



## UK Visas and Immigration

### Asylum Operations Stakeholder Event 08<sup>th</sup> August 2020 Slido Q&A document

#### Video Conference/Face to Face Interviewing

**Q. Where will video conference interviews take place?**

*A. Customers will be asked to attend an agreed end point provided by the Home Office i.e. VFS Global commercial suppliers, Home Office locations and in the future other Her Majesty's Government (HMG) or suitable locations.*

**Q. What are VFS Global Commercial Suppliers?**

*A. VFS Global are the VAC (Visa Application Centre); VFS Global is the name of the supplier.*

**Q. What childcare provision will there be for people having video interviews?**

*A. We are working with suppliers who have furloughed their workers to see when we can restart; social distancing and PHE guidance needs to be adhered to and part of the consideration.*

**Q. When will an interview via VC not be appropriate i.e. will there have to be a medical argument, or will it be considered where a person is just simply not comfortable with VC interviews?**

*A Some research has been commissioned to explore this in more detail and we will also be working with stakeholders through the NASF subgroups and a VC working group.*

**Q. Are interview letters produced in the preferred language of the customer or just in English as some of the concepts/terminology around VC may be unfamiliar?**

*A. The Home Office will be reviewing the information provided prior to VC interviews to improve the customer and employee experience following feedback from the virtual stakeholder event.*

**Q. How will you ensure that customers are also prepared for participating in VC interviews?**

*A. The Home Office will be reviewing the information provided prior to VC interviews to improve the customer and employee experience follow feedback from the virtual stakeholder event.*

**Q. What risk assessment of customers are you doing before you invite them to VC interview beyond asking the claimant if they are vulnerable?**

*A. See previous response on suitability of VC.*

**Q. Will the VC/remote approach enable proper interpretation services integration i.e. Skype/Teams is not yet ideal for this?**

*A. The existing Home Office commercial digital interviewing (DI)/VC system works using Skype. In the short to medium terms there are no plans to change the platform.*

**Q. Are you using VC for interviews connected to refugee family reunion applications (where needed)?**

*A. Asylum Operations only deals with overseas family reunion applications; in country applications is the responsibility of Refused Case Management (RCM).*

**Q. These changes rely on access to the internet yet only SIM cards and not smartphones are provided and there is no WIFI in dispersal. An increase in Asylum Support rates is needed. Specifically, given what you have acknowledged about the challenges you've faced in delivering training using VC. So, what are the options being considered?**

*A. Customers will be asked to attend an agreed end point provided by the Home Office there will be no costs to the customer or need to have own wi-fi connection.*

**Q. How are the initial interviews going to be prioritised?**

*A. It's a mixed approach at present: cases have been reviewed to ensure that those invited to interview can be decided; we will consider customer addresses/locations in comparison to the office to limit public transport use; we will also give consideration as to suitability.*

**Q. What support will be available for customers after their interview?**

*A. The customer can access support in the usual ways they do now post interview, we are not changing the existing process.*

**Q. What about childcare whilst being interviewed in their own home - especially during Covid?**

*A. We will still offer face-to-face interviews where appropriate.*

**Q. Why was the decision made to use Skype for Business?**

*A. The existing Home Office commercial DI/VC system works using Skype. In the short to medium terms there are no plans to change the platform. The end point provided by the Home Office will be fully compatible.*

**Q. Will training on VC interviewing include understanding of safeguarding risks for vulnerable customers and the possible impact on quality of the information they will elicit?**

*A. Yes, training will cover circumstances when it may not be appropriate to hold the asylum interview by VC. If a DM is concerned, they will liaise with a Technical Specialist/Senior Caseworker about the next course of action.*

**Q. Could you explain the process of utilising interpreters during VC?**

*A. Interpreters are now able and authorised to conduct full asylum interviews in real time from secure remote locations via Skype for Business.*

**Q. What is the eligibility for face to face interviews vs remote interviews? Will customers have a choice in which they would prefer?**

