview rooms to put in-place a safe work environment in which to conduct asylum interviews in person in response to Covid-19, such as introducing clear screens between the claimant and interviewer and amending the room layout to ensure social distancing is maintained.

Currently, it will be optional for those attending the interview as to whether they want to wear personal safety equipment in the form of a mask to cover their face during interviews, or gloves, but in line with all procedures set out in the guidance, this will be regularly reviewed to ensure adherence to the government guidance on Covid-19. Although masks / face coverings are not mandatory they will be offered to claimants by HO Security and / or at asylum interview reception desk. There will be additional breaks factored into the interview, based on the physical interviewing environment.

## **Related content**

[Contents](#)

# DI/VC Interview scheduling process

This section provides advice to asylum workflow teams seeking to schedule a DI/VC interview in another Home Office (HO) DI/VC site location.

## Allocate and schedule an interview

You should use the normal internal procedures to identify a scheduling opportunity and secure the availability of an interviewer and room.

## Appropriateness of DI/VC interview

As outlined in the video conferencing section of the [Asylum Interviews guidance](#), in some cases, conducting an interview via DI/VC may not be appropriate, though this will depend on the circumstances of the individual case. When deciding whether to use DI/VC you need to consider factors that may prevent a claimant disclosing particularly sensitive information in a DI/VC interview. This does not mean that DI/VC will not be appropriate, but any reasons given by the claimant for not wanting an interview to be conducted by DI/VC must be carefully considered. This may include, but is not limited to, cases involving sexual orientation or gender identity, victims of torture or other trauma where recording was part of the persecution, victims of sexual violence or other forms of gender-based persecution, victims of modern slavery or claimants with mental health conditions.

Where you assess, based on the evidence available, that a DI/VC interview is not appropriate, then you should inform the claimant that a face to face interview will be organised when it is safe to do so (under the second phase of the resumption).

## Interviews timings

We recommend that interview start times are between 8.30am and 9.00am or between 12.30pm and 1.30pm with claimants being invited to arrive at least 15 to 30 minutes earlier subject to their individual circumstances, such as reporting or BRP enrolment at a Service Support Centre.

## Invitation to interview

You must issue invitation to interview letters to claimants within a sufficient timeframe to ensure that claimants receive appropriate advance notification of their interview to be able to make the necessary preparations to attend. A minimum of 5 days' notice will usually be given, but on occasions, less notice will be given where an interview slot becomes available.

You will inform the claimant in the invitation to interview letter that they should provide all documentation or evidence in support of the claim in advance of their interview, to reduce unnecessary contact with Home Office staff on the day of the interview. All foreign language documents must be translated into English and certified as authentic translations of the originals. Wherever it can be avoided, local

staff will not scan documentation on the day of the interview in order to reduce contact. See submission of documents in video conference interviews section in the [Asylum Interviews guidance](#) for more details.

You will provide instructions within the invitation to interview letter informing the claimant that they must call the Home Office (on the contact details provided) at least 3 days prior to their interview to confirm if the interview room is bigger enough for others to attend, such as a legal representative or supporter.

The procedures for interviews conducted in Visa Facilitation Service (VFS) Visa Application Centres (VAC) end points will differ to those conducted at asylum estate buildings, as claimants in VFS locations will often be using a booth rather than an interview room. You should outline the differing procedures that will occur for claimants in their invitation to interview letter.

## Legal representatives

You must copy the invitation to interview letter to the claimant's legal representative, if there is one on record.

Where the room is large enough to adhere to social distancing, as outlined by the government guidance on Covid-19, legal representatives will be able to join the interview in-person. Claimants, or legal representatives, should contact the Home Office, as outlined in the invitation to interview section, to enquire as to whether legal representatives can attend the interview in person.

Where a legal representative cannot join the interview in person, or they do not wish to, they can join the interview remotely via DI/VC.

You should follow the guidance on checking registration of legal representatives and the professional conduct of legal representatives as normal. See the legal representative section of the [Asylum Interviews guidance](#) for more details.

## Interpreters

The attendance of a suitable interpreter, as defined in the interpreters section of [Asylum Interviews guidance](#), will be arranged if required. You will inform the claimant in the invitation to interview letter of the language which we have on record for them and should this be incorrect, the claimant should contact the Home Office on the details provided to ensure that a suitable interpreter is provided on the day.

Interpreters will attend the interviews remotely, via video conferencing, wherever possible, in order to ensure social distancing is adhered to, but will be able to attend in person where the room is of sufficient size.

