



HM Government

# **New Plan for Immigration: Legal Migration and Border Control Strategy Statement**

May 2021

CP 441



# **New Plan for Immigration: Legal Migration and Border Control**

## **Strategy Statement**

Presented to Parliament

by the Secretary of State for the Home Department

by Command of Her Majesty

May 2021

CP 441



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## 2 New Plan for Immigration: Legal Migration and Border Control

# Introduction

On 31 December 2020, freedom of movement between the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) ended. The UK's new global points-based immigration system is now in place.<sup>1</sup>

This was a significant milestone that delivered on a key HM Government commitment to the public to take back control of our borders and put in place an immigration system that works in the national interest. It marked the beginning of a wider multi-year programme of change, led by the Home Office, to radically transform the operation of our border and immigration system.

We will build on the foundations of this early success to deliver an ambitious vision for Global Britain. We are introducing bespoke routes to enable more students, scientists, academics, investors and entrepreneurs to come to the UK and contribute to our economic growth.

Over the next four years, we will implement transformational change for everyone who interacts with the immigration system and crosses the border. We will deliver a fully end-to-end digital customer experience for people from the way they apply online, how they prove their identity, how they provide evidence that they meet the relevant criteria, to how they receive and use proof of their status to cross the border and demonstrate any entitlements in the UK. This system will help ensure people who come to the UK comply with the terms of their leave.

We intend to be global leaders in providing a streamlined and seamless customer experience, whilst ensuring the security of the UK.

Our reforms will ensure that UK businesses have access to talent from across the world so that we can 'Build Back Better' from the Covid-19 pandemic and support the national economic recovery. As part of this we will implement the Plan for Growth measures on highly skilled migrant workers.

This document provides details of our delivery priorities for 2021/2022 and sets out our vision for the UK's border and immigration system in subsequent years. These include:

- New and reformed immigration routes that support Global Britain and our economic recovery.
- Simplifying our systems and processes to improve the operation for our users, our staff and our wider stakeholder community.

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<sup>1</sup> In most cases, references throughout this document to citizens of the EU also relate to citizens of the European Economic Area and Switzerland.

- Implementing digital systems that transform the customer experience for all those who use them, including at the border.
- Overhauling the operation of the UK border by introducing a universal permission to travel requirement, for all coming to the UK (except for British and Irish citizens) and adopting increasing automation.

Building on the success of the fully digital EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) and the UK's point-based immigration system, we will transform the immigration system into one which is world-leading with a comprehensive offer to people looking to come to the UK, businesses and educational establishments, accompanied by an enhanced customer experience.

We are also transforming our approach to asylum and removals to fix the broken asylum system. On 24 March 2021 we published the 'New Plan for Immigration' policy statement which set out the Government's intentions to build a firm but fair asylum and illegal migration system. The 'New Plan for Immigration' has three objectives:

- To increase the fairness and efficacy of our system so that we can better protect and support those in need of genuine asylum.
- To deter illegal entry into the UK, thereby breaking the business model of criminal trafficking networks and protecting the lives of those they endanger.
- To remove more easily from the UK those with no right to be here.

## The story so far

The UK left the EU on 31 January 2020 and then entered a transition period with the EU until 31 December 2020. During that time, the Home Office implemented a new points-based immigration system that works in the interests of the whole of the UK – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – and prioritises the skills a person has to offer, not where their passport comes from. It also paved the way for further transformation of the border and immigration system.

Freedom of movement with the EU ended on 31 December 2020 after Royal Assent was given to the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Act 2020. Now, those coming to the UK do so under the UK's immigration system. This means that UK immigration rules apply to newly arriving migrants, including those from the EU. A visa is not required by EU citizens to visit the UK (other than those coming to the UK to get married), but a visa is required by those coming to work, study or join family here.<sup>2 3</sup>

Since 1 January 2021, we have strengthened our approach to criminality to ensure the UK is protected from those who pose a threat to society. We have implemented powers to refuse entry to arrivals if they have a conviction which resulted in a prison sentence of at least 12 months; if they have offended and caused serious harm; if they are a persistent offender; or if their presence is not conducive to the public good.

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<sup>2</sup> British and Irish citizens do not require a visa to come to the UK to work, study or join family, or for any other purpose.

<sup>3</sup> After the end of the grace period EU citizens that wish to come to the UK to get married will require a marriage visit visa.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, people from around the world are already applying and coming to the UK through our new points-based immigration system. We recognise that the pandemic has created an uncertain environment and it is a new system, but people are applying and being granted immigration status, which shows that it is operating well.

