

**Meeting of the Entry Clearance User Panel
14.00 hours, Friday 3 November 2006**

Present:

User Panel

Owen Davies, ILPA
Naadiya Rawat, English UK
Gautam Banjeri, Hindu Council
David Main, Aria
Tauhid Pasha, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants
Mahmud Qauyam, Camden Law Centre
Gulay Mehmet, Gulay Mehmet Solicitors
Sabinder Bains, Immigration Advisory Service

UKvisas

Glyn Williams	UKvisas Director, Business Development Group
Simon Lovett	Programme Manager, Strategy and
Communications	
Colin Brazier	Stakeholder & Communications Manager
Jo Cheeseborough	Head of Communications (Secretary)

Apologies

Maria Fernades	Association of Asian Businesses
Mohammed Akram	CBP(S)

Item 1: Welcome and introductory remarks

Simon Lovett welcomed members and asked everyone around the table to introduce themselves.

Simon Lovett introduced Glyn Williams, UKvisas Director, Business Development Group, who started at UKvisas in September. Glyn explained to members that he is responsible for the Business Change, Strategy and Communications and Entry Control Programmes.

A member requested more information about the Risk Assessment Project. It was suggested that UKvisas might organise a workshop on this subject for User Panel members. It was explained that the purpose of the Risk Assessment Project is to define risk groups with the aim of developing confidence in the visa system and speeding up the process for genuine travellers.

Item 2: Action Points from previous meeting

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS FROM 18 NOVEMBER 2005 MEETING

Item	Action	Owner
3.1	When lodging an appeal, some Posts do not send an acknowledgement or notice of receipt. It was agreed that UKvisas would look into this as part of a wider review of the visa appeals system.	UKvisas agrees to issue an acknowledgement on the receipt of an appeal. If members are aware that posts are not doing this, they are asked to raise this with UKvisas.
3.2	The User Panel asked that the appeal system in respect of work permits be reviewed, perhaps by lengthening the validity of the work permit if the entry clearance went to appeal, to allow for the time spent in such cases. It was agreed that UKvisas would consider this issue with WPUK.	Mike Dwyer-ongoing
5.1	The Commercial Partnerships Program undertook to consider an external consultation process	This has not proved possible because of time constraints. But UKvisas will continue to brief the User panel on developments in the commercial partners programme.
8.1	A discussion on overseas advisors was requested.	Ongoing. This will be added to a future User Panel meeting

In expanding on the issues arising from the action points, Simon Lovett explained that the CPP would cover 90% of UKvisas' business once it has been fully implemented. UKvisas would like to engage User Panel members on the topic of customer services and values, specifically with regards to the value-added services that could be provided by commercial partners. The CPP used a legal procurement process and advertised tenders through the proper channels.

UKvisas plans to incorporate the fee charged for commercial partners' services in the visa fee.

No formal evaluation of the CPP has taken place to date. UKvisas is constantly looking at the efficiency of its commercial partners and carries out customer surveys on a regular basis.

A member asked which part of the visa application process would be outsourced. It was explained that the commercial partner would handle the 'front-end' of the visa application process, which includes taking in

applications and documents, interview appointments, biometric enrolment and processing payments.

The issue of biometric security was raised. Members were told that security both of the biometric enrolment process, and of the data captured, had been rigorously designed to ensure integrity of the end to end system.

Members had no further queries about the action points from the previous meeting.

Item 3- Update on the Points Based System

In response to issues raised in the Members Forum, Simon Lovett gave a brief update on the progress of the Points Based System (PBS).

Simon Lovett informed members that Liam Byrne, Minister for Immigration, Nationality and Citizenship, would shortly be announcing a change in the Rules for the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP). Applicants under this scheme will be judged against new points criteria designed to better reflect the likelihood of migrants' labour market success. The result will be to bring the HSMP closer in line with the Government's aims for migration, including supporting an objective set by the IND Review (July 2006), to 'boost Britain's economy by bringing the right skills here from around the world'.

