

## ENTRY CLEARANCE USER PANEL MEETING THURSDAY 25 OCTOBER 2007

### PRESENT

#### User panel:

Mohammed Akram	Council for British Pakistanis (Scotland)
Gautam Banerji	Hindu Council UK
Nichola Carter	Immigration Law Practitioners' Association
Alison Harvey	Immigration Law Practitioners' Association
Virender Choudhary	International Student Committee, National Union of Students
Kate Handforth	UKCISA
Clyde James	Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner
Hina Majid	Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants
Gulay Mehmet	Law Society Immigration Committee
Elaine Ngai	Immigration Advisory Service
David Main	Association of Regulated Immigration Advisers
Mahmud Quayum	Camden Law Centre
Naadiya Rawat	EnglishUK

#### UKvisas:

Glyn Williams	Director, Business Development Group (Chair)
Janet Battersby	Deputy Director Visa Services, Southern Africa
Jacqui Booker	Structured decision making
Rafe Courage	Manager, Customer Services and Standards
Simon Lovett	Programme Manager, Customers and Communications
Jessica Mabbutt	Appeals team
Frankie Pearson	Project Officer, Stakeholder Engagement
Kevin Shaughnessy	Head of Entry Clearance and Appeals Policy

#### Agenda

##### Item

- 1) Glyn Williams, as Chair, welcomed members, and all introduced themselves.
- 2) Minutes of the last meeting

These were accepted.

- 3) Action points from last meeting

1. Simon Lovett explained the Integra pilot scheme. There was to be a meeting of the Directors of Visa Services the following week where the Integra pilot would be discussed. We were looking to do a cost/benefit analysis. **UKvisas would also provide an update for the next meeting.**



2. Kingston were continuing to improve their service and effectiveness. Any feedback from members was welcomed.
3. The Knowledge of Life Test was only available in the UK. Members noted that there had been instances of people being refused visas when they said they were applying to take the Test, but the Chair said it should not per se be grounds for refusal. It may be that in the future the test could for example be undertaken by an overseas commercial partner, but there were no current plans to do so.
4. The UKvisas website needed to show the end-to-end cost of migration fees. In the short term we could do this by **setting out the UKvisas and BIA fees tables and by providing good links to BIA website fees.**

#### 4) UKvisas update

1. The Chair explained that the Prime Minister had announced the establishment of a unified border force. As part of this development, involving a merger of BIA and Customs, UKvisas would merge with the BIA from 1 April next year. The Prime Minister will be making a further announcement on this in the next few weeks. The merger will bring welcome synergies between UKvisas and BIA. The UKvisas brand will continue overseas as it was well established and recognised by customers.
2. Visa application numbers this year were around 5-10% lower than the same period last year, but demand differed from Post to Post and across visa categories. Biometrics has had a short term impact on demand in countries where it has been introduced, with applications recovering to previous levels within a couple of months. We are continuing to analyse these impacts. The April 2007 fee increase seems to have had a smaller impact than the introduction of biometrics.
3. Biometrics would be rolled out globally by 2008. The UK was somewhat ahead of the rest of Europe but some countries e.g. France were close to us. It was possible that in future we could share enrolment facilities with EU partners and this would benefit customers. There were no current plans to share biometric information with other countries but this was something which was likely to be discussed with close partners in the future.
4. UKvisas had dealt with the on-line security breach which was the subject of an independent investigation earlier this year, and had put mechanisms in place to avoid any reoccurrence. A member pointed out that the Annual Report had incorrectly said that the breach had been brought to our attention in May 2007 when in fact it had first been raised in December 2005.
5. New Visa Application Forms to be introduced on 29 October would give ECOs a better structure and more consistently obtained information for making decisions. The forms were only available in English, but the guidance may be translated by commercial partners into other languages. One member asked if applicants would need expensive software to use the application forms in PDF format. **UKvisas undertook to look at this point.**
6. The Independent Monitor's next report for the period September 06 to March 07 was due to be published soon. The IM's role will continue for 2008-09 when it will be subsumed into the Chief Inspectorate that BIA are establishing.

7. Minister Liam Byrne will be soon publishing a Statement of Intent on Tier 1 of the Points Based System and will undertake a similar exercise in advance of the other Tiers, setting out how they will operate. It is expected that Tier 1 will roll out next May.
8. One proposal in the 'Securing the UK Border' strategy published earlier this year was for a Visa Waiver Test. BIA would review every country in the world against a set of objective criteria to see if the risks warranted a full visa regime. This review will continue until the first part of next year. The strategy had also proposed a fresh look at the business, visitor and tourist routes. A Visitor Taskforce was considering some of the options and there would be a public consultation. When the latter took place the **Chair suggested convening a special meeting of the User Panel to consider the issues.**
9. Configuration of the overseas network: UKvisas were undergoing an efficiency programme to further reduce its cost base. One short-term outcome would be the hubbing of some work into larger posts in the region. With the new network of commercial partners the impact on customers should be minimal. A related piece of work was the development of new customer-facing processing time targets - i.e. targets showing the end-to-end processing time for visas incorporating both the commercial partner and visa section processing times. Karachi had closed at the end of September, with customers applying to the visa application centre there but applications then being sent to Islamabad for decisions. If interviews were necessary these would be done in Karachi as before. Similarly, visa applications in Harare were being made at a visa application centre but being sent to Pretoria for decisions.
10. One member raised the issue of customer access to the visa application centres in Pakistan. **UKvisas undertook to keep this under review.**