### **Principles of the points-based system**

Our system is:

- **Fairer**, because we welcome people based on the skills they have to offer and how they will contribute to the UK, not where their passport comes from.
- **Firmer**, because we have control of our own borders and are able to decide who comes into the country.
- **Skills-led**, because we have access to the skills our economy needs, with people awarded points for a job offer at an appropriate skill level, meeting the appropriate salary threshold and if they speak English to an appropriate level. This is coupled with an emphasis on employers investing in, and training, the domestic UK workforce.

Built on these principles, we can restore public confidence in our border and immigration system, ensuring that UK citizens and others who are in the UK legally have confidence in the effectiveness and efficiency of our system.

We are committed to openness and transparency in understanding the impact of the points-based system. We published a revised Equality Impact Assessment on the new system in December 2020, and we continue to review equalities impacts in relation to the new system.

### **Supporting the UK's economic and labour strategy**

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, HM Government has implemented an unprecedented package of measures to support workers and businesses right across the UK. The points-based system supports a wider package of interventions that make up our long-term approach to the labour market and our strategy to rebuild our economy, support businesses to grow and get people back to work, including HM Government's Plan for Growth.

The new immigration system supports our Build Back Stronger agenda, by supporting the UK's domestic labour market and attracting the best and brightest global talent to contribute to the UK's economy.

We want employers to focus on training and investing in our domestic workforce. But we also want to ensure that employers have access to the global talent that can complement the skills we already have in the UK. The points-based system does that; welcoming people from around the world based on the skills they have to offer and how they will contribute to the UK.

Where there are skilled jobs with an identified national shortage, we have introduced flexibilities to recruit from overseas into these sectors through the Shortage Occupation List. This both supports our economy and society, whilst also ensuring that the development of the domestic UK workforce is not undermined. For example, changes to the Immigration Rules announced in March 2021 will give workers in key health and care roles greater opportunity to come to the UK. Pharmacists, laboratory technicians, senior care workers and nursing assistants are among roles that were added to the Shortage Occupation List.

### **Compliance and enforcement under the new system**

The transformation of our borders and immigration system also underpins the Build Back Safer agenda, by securing the UK border and ensuring compliance with tougher immigration rules relating to criminality.

We will continue to ensure that our enforcement system is fair, protects the public, upholds our immigration policies, and acts as a deterrent to those who might seek to frustrate those policies. Compliance with UK immigration laws and rules is an essential part of an immigration system that operates fairly, robustly and with integrity. Controls such as right to work and right to rent checks are key components of this. We set out clearly to those wishing to come to the UK, and those seeking to remain in the UK, what is expected of them and the consequences of not complying with immigration laws and rules.

### **EU Settlement Scheme**

The EU Settlement Scheme ensures EU citizens and their family members who were resident in the UK before the end of the transition period can get the UK immigration status they need to continue living, working and studying in the UK beyond 30 June 2021. This means our friends and neighbours who moved here during the time of free movement and have made the UK their home can obtain the appropriate status free of charge. It also provides stability and certainty for those who employ EU citizens.

We are delighted we have now received over 5.4 million applications (as of 30 April 2021). There have been over 4.9 million grants of status but those who have abused our hospitality as serious or persistent criminals have been refused. Those EU citizens and their family members who arrived in the UK before 31 December 2020, and have not yet applied to the EUSS, remain eligible to do so and have until 30 June 2021 to apply. The Home Office is continuing to work with individuals and our grant funded organisations to ensure everyone gets the help they need to apply. Guidance on reasonable grounds for late applications to the scheme, in line with the Withdrawal Agreement, was published on 1 April 2021.

### **A comprehensive and flexible immigration system**

We have replaced freedom of movement with a comprehensive points-based immigration system that ensures we continue to be global leaders, attracting the highly skilled people that help our United Kingdom to prosper. It is a single UK-wide system, covering England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It delivers a simple, effective and flexible system to businesses and education institutions, giving them access to wide-ranging talent from around the world.

The new points-based system has been implemented in phases, alongside changes reflecting the Withdrawal Agreements with the EU, the other EEA countries and Switzerland, in order to give people time to prepare ahead of 1 January 2021. These are grouped into three areas in Table 1: core points-based system routes, EUSS and Withdrawal Agreement routes and the Hong Kong BN(O) route.