The basic changes will be:

- Points Based System Tier 1 attributes will replace the existing HSMP criteria for initial considerations in the UK;
- New criteria will be applied to HSMP extension applications made in the UK;
- A temporary suspension of HSMP considerations in the UK will be imposed for 27 days from the date of announcement.

There will be no suspension of HSMP entry clearance applications at post, and the entry clearance criteria will not be changing. Posts will continue to consider applications as normal. Consequently the effect of these changes at post should be limited.

UKvisas and IND Managed Migration are continuing to work closely on the development of the PBS and are currently looking at IT solutions and on-line self-assessment and staff training.

IND is in the process of setting up an Employment Task Force, which will be a forum for stakeholders from the employment sector to discuss the PBS.

In response to a question from members, Simon Lovett clarified that the right of appeal would be removed for some categories under the PBS, but this will not be done until there was an administrative review process in place.

There were questions raised about the cost of the implementation of the PBS and the impact on visa fees. Members were reminded that the Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office had recently launched a Charging Consultation inviting views on how we should charge for migration services.

Item 5- Update on the Biometrics Programmes

In response to issues raised in the Members Forum, Colin Brazier gave members an update on the UKvisas Biometrics Programme.

- From January 2008, full roll-out will be implemented; posts will be taking 10 finger scans and a digital photo of all visa applicants.
- There will be roll-out to a further 20 posts before 31 December 2006.
- No biometric details will be held in the vignette.
- Biometric results are returned to post within 30 minutes of capture, therefore there will be no delay to the application process as a result of biometrics.
- UKvisas are considering the possibility of a mobile biometrics capture solution in some markets.
- Non-visa nationals will be exempt, if staying in the UK for less than six months.

A member asked whether biometrics had been implemented in 'high risk countries' first, during the pilot. Biometric collection from all visa applicants is a global programme with the equipment is being deployed in roughly 150 countries. The rollout sequence had been determined by the need to minimise operational impact.

Action point

4.1 UKvisas to send members regular updates on which countries have been equipped with biometric data collection equipment.

4.2 UKvisas to demonstrate biometric capture at the next User Panel meeting

Item 5- An update on suspension of the Working Holiday Maker (WHM) Scheme

In response to questions raised in the Members Forum, the meeting included an update on suspensions of the WHM Scheme.

The suspensions, particularly in Dhaka, were introduced as a result of an unprecedented increase in the number of applications under the WHM Scheme. It was no longer possible to process these applications and continue to meet PSA targets. Ministers has therefore agreed that the WHM Scheme should be suspended with a six-month review to follow.

Members noted that UKvisas should have the logistical capacity to deal with the volume of applications and submitted that the suspensions were racially discriminatory. Simon Lovett responded by stating that the suspensions had been made purely on operational grounds, but that if Panel Members perceived that any action of UKvisas contravened race relations legislation then this would be taken very seriously and investigated.

In accordance with the instructions given by Ministers, the Bangladesh suspension would be reviewed now.

Action points

5.1 A member stated that there are currently delays in getting appointments in Delhi. UKvisas will look into this and respond to members,

6) Any Other Business

Members passed thanks to Simon Lovett and Jo Cheeseborough for resolving individual issues and queries quickly. Members were reminded that UKvisas is happy to respond to queries and issues at anytime.

Member requested an update of the UKvisas organisational chart with contact names and telephone numbers.

Action point- 6.1 Once contacts lists are produced, these will be sent to User Panel members. In the meantime, members are invited to continue to contact Jo Cheeseborough and Simon Lovett with any queries that arise.

Members asked about the current delays in AIT notifying posts when an appeal has been allowed. UKvisas is aware that this is an ongoing issue and is continuing with work with the AIT to resolve this.

Members noted that there had recently been a marked improvement in the reviews of refusals undertaken by posts, with better explanations being provided.

Item 7- Date and location of next User Panel meeting

The date, time and location of the next meeting are to be confirmed.

Item 8- Tour of 4th floor of King Charles Street – UKvisas new accommodation

Members were shown the new UKvisas accommodation on the 4th floor of King Charles Street. UKvisas will be moving to the newly refurbished premises on 17th November and 7th December. Address details and telephone numbers will remain the same.