

Terms of reference for UKvisas User Panel

Aim

The aim of the UKvisas User Panel is to provide a forum for dialogue with organisations representing users of the entry clearance operation.

Objectives

- To improve the user-focus of the work of UKvisas and to ensure that we are aware of and respond to customers' needs;
- To foster working partnerships with organisations, and improve their understanding of our problems and challenges.

Composition

The User Panel will consist of a balanced cross-section of organisations representing as far as possible all those with an interest in and experience of the entry clearance system. Each organisation will have one seat on the Panel. Panel members will represent their organisation and will be expected to act as a conduit for information to and from its members. The User Panel meetings should not be used as a forum in which to raise individual cases or issues of very narrow interest except where these concern the wider entry clearance operation. Membership will be reviewed regularly to ensure that balance and diversity are maintained. Attendance at meetings is not obligatory; organisations or individuals not wishing to attend meetings may participate as "virtual members", with electronic access to all papers and channels of communication.

Organisation

Meetings will be held twice a year and will normally be chaired by the Director, UKvisas. A Secretariat will be provided by UKvisas Communications Section. A request for agenda items will be issued one month prior to each meeting. Minutes of each meeting will be provided individually to members within 20 working days of each meeting and will be published on the UKvisas website.

Members may at any time raise specific entry clearance-related issues with UKvisas for response or clarification. In addition each meeting will also include a written "Members Forum" in which members may raise in advance any specific questions. Responses to Members Forum issues will be circulated to all members in advance of each meeting.

The continuing effectiveness of the User Panel will be evaluated regularly.

Scope

The scope of the User Panel will be limited to those issues relating to the operation and management of the entry clearance system. Responsibility for visa policy matters lies with the Immigration and Nationality Directorate which maintains its own User groups and fora for discussion, at which policy issues may be raised.

User Panel meetings will not be the appropriate forum in which to raise individual cases. Such matters may be raised with UKvisas staff outside meetings, and every effort will be made to respond positively to requests, subject to resource constraints. UKvisas may also consult Panel members where appropriate on proposed changes to operations and procedures.

Representative organisations may be asked to replace any member who fails to abide by these terms of reference.