**Table 1: The roll-out of the points-based system**

| Routes   | Detail   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Core points-based system routes</b></p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Global Talent:</b> On 20 February 2020 we launched the Global Talent route, to enable leaders or potential leaders in academia, research, digital technology and arts and culture to come to the UK. On 5 May 2021 we launched a new pathway for eligible prize winners with achievements in science and the arts, who would be able to bypass the endorsement stage of the Global Talent route and go directly to the visa stage.<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• <b>Health and Care visa:</b> On 4 August 2020 we launched the new Health and Care visa, creating a new fast-track visa route for eligible health and care professionals and delivering on a key manifesto commitment.</li> <li>• <b>Student and Child Student:</b> On 5 October 2020 we launched the new Student and Child Student routes to attract the best and brightest international students from across the globe.</li> <li>• <b>New and reformed points-based routes:</b> On 1 December 2020 we launched new and reformed points-based system routes in order to ensure the UK can attract the brightest and best talent from around the world: Skilled Worker; Intra-Company Transfer; Graduate Intra-Company Transfer; Global Talent; Innovator; Start-up; PBS Child Dependant and PBS Partner Dependant, and Visitor.</li> <li>• <b>Family:</b> On 31 December 2020 we extended the Family routes to accommodate the end of free movement.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>EUSS and Withdrawal Agreement routes</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Family members of the people of Northern Ireland:</b> On 24 August 2020 we expanded the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) to include family members of people of Northern Ireland. This means that people can apply to the EUSS if they have a family member who is an eligible person of Northern Ireland, regardless of whether the applicant is an EU, EEA or Swiss citizen.</li> <li>• <b>Frontier Worker:</b> On 10 December 2020 we launched the Frontier Worker route in line with our obligations under the Citizens' Rights Agreements. This route allows individuals to come to the UK to work while living elsewhere, provided they are from the EU, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein and began working in the UK by 31 December 2020.</li> </ul>  |

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-talent-eligible-prize-list>

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
|                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Citizens' Rights Agreements:</b> On 1 December 2020 we launched two routes that we agreed to deliver under the Citizens' Rights Agreements: Service Providers from Switzerland and S2 Healthcare Visitor.</li> <li>• <b>EUSS and EUSS Family Permit:</b> On 31 December 2020 we expanded the EUSS and the EUSS Family Permit (including to cover family members coming here after the transition period).</li> <li>• <b>ECAA:</b> On 31 December we also made transitional arrangements for beneficiaries of the European Community Association Agreement (ECAA) route for Turkish businesspersons, workers and their family members who already hold permission in that capacity and are seeking an extension of their permission.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Hong Kong BN(O) route</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Hong Kong BN(O):</b> On 31 January 2021 we delivered the Hong Kong BN(O) visa, reflecting the UK's historic and moral commitment to those people of Hong Kong who chose to retain their ties to the UK by taking up BN(O) status at the point of Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997. We enhanced this further with the <b>launch of a fully digital application route on 23 February 2021</b>. As a result, applicants with biometric passports can submit their biometrics and validate their identity using the ChipChecker app. Those who are unable to scan their passport chip will need to finalise their application through attending an appointment at a Visa Application Centre (VAC).<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>                     |

### Visitors, tourism and short-term business mobility

Visitors who support our economy and enrich our society and culture are welcomed to the UK through our generous rules for those visiting the UK. In keeping with the end of free movement, EEA nationals are now subject to the same rules in relation to visits to the UK as the rest of the world.

The visitor rules make clear what visitors can and cannot do in the UK. The rules allow for a wide range of activities that go beyond tourism or visiting family and friends. Visitors can also attend conferences, carry out independent research, undertake work-related training and maintain and install equipment where there is a contract with a UK company. In addition, we allow audit activity and knowledge transfer where these take place in an intra-company setting.

In certain circumstances those coming to do specific paid engagements, having been invited as an expert in their profession or to undertake a cultural performance, can also do so under the Visitor route without having to be sponsored under the points-based system. Further detail on Permitted Paid Engagements is in Appendix V of the Immigration Rules.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The ChipChecker process involves applicants using the UK Immigration: ID Check app to complete the identity stage of their application.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-appendix-v-visitor>

## Hong Kong British National (Overseas) Visa

The UK Government committed to introducing a new Hong Kong BN(O) visa following the imposition by the Chinese Government of a national security law on Hong Kong that restricts the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong, and constitutes a clear and serious breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration. The BN(O) visa was created in recognition of the UK's historic commitment to the people of Hong Kong through the Joint Declaration, and our unique obligations towards those who elected to retain their ties with the UK by obtaining BN(O) status.

We delivered on our commitment on 31 January 2021 with the opening of the route for applications. On 23 February 2021, we launched a fully digital application route for BN(O)s, with those owning certain biometric passports able to submit their biometrics and validate their identity using the 'UK Immigration: ID Check' app. This allows the first group of non-EU nationals to complete the process of applying for a visa from home in a secure way.

BN(O)s and their family members are able to apply to enter or stay in the UK for a period of 30 months (which can be extended by a further 30 months) or a period of five years and after which they will be able to apply to settle in the UK. They will then be able to apply for UK citizenship 12 months after being granted settlement under existing rules and application processes. Further information can be found on gov.uk.<sup>7</sup>

### Improvements for users – sponsorship

In February 2020, we committed to introducing further improvements to the UK's sponsorship system once we had implemented the points-based system.<sup>8</sup> Sponsorship of workers and students remains a core element of the immigration system, ensuring those who most directly benefit from attracting workers and students to the UK play a vital role in maintaining the integrity of the system, which in turn benefits the wider UK. We have already made improvements to our employer sponsorship system by:

- Reducing the amount of time it takes to sponsor an individual by up to eight weeks.
- Removing the resident labour market test and suspending the cap on numbers.
- Making the sponsor licence application fully paperless, and re-designing the sponsor guidance, making the system simpler, more streamlined and accessible.

### Improvements for users – simplification of the legal framework

We also committed to simplifying our Immigration Rules. Over the course of many years our rules, guidance and templates have become long, complex and repetitive – numbering over 1000 pages. The Law Commission's review of the Rules identified principles under which they can be redrafted to make them simpler, more accessible and fit for the future. We have begun to address this through the new rules for the points-based system routes

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hong-kong-british-national-overseas-visa-applications>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-points-based-immigration-system-policy-statement>

which replace the previous complex rules with rules which are clearer, more consistent and reduce duplication.

In September and October 2020, the Home Secretary laid Statements of Changes in Immigration Rules which represented a significant step in our commitment to simplify the rules; implementing several of the recommendations from the Law Commission to ensure we provide greater clarity to applicants, colleges, employers and all other users of the rules.

Our approach to simplification aims to deliver a streamlined and transparent system. This will make the system easier for applicants to understand, navigate and make choices. Streamlining the system will also mean that the majority of cases are easier for caseworkers and decision makers to make a decision on, freeing up resource for more complex cases.

We made significant progress on simplifying the Rules in 2020, including:

- Redrafting and simplifying over 500 pages of rules, representing the biggest ever rules change;
- Simplifying 21 routes, including visitor, student and work routes;
- Introducing 18 new application forms with ChipChecker identity checking technology meaning that documents can be uploaded, and applicants would not need to attend a VAC.

### **Common Travel Area (CTA)**

The CTA is a long-standing agreement between the UK, the Crown Dependencies and Ireland. Under the CTA, British and Irish citizens can move freely and reside in either jurisdiction and enjoy associated rights and privileges, including the right to work, study and vote in certain elections, as well as to access social welfare benefits and health services. The UK Government and Irish Government have committed to maintaining the CTA in all circumstances.

As a result of the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Act 2020, Irish citizens will still be able to enter and remain in the UK without requiring permission, regardless of where they have travelled from, except in a very limited number of circumstances. There will continue to be no routine immigration controls on journeys from within the CTA to the UK, with no immigration controls whatsoever on the Northern Ireland – Ireland land border. The UK Government will continue to work closely with the Irish Government and Crown Dependencies to facilitate legitimate travel within the CTA whilst tackling any abuse of these arrangements.

### **Communications and engagement**

We continue to invest in communicating the changes to the immigration system to both current and potential users of the system, including UK employers, EU citizens and non-EU citizens.

Given that the end of free movement represents a major change for EU citizens, we have delivered a substantial, multi-lingual international marketing campaign to increase awareness and understanding of what the new system means for them. Translated guidance has been published to ensure EU citizens (including workers, students and visitors) understand the requirements for coming to the UK under the points-based system. We have shared this guidance with EU member states.

An extensive programme of communications and engagement activity to prepare UK employers was also delivered throughout 2020. This included a significant marketing campaign using a wide range of channels to target businesses across the UK.

Comprehensive guidance has been published to ensure employers understand sponsorship requirements and how to recruit workers internationally. A programme of engagement events took place, particularly aimed at those new to the system. Events reached over 17,000 stakeholders, including business and education sectors, and have been an important way to provide clarity and get feedback on the changes we are implementing.

This work is ongoing. As the prospect of international travel increases and the labour market recovers from the impacts of Covid-19, communications and engagement will continue to ensure businesses, educational establishments and citizens understand and adapt to the changes. Communications will support UK employers in taking advantage of the opportunities now open to them by recruiting the best and brightest global talent from around the world to help maximise the UK's future prosperity.