## Childcare requirements

Should claimants who are invited to interview have young children requiring childcare facilities whilst the interview is conducted, the claimant should contact the

Home Office as soon as possible using the contact details on the invitation to interview letter to ensure that creche facilities are available at the interview location.

If you cannot offer childcare provision on the day of the interview, you should offer to reschedule the interview if necessary, so the claimant can arrange their own childcare, or should they be unable to, schedule the interview for a day where childcare is available on the asylum estate.

#### **Related content**

[Contents](#)

# Day of the interview

## Arrival of attendees

### Reception duty

The receptions of interview venues will usually open at 8.30am and remain open until 4.30pm, or until all DI/VC interviews are concluded, whichever is later.

You will inform the claimant in the invitation to interview letter of the importance of attending the interview at the stated time. Should the claimant arrive early, they may be asked to wait outside of the building.

As advised in the invitation to interview letter, the claimant must wash their hands when they enter the building using soap and water, or if this is unavailable, the hand gel provided.

### BRP enrolment

Asylum claimants may be required to arrive early to enrol their biometrics at the interview venue or at a local Service Support Centres (SSCs).

Home Office staff will be aware of such arrangements and will provide sufficient time for claimants to arrive after such appointments before treating the interview as a non-attendance.

### Interpreters

Home Office reception staff, who act as a single point of contact (SPOC) on the day of the interview, should introduce interpreters to the interview room (if they are attending in-person).

Interpreters who are joining via DI/VC will confirm their identity to the interviewer before the start of the interview.

### Preparation

You are expected to log onto the DI/VC equipment 15 minutes before the stated interview start time.

This will enable you to establish the DI/VC link and for you and the team at the venue to identify any potential issues.

If it is known beforehand, you should make the venue team aware of any mobility issues for the claimant prior to the interview to allow the SPOC to complete a required PEEP (Person Emergency Evacuation Plan). The remote unit should also inform the SPOC of any potential risks which may necessitate extra measures to be put in place.

## Room Control

You are expected to be aware of the situation in the DI/VC rooms at all times and be alert to potential issues which may occur.

This should include monitoring the claimant's behaviour and wellbeing. If you have any concerns at any point whether it is appropriate to proceed with the DI/VC interview you should consult with a senior caseworker or a member of a local safeguarding team. This can be done during a break.

Where it becomes clear during a DI/VC interview that the claimant is unable to participate fully in the interview process, you must suspend the interview and establish the reason why, seeking advice from a senior case worker or technical specialist as necessary. If the interview cannot continue as a DI/VC interview, an interview must be rearranged as a face to face interview (during the second phase of the resumption).

You should clearly communicate break timings and any evacuation procedures to all parties at the beginning of the interview, including the SPOC, to ensure maximum cooperation. This should include specifying a meeting point where claimants are expected to be collected prior to resuming the interview.

You should ensure that interactions between the interpreter and claimant remain professional. If there are any concerns about any parties' behaviour this should be communicated to a senior caseworker, and where required, the interpreter should be reported to the Interpreter Operations Unit (IOU). See the interpreters section of the [Asylum Interviews guidance](#) for more details.

At no point should a claimant be left unattended in a DI/VC interview room without a member of staff at the venue being present. Similarly, you should not leave sight of the camera.

## Ending an interview

Once an interview has ended you should contact the SPOC to inform them that the claimant can be collected and directed out of the building. You should not end the video conference until a member of staff has collected the claimant and the interpreter.

## Late running of interviews – impact on scheduling

Generally, it is expected that DI/VC interviews should be concluded by either 12.30pm for morning interviews or by 5.30pm for afternoon interviews.

If you believe an interview may run past the scheduled time slot, you should consult a senior caseworker to seek advice on how to proceed. You should make an assessment regarding how much longer the interview may last – this information should be communicated to the SPOC, so that agreement to continue later can be sought from the local staff. This should be facilitated, where possible, unless there is

another interview scheduled in the facilities, for the interviewer, legal representative or interpreter.

Where the DI/VC interview is ongoing past the time where the venue is due to close, or the interview cannot continue for the reasons mentioned above, the interview should be suspended and rebooked.

## Interview transcripts

You are responsible for ensuring that the interview transcript and recording is dispatched to the correct claimant's and/or representative's address. You should use MOVEit to send the transcript and recording wherever possible.

When providing copies of interview transcripts, reference should be made to the interview transcripts section of the [Asylum Interviews guidance](#).

### **Related content**

[Contents](#)