*A. Due to a number of reasons that benefit both the Home Office and the customer, the Home Office has plans to increase the number of interviews completed using DI/VC. The Home Office will ensure that there is a mixed approach to meet the needs of our customers. The Home Office is committed to reviewing the process with stakeholder to improve the customer and employee experience.*

**Q. Re: speech to text for interviews, can the asylum seeker have a copy?**

*A. Customers will still receive their transcript and recording.*

**Q. Does the new technology/approach allow for the Asylum Seeker to get access to their records?**

*A. The existing system records the interview audio and is not a customer account management system. Progress on cases will be via the normal channels. Future customer channel engagement will form part of wider HO transformation.*

**Q. As part of this design, have people (including Business Systems Limited) spoken to people with experience of the asylum process?**

*A. BSL have designed a solution based on a set of original business requirements. The Home Office is however committed to reviewing the process with stakeholders to improve the customer and employee experience.*

**Q. What are 'sentiment analytics'?**

*A. In essence, it is the process of determining the emotional tone behind a series of words, used to gain an understanding of the attitudes, opinions and emotions expressed within an online mention. The Home Office has no plans to use sentiment for asylum interviews currently.*

### UASCs (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children)

**Q. Do you have a time-frame for reintroduction of substantive asylum interviews for UASC or when the HO will be reaching out to LAs for support around it?**

*A. As Asylum Operations continue to roll out their phased interview restart schedule (as outlined in the letter circulated on 15 June), further development work is taking place regards the restart of children's interviews. The Home Office are keen to restart children's interviews at the earliest opportunity, however must take care to ensure that the appropriate infrastructure is in place, that is tested and proven before committing to set timeframes.*

**Q. Who accompanies UASCs when their biometrics are taken, when interviewed by phone, etc.?**

*A. This is outlined in p33 of Children's Asylum Claims AI which is available on GOV.UK. The Responsible Adult role is outlined in p21 of this guidance.*

**Q. If the HO is going to pursue digital avenues will this be considered in Asylum Seeker rate reviews in future?**

*A. Yes, there is ongoing social research at the moment, we also intend to continue to engage with stakeholders throughout as we shape our transformation plans.*

### FTP (Foundation Training Programme)

**Q. Are you still running the FTP within 3 weeks or have these new arrangements forced you to extend the programme?**

*A. The formal classroom training aka. The FTP is 5 weeks in total, but it is currently being fully revised.*

**Q. How does the training incorporate the recommendations of the Windrush Lessons Learned Review (WLLR)?**

*A. We will work collaboratively with relevant parts of the business responsible for WLLR training to ensure that it is delivered to our staff. As part of the FTP revision we are incorporating the WLLR recommendations where appropriate.*

**Q. Are you doing knowledge tests with trainees and can you compare learning outcomes from virtual/face to face training?**

*A. We conduct knowledge tests throughout the FTP. We will closely review how virtual training is going and making necessary amendments as we go.*

### PIQ (Preliminary Interview Questionnaire)

**Q. It's good to have the PIQ on the gov.uk website - maybe the clarification (below) referred to can be put on there?**

A. The PIQ is available on gov.uk. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preliminary-information-questionnaire-for-asylum-claims>

**Q. Will the HO postpone PIQ questionnaire/interview dates upon request? Many Asylum Seekers are receiving PIQs without access to advice due to legal firms furloughing staff.**

A. An interview can be conducted in the absence of a PIQ. If the form is not returned by the deadline then an interview may be arranged. Should the customer wish to instruct legal representation and submit a PIQ, they should contact the asylum team responsible for their case to request an extension.

**Q. Can we get clarification on the status and effect of PIQs in writing please because this is regularly raised as a concern in Wales?**

A. The PIQ is a part of the asylum process and is issued to customers at screening. They are asked to complete and return the form within 20 days of attending their screening interview. We would ask all customers to complete the form as it has benefits for them including shorter, more focused interviews, better prepared interviewing officers, identification and support of vulnerabilities etc. however we accept that it may not be possible and if we do not hear from the customer or their representative before the deadline, we will book the customer an interview. A reminder to return the form is now included in the invitation to interview.