We will continue to engage our expert Advisory Groups and key stakeholders in business, academia and the third sector on the further changes being implemented during the lifetime of the programme.<sup>9</sup> We will also continue our proactive engagement with those working to tackle modern slavery, including the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. Modern slavery and human trafficking have absolutely no place in our society and we are committed to fortifying our immigration system against these heinous crimes, whilst ensuring victims are protected and offenders prosecuted.

Our combined communications and engagement efforts aim to help safeguard against unintentional and avoidable non-compliance within the new system or discrimination against EU, other EEA or Swiss nationals still eligible to apply to the EUSS during the grace period, as guaranteed in the Withdrawal Agreement.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-future-skills-based-immigration-system-advisory-group-membership>

## Delivery priorities for 2021-22

1. We are continuing to build on the points-based system, providing further opportunities for the brightest and best to come to the UK and contribute to our economy, communities and public services. Over the coming years, our reforms will deliver a simpler and easier to navigate customer experience and strengthen UK security through transformation of our border processes and technology.
2. We have an ambitious programme for 2021 and 2022, which includes further enhancements to the points-based system and greater simplification of our immigration rules and improving the customer experience. We will also lay the groundwork for the full transformation of the border and immigration system in the coming years, which will result in a fully digital end-to-end experience with the UK knowing more about the people travelling to the UK before they start their journey. This will deliver both strengthened security and a smoother passage across the border.

### EU Settlement Scheme

3. The EUSS provides a “grace period” until 30 June 2021 during which time those EU citizens who arrived in the UK by 31 December 2020 may apply to the scheme.
4. Employers and landlords will continue to be able to accept the passports and identity cards of all EU citizens as evidence of their right to work or right to rent until 30 June 2021. There will be no legal requirement on employers and landlords to carry out retrospective checks on existing employees or tenants after this date, though they are free to do so.
5. At the border, we will ensure the smooth flow of those coming legitimately to the UK. By summer 2021, all Border Force staff will have the ability, if required, to check whether an individual has applied for, or been granted status under the EUSS, should they need to do so.

### Simplification

6. We will continue to simplify our Immigration Rules and make them as user-friendly and accessible as possible, building on the progress made in 2020.
7. During 2021, we will introduce the Graduate and International Sportsperson routes, for which Rules and guidance have been drafted applying simplification principles. This means they will follow a consistent structure and are clearer for the applicant to understand and navigate as opposed to the previous Rules. Questions on application

forms will be simplified and there will be more flexibility on how an applicant can show that they meet the requirements for their route. Examples of this include allowing applicants who have gained GCSE/A Level or Scottish Highers in English, while at school in the UK, to rely on this to prove their English language ability<sup>10</sup> and allowing applicants to show they meet maintenance requirements by relying on a wider range of accounts. In some cases, applicants will also have the ability to upload their evidence from home.

8. The majority of applicants for the Graduate Route will not need to visit a VAC if they already hold a valid Biometric Residence Permit, demonstrating our intention to streamline the customer journey, using online processes where possible. We will also simplify the Family, Private Life, Settlement and Returning Residents routes, together with simplifying the application forms and our decision notices and providing more consistency in areas like how to prove a relationship.

## Sponsorship

9. We intend to deliver a digital, simplified and modern sponsorship system that enables a more efficient operation, for users and the Home Office, and encourages compliance. We have already made significant improvements and will continue to do so, making enhancements in 2021 and beyond to deliver a sponsorship system that will enable employers to have overseas workers ready to start work faster than any G20 country.
10. We have worked closely with stakeholders over the past 18 months on making further improvements to the UK's sponsorship system. This has helped us to plot a full redesign of the sponsorship system for workers and students to come to the UK. This is based on three core objectives, set out in paragraph 11.
11. As part of our long-term ambition, we will harness new technological innovations to:
  - Speed up end-to-end processing, from applying for a sponsor license to a worker or student being approved for a visa through:
    - Expanding the use of our secure ChipChecker service for checking identity so that more applicants can apply for a visa using a mobile device to scan their passport and capture their facial image without the need to attend in-person appointments.
    - Automatically digitally inviting sponsored applicants to make visa applications and confirm information provided by a sponsor removing duplication from the system.
  - Improve a sponsor's experience of using the sponsor system, reducing the burden placed on them to maintain their license and providing functionality and transparency that they have asked for by:

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<sup>10</sup> Initially this will apply to entry clearance and permission to stay for Students, Skilled Workers and Start Up and Innovator.

- Introducing automated checks with HMRC and Companies House to identify sponsors and users that can have fast track approval.
  - Expanding the use of digital status to avoid the need for Biometric Residence Permit production, collection and making it easier to demonstrate a right to work.
  - Providing a dashboard to help sponsors manage their sponsored workers and see feedback on their visa applications.
  - Prevent abuse of the system, including effective management of information risk through:
    - Automatically checking PAYE data from HMRC to ensure compliance with salary requirements and other sponsorship duties.
    - Introducing trust ratings for sponsors based on a track record of compliance to allow a differentiated approach to sponsor and reporting duties.
12. Compliance is central to our approach to sponsorship. The employer sponsorship system requires employers to comply with all relevant UK legislation. We make relevant checks on all potential sponsors, including on past criminality or immigration offences, to ensure the safety of those coming to the UK for work. As with the previous system, sponsors may be subject to compliance visits from the point they apply to be a sponsor and throughout the period they hold a licence to ensure they are capable of carrying out their sponsorship duties.
13. Key protections for workers, for example a maximum 48 hour working week, will be monitored via these visits. The new sponsorship system will make greater use of technology to identify abuse and we will continue to work closely with key partners, including the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority. Our new salary checks with HMRC will enable us to ensure that employees are being paid the amount their employers committed to pay them. We will target compliance visits on those sponsors who present a higher risk or have no track record of compliance. Sanctions for non-compliance may range from conditions or limits on recruitment, managed action plans, or suspension and revocation of a sponsor licence.
14. For students, sponsors must continue to meet educational oversight requirements and ensure their students are engaged in study. They will still be expected to maintain low visa refusal rates and high enrolment and course completion rates. We will further improve compliance through better data sharing with sponsors, combined with easier to view information to measure compliance and act where required. We will also seek to more clearly delineate between sponsorship for different levels of study, including consideration of developing separate immigration routes for higher education and further education.
15. Our focus for sponsorship reforms in 2021 is to remove and demystify perceived barriers to use of the system, enabling businesses and educators to feel confident in making future investment decisions with a degree of certainty, especially when they have not used the system before. We will continue to deliver changes to support our three core objectives:

- Speed up end-to-end processing, from applying for a sponsor license to a worker or student being approved for a visa through:
    - Expanding the use of our ChipChecker service to include applications from the new Graduate route eliminating the need for those customers to attend an in-person appointment to collect their biometrics. The ChipChecker service enables those with a chipped biometric passport to prove their identity, verify their passport is genuine and that they are the genuine holder of it, from their own home or workplace. This provides both security and customer improvement benefits.
  - Improve a sponsor's experience of using the sponsor system, reducing the burden placed on them to maintain their license and providing functionality and transparency that they have asked for by:
    - Establishing a service that can lend support to small and micro businesses, working with our business stakeholders.
    - Reviewing our fees for those who use the sponsorship system.
    - Introducing a new Skilled Worker Eligibility checking tool making it easier for prospective Employers and workers to understand if a particular job is eligible under the Skilled Worker route.
  - Prevent abuse of the system, including effective management of immigration risk through:
    - Piloting our new salary check feature with HMRC to check that employees are being paid the amount the employers committed to pay them.
16. We will publish a roadmap this summer which sets out the further improvement we will make to the sponsorship system in 2022 and beyond in order to meet our long-term ambitions.

## New and reformed immigration routes

17. The points-based system is central to HM Government's drive to build a truly Global Britain. Our immigration system tells the world that Britain is open for business and gives top priority to those with the highest skills and the greatest talents. We made significant progress on this in 2020, and we will go further in 2021 with more reforms to our immigration routes.
18. As set out in Build Back Better – a Plan for Growth, we will build into our new system a set of targeted reforms to attract and retain highly skilled people, particularly in academia, science, research and technology.

### A comprehensive business offer

19. Since its introduction in February 2020, the **Global Talent** route for world leaders and emerging future leaders in science, engineering, digital technology, medicine,

humanities and arts and culture has proved highly successful despite the challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a world-leading visa offer for international talent providing a route for highly skilled people to come to the UK without being tied to a specific sponsor and offers an accelerated route to settlement.

20. Global Talent provides successful applicants with a highly flexible visa allowing them to undertake a range of activities, with few restrictions. The design of the endorsement system gives professional bodies the ability to endorse an individual and gives key sectors greater flexibility and involvement in ensuring visas are granted to those making important contributions to their specialist field. We are building on this success, expanding Global Talent to introduce a new pathway for individuals with highly prestigious awards or prizes. This will remove the requirement for holders of specified awards and prizes to go through the current endorsement process. This came into effect on 5 May 2021.
21. In Spring 2022 we will also introduce a **new, unsponsored points-based route** to attract the brightest and best to the UK, with a particular emphasis placed on the very high skilled and academically elite. Within this route we will create a 'scale up' stream that will allow those with a job offer at the required skills level from a recognised UK scale-up to qualify for a fast-track visa, without the need for sponsorship.
22. The UK prides itself on a rich heritage of innovation. Providing a transparent, stable and secure environment for business, the UK is an attractive destination for ambitious entrepreneurs looking for a platform to build globally successful businesses. We are exploring how we can adapt the endorsing bodies model for the **Innovator route**, so that it continues to bring innovative businesses with high growth potential to the UK.
23. We will ensure that the UK remains open and accommodating to those who wish to come to the UK, grow their businesses and employ people. We plan to create a single, sponsored **Global Business Mobility** route that will simplify the UK immigration offer for business by bringing together, reforming and expanding a number of existing routes that exist for this purpose. We aim to deliver the new route by spring 2022. The new route will incorporate:
  - Existing provisions for intra-company transferees, subject to any recommendations made by the independent Migration Advisory Committee following the Home Secretary's commission.
  - Existing arrangements implementing the UK's trade commitments in respect of contractual service suppliers and independent professionals.
  - Arrangements for employees of an overseas business assigned to the UK to establish a branch or subsidiary of that business. Existing rules which restrict the route to a single representative per sending business will be relaxed depending on, for example, the size of the investment in the UK. We are examining how these arrangements can be brought within the sponsorship system.
  - New provision to accommodate import and export-related secondments to, for example, better accommodate scenarios in which an overseas business has contracted with a UK business for the supply of goods and needs to second workers to the supplier for the purposes of product development or familiarisation.

## Delivering a new Graduate route

24. The UK's world-leading education sector will continue to welcome high potential students to our universities, further education and English language providers, and independent schools.
25. We want to ensure that we retain the brightest and the best students so they can continue to contribute to the UK after they have completed their studies. This is why we are launching the Graduate route in summer 2021 to allow those who have completed a bachelor's degree, postgraduate degree, or a limited number of professional qualifications at degree level or above at a UK Higher Education Provider with a track record of compliance, to stay in the UK for two years (three years for PhD graduates) and work at any skill level. They can then apply to switch into a permanent work route if they find a suitable job.
26. The Graduate route will have a streamlined application process. Students can apply once their Student sponsor has confirmed they have successfully completed their qualifying course. There will be no ongoing sponsorship requirement, and applicants will not need to meet further maintenance or English language requirements having already demonstrated their ability to meet these requirements on the Student route. The application fee will be £700.
27. We believe that time spent studying in the UK is a fundamental tenet of Graduate route eligibility. To be eligible, applicants must have been in the UK for the whole course of study if the course is 12 months or less in length, or in the UK for the final 12 months of their course if it is over 12 months. However, we recognise the impact that Covid-19 has had on the education sector and students who have been engaging via distance learning during the pandemic will not have this absence counted against their eligibility for the route for the 2020/21 academic year, providing they met the requirements to be granted a visa as a Student, meet the other requirements of the Graduate route and are present in the UK when applying as a Graduate.
28. The Graduate route will be delivered through a fully online application process. Applicants of all nationalities will be able to apply online from within the UK and prove their identity using the ChipChecker process with their Biometric Residence Permit and by uploading a photo. This will mean that the applicant will not need to attend a UK VAC to give their biometrics, making the process easier for the customer and more efficient for the Home Office. We will re-use fingerprint biometrics already captured through their Student route application process to undertake the required checks. Whenever a person makes an application for leave to stay in the UK, we conduct checks against relevant law enforcement databases.
29. Initially, visa nationals will be issued with a Biometric Residence Permit to travel to the UK as well as access to the online service which includes evidence of their immigration status. Non-visa nationals will receive access to the online service and will not need a Biometric Residence Permit for travel. The online service can also be used to prove their right to work or right to rent. It will also allow system to system sharing of information with other Government departments to enable access to public services such as the NHS.

30. Over time we intend to extend the ChipChecker application processes to people applying to extend their leave from within the UK on the **Skilled Worker** and **Student routes**.
31. We will continue to offer an assisted digital service which provides UK-wide support to applicants who do not have access to technology, or the digital skills or confidence, to complete the application form online. We will also provide support to those needing to prove their immigration status, or their right to work or rent, where they are unable to use the online service.