#### 5) Appeals

1. Kevin Shaughnessy outlined the appeals process. Currently around 60% of appeals were dismissed (ECO decision upheld) by Immigration Judges. UKvisas was working on a series of measures to achieve a performance target of 80%. It was asked whether the statistics included those appeals conceded before reaching the hearing stage. UKvisas confirmed that they did not and **undertook to look into whether these figures could be incorporated in future statistics.**
2. One of the main benefits of the PMDU review of the appeals process had been a reduction of 7 weeks in the processing time for appeals lodged at post. Kevin confirmed that posts were required to send an acknowledgement of receipt to the AIT within 10 days of receiving an appeal. AIT then update their records and send the representative or appellants an acknowledgement to say the appeal has been received and will be heard on a certain date.
3. There was a discussion on the verification of documents: ECOs refusing on the basis of non-genuine documents were required to submit a verification report with the appeal bundle.
4. There had been an increase in the number of refusals of work permit applications with an effect on UK employment. **UKvisas agreed to look at the numbers of these refusals**, but if sponsors wanted to expedite an appeal they would need to write directly to the AIT giving full reasons for the request.

## 6) Cyber-scams

1. Simon Lovett asked members to keep an eye out for any cases where their clients had been tricked into parting with money by criminals posing on-line as UK government officials arranging visas. **He undertook to let the OISC representative have any information we had**, and asked members to forward to us any instances they might come across.

## 7) Customer Information Services

1. Rafe Courage outlined his presentation on the Visa Customer Service teams: Customer Services Standards, complaints handling, Commercial Partner Information Services and liaison with the Independent Monitor. UKvisas was developing a new website and this would be launched next March. Separately, the visa policy information on local post websites was being migrated back to the central UKvisas website, while commercial partner websites would be the main source of information about local processes e.g. local opening times and locations, local currency costs etc. The main objective is to make the customer journey as straightforward as possible and remove the room for confusion presented by multiple sources of information. All email and telephone enquiries are now directed to commercial partners who should give out only the information that is available on the website. UKvisas was also rolling out to Posts new procedures for complaints and how they should be responded to. The public want clarity and to know how long procedures are going to take, so as outlined above, UKvisas was making its targets more customer-centric.
2. There was discussion on the kind of information CPs were giving out over the phone which it was felt was sometimes inaccurate and sometimes bordered on 'advice' rather than 'information'. UKvisas said that neither they nor their commercial partners wanted in any way to cross that line. There had been some significant issues of quality in implementing the new customer information services contracts which were urgently being addressed by commercial partners. If CPs did not know the answer to a query, they are obliged to pass that question to Post. **UKvisas undertook to update information on CPs' websites to clarify exactly what they are and are not mandated to do.**
3. **UKvisas would also consider how accredited advisers could better contact ECOs with case-specific queries.**
4. **It was agreed to ask the Independent Monitor to attend the next, or a future, meeting.**

## 10) Any other business

1. Jacqui Booker gave a presentation on Structured Decision-Making (SDM). SDM is for non-PBS categories. Its aim is to ensure that ECOs make robust, consistent, objective, transparent and efficient decisions across the whole spectrum of visa applications. The SDM template covers watchlist checks, risk assessment, document verification and the immigration rules; ECOs will use this checklist to assess applications. SDM scheme had been piloted in 20 countries on over 1,000 applications. **There will be an update for the next meeting.**
2. An assurance was sought that a student coming e.g. for a two month course but who did not intend to work but wanted to retain the option of extending their studies in the UK would receive a Student, rather than Student Visitor visa. It was explained that if the applicant said they did not want to work then they would normally come into the Student Visitor category.

But in the above case the applicant should tick the Student box – 2 – rather than the Student Visitor box – 3 to request the visa they actually wanted. It was a question which should be raised at the Joint Education Taskforce. **UKvisas undertook to circulate the guidance on this.**

3. A member raised the issue that in theory no-one could satisfy Rule 57 concerning DfES registration, as DfES no longer existed. Simon Lovett said this was not a problem in practice: ECOs were applying the rule as if it pertained to the now DIUS register. But **UKvisas would raise the issue of updating the wording with BIA.**
4. Simon Lovett **undertook to find out what percentage of the passport fee constituted the Consular premium.**
5. At lunch, there was a demonstration and explanation of the biometrics kit and its workings.