**Q. Will you make sure that a claimant has a legal rep before sending them the PIQ?**

A. No. PIQs are issued at the point of screening.

**Q. Can a decision be made without submission of a PIQ at all?**

A. If a PIQ is not returned, an interview will be scheduled, and the case will proceed.

**Q. Will the HO postpone PIQ questionnaire/interview dates upon request?**

A. Any requests to extend the timescales for the return of the PIQ will be considered and should be made to the asylum team responsible for their case. For those without access to advice we would suggest contacting Migrant Help for assistance in finding a representative.

### BRP (Biometric Residence Permit)

**Q. Are BRP enrolment appointments being provided at regional sites?**

A. Yes, they are provided at the SSCs, appointments are currently being prioritised on need/vulnerability, however they are in the process of extending opening hours and increasing the number of available appointments

**Q. We have had someone waiting for a BRP since February, is that the time expected?**

A. Yes, as above, those falling in to specific vulnerability categories have been prioritised however extended opening days/hours and increased appointments are starting so other types of cases will start to be picked up.

**Q. At the recent (NASF) Decision Making subgroup, long delays in receipt of BRPs was reported - have you managed to look into this yet?**

A. We have spoken to operational colleagues and the BRP teams and there is no obvious answer. It would be good to look in to an example if you have one to follow it through the process?

## Asylum Decisions

**Q. What percentage of decisions are still being served by post? Have you had any examples of people not receiving emails for any reason?**

*A. This data is not currently available in a verified format suitable for publication.*

## Asylum Intake

**Q. Will the Home Office consider the ongoing operation of the regional intake offices, rather than it just being a temporary measure?**

*A. The regional locations for registering asylum claims are a temporary contingency measure in response to COVID19 and the associated restrictions, and do not represent a change in operating model. Although lockdown measures are easing, we recognise that closing regional locations at this time would not be in the spirit of the current Government guidance. The position remains under constant review.*

**Q. Has any assessment been made of the longer-term benefit of keeping the regional intake units?**

*A. All our contingency arrangements, including the regional locations, are being evaluated as part of our recovery planning to ensure that benefits and lessons from the way we have worked are retained and improved upon as we move forward. We do recognise the value provided by the regional locations for registering asylum claims during the restrictions around COVID 19.*

**Q. Could it be clarified whether the same applies to UASC or not?**

*A. The Home Office is committed to enabling UASCs and our most vulnerable customers to register their asylum claims locally. Prior to COVID 19 and the associated restrictions this commitment was met through a mobile team providing locations across the UK. The impact of COVID19 and the associated restrictions has paused the operation of this team, however this commitment is now being met by the temporary regional locations for registering asylum claims. Appointments for UASC and vulnerable customers at regional locations can be access through the Asylum Intake Unit appointment booking line - details are available on gov.uk.*

**Q. How many screening interviews have been conducted by telephone?**

*A. This data is not currently available in a verified format suitable for publication.*

**Q. Is everyone arriving by boat across the channel interviewed or are some, as rumored, sent back without? (both UASC and adult)**

*A. All asylum customers arriving by small boat across the channel are taken through the asylum registration and screening process so there is no differentiation of those arriving in the UK by this route. Where there is evidence to suggest that a customer has spent time in a safe EU member state, their case will be routed through to the safe third country process for consideration of return under the EU Dublin Regulations and the associated timescales. This has not changed - although such returns were temporarily suspended under the COVID-19 restrictions.*

## Other

**Q. What are the main challenges posed by COVID-19 that the government is grappling with and areas in which you require more support from international partners?**

*A. We have noted the offer of assistance and will take them up on it where and when needed and appropriate.*

**END**