### Further reforms to immigration routes

32. We will create a new **International Sportsperson** route that replaces the Tier 2 and Tier 5 routes.
33. By creating a single route, we believe this should simplify the approach for the sport sector, and sportspeople, by offering tailored requirements and providing an option for both shorter-term and longer-term stays. Professional sport has a pivotal role to play in advancing the Global Britain agenda and these changes will support the UK to attract world-leading talent, whilst also ensuring domestic talent has space to develop. We intend to retain the Sports Governing Body endorsement process in this route. This is because the sports sector is keen to maintain the ability to endorse and sponsor overseas international sportspeople, ensuring access to top-end talent and encourage development and opportunities for home-grown talent which, in turn, elevates the quality of the game and attracts audiences.
34. As part of these reforms, we intend to open a fully digital online application process for EEA nationals (as with the Skilled Worker route). Non-EU nationals will benefit from the policy reforms, though for their first application they will need to attend a VAC to submit fingerprint biometrics. Any further applications on this route could reuse biometrics and so could be completed fully online.
35. Separately, we aim to provide a fully digital application process for EU citizens for the remaining previous Tier 5 routes from September 2021 and these will be renamed **temporary worker routes**. This includes the routes for creative workers, religious workers and a wide range of Government Authorised Exchange schemes. These reforms will improve the customer experience as applicants from the EEA will not need to visit a VAC to complete their application. These routes provide a significant boost to the UK's wider cultural objectives through agreements like cultural exchange programmes.

### Family and settlement routes

36. We will look at how individuals apply to join British Citizens and settled family in the UK, seek to stay on the basis of long residence and apply for settlement here. We know that there are several family routes and many paths to settlement and navigating these can be confusing. Therefore, we will simplify the **family, private life and settlement routes**. We intend to provide a more streamlined application process and more consistent evidence requirements so that applicants are clear what they need to demonstrate and how. We will build on lessons learned from simplifying the economic routes to deliver improvements.

## Delivering a fully digital system - online evidence of immigration status

37. In addition to reforming the immigration routes we are continuing to deliver a digital system by removing the use of physical documents to demonstrate status. We will make further improvements to how applicants access and prove their immigration status to others.

### What is the online immigration status service?

Those that have settled or pre-settled status or have applied for a visa and used the 'UK Immigration: ID check' app to scan their identity document (e.g. EEA nationals on the points-based system routes and those on the BN(O) route) can now use an online service to view their immigration status and to prove their status to others. The service can be used by them to:

- Prove their status to others, for example employers and enforcement bodies.
- Update personal details, for example their passport number or email address.
- Check what rights they have in the UK, for example right to work, rent or to claim benefits.

38. We will continue to improve the online immigration status service, and we will enhance our support offer for those who need assistance to use this service (mainly EEA citizens and BN(O)s at present). This assistance would involve UKVI support agents being able to share evidence of status with third parties such as employers and landlords on behalf of the person with their permission. There will also be enhanced support and guidance on gov.uk.
39. We will be taking a phased approach as we move to a fully digital system. As part of this, we are looking at further ways to remove physical documents from the process and streamline the system, such as potentially removing the need for separate vignettes and Biometric Residence Permits, taking out the cost and time for the user and the Home Office and improving security. This would be supported by increased use of the online services to prove right to work and rent, simplifying the process for employers, landlords and individuals and reducing the number of documents relied on to prove status.
40. Building on the success of the EUSS, we are putting in place system-to-system services that will allow other Government departments and public bodies to check immigration status information direct with the Home Office, instead of the individual having to prove these rights via the online service when accessing public services.
41. Existing legislation is in place to protect people's personal data and prosecute those who commit crimes enabled by theft. These include the Fraud Act 2006, the Computer Misuse Act 1990, the Identity Documents Act 2010 and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Building on this legislation, we believe that the most effective way of preventing identity theft is to improve the safety and security of the systems we use, particularly online. HM Government recently published draft proposals for governing the future use of digital identities and is inviting feedback on them.<sup>11</sup>

## Border and security

42. Alongside the focus on our new global points-based system for all routes to work and study in the UK, we want to transform the way that we manage passengers crossing the UK border. We aim to deliver the world's most effective border, one that enables prosperity and enhances security for Global Britain; ensuring the UK remains biosecure, protecting plant, animal and human health and enhances the UK position as an attractive place to visit, study and to conduct business. This work is aligned with the 2025 UK Border Strategy that was published on 17 December 2020 and set out our goal to help UK businesses take advantage of new trading relationships with the rest of the world whilst strengthening our ability to target criminal activity, prevent illegal migration and protect the UK's people, businesses, health, and