



Coronavirus (COVID-19) factsheet: guidance for sponsors

Monday 20 July

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, or is due to expire, between 24 January and 31 July 2020, 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 coronavirus.
- 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.
- 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.
- Once individuals whose leave expires between 24 January 2020 and 31 July 2020 have submitted the online e-form, their status in the UK is secure.
- Once an individual has requested an extension, they won't need to make another request if UKVI extends the visa further due to coronavirus. Their visa will be extended again automatically.
- Individuals are expected to take all reasonable steps to leave the UK before 31 July.

Completing their application

- Some UK Visa and Citizenship Application Centres (UKVCAS) have reopened for existing customers. Customers can check which UKVCAS centres are open.
- Service and Support Centres (SSCs) are offering a reduced number of appointments because of coronavirus. As more appointments are made available UKVI will invite [applicants, via email or post, to arrange an appointment.](#)



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- We have already contacted customers who have made an appointment to attend a UKVCAS or SSC to let them know their appointment has been postponed due to the centre being temporarily closed. 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.

If individuals have provided fingerprints before

- If UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) can reuse the fingerprints individuals have given already, individuals will be emailed with instructions on how to send UKVI an image of their face and their supporting documents.
- This will mean individuals do not have to attend a UKVCAS or an SSC service point appointment to provide biometric information.
- If an individual cannot send the information through the instructions given, they'll be able to book an appointment.

English language testing centres in the UK

- Some English Testing Centres are resuming services. For more information on how an individual can book their English Language Test, contact either:
 - their test centre
 - Trinity College London
 - International English Language Testing System (IELTS)
 - LanguageCert website

NHS and frontline health workers

- Some health workers and their families will get their visas automatically extended because of coronavirus.
- The extension will apply from the date an individual's visa is due to expire.
- If an individual's visa is due to expire after 1 October 2020, they will not get the free extension. An individual will need to extend their visa in the normal way.
- These changes will apply if an individual who:
 - works for the NHS or an independent health or care provider
 - has a visa expiring between 31 March and 1 October 2020
 - works as a:
 - biochemist
 - biological scientist
 - dental practitioner
 - health professional
 - medical practitioner
 - medical radiographer
 - midwife
 - nurse
 - occupational therapist



- ophthalmologist
 - paramedic
 - pharmacist
 - physiotherapist
 - podiatrist
 - psychologist
 - social worker
 - speech and language therapist
 - therapy professional
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- 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, due to coronavirus:
 - a student is unable to attend for more than 60 days
 - an employee is absent from work without pay for more than 4 weeks



Home Office

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

- Sponsors 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.
- Sponsors can also commence sponsoring new students who will start studying through distance or blended learning in the 2020-2021 academic year provided they intend to transition to face-to-face learning as soon as circumstances allow.
- If a student has permanently withdrawn from their studies, or deferred their studies for reasons which are not related to covid-19, their sponsor must report this as usual.
- Sponsors 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 which will wholly be studied by distance learning do not require sponsorship under Tier 4. This is because they do not need to travel to the UK.
- Sponsors 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. The distance learning concession will be in place for the duration of the 2020-21 academic year. The concession will be subject to regular monitoring to ensure it is working as intended, and it will be subject to review at the end of the 2020-21 academic year.

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



Home Office

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

Read detailed guidance on the temporary measures in place for Tier 4 sponsors, their students and short-term students in response to the [coronavirus outbreak](#).

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, need to start from the date the sponsor has 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



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- 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, they can request a replacement visa with revised validity dates free of charge until the end of this year. This does not apply to other types of visas.
- This process will be in place until the end of 2020.
- To request a replacement visa, an individual can either:
 - contact the Coronavirus Immigration Help Centre
 - arrange to return their passport to their VAC if it has re-opened

Contacting the Coronavirus Immigration Help Centre:

- The individual will need to include their name, nationality, date of birth and GWF reference number with 'REPLACEMENT 30 DAY VISA' in the subject line. If the individual already contacted us about this, please let us know in the email.
- We are dealing with a high number of requests and will reply as soon as we can. Please do not contact us again unless to tell us about a change in circumstances.
- [Contact the Coronavirus Immigration Help Centre.](#)
- Individuals will be contacted when their VACs re-open to arrange for a replacement visa to be endorsed in their passport. Their replacement visa will be valid for 90 days.
- Alternatively, individuals can arrange to return their passport to their VAC if it has re-opened.
- Individuals should not travel to the VAC with their passport until they have checked our commercial partner websites for the process in place for re-submitting a passport for a replacement visa as this may vary depending on their geographical location:
 - [TLS contact](#) if located in Europe, Africa and parts of the Middle East
 - [VFS global](#) for all other countries
- The guidance is different [if an individual applied through an enrolment location operated by Immigration New Zealand.](#)
- Individuals arriving in the UK will not be penalised for being unable to collect their biometric residence permit (BRP) while coronavirus measures are in place.

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](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents)



Additional Information

Why are you opening UKVCAS now?

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?

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 contact the Coronavirus Immigration Team by visiting [Gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents](https://www.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.



Home Office

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. Individuals 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 has already enrolled their biometrics but no longer wishes to travel to the UK should visit [Cancel your visa, immigration or citizenship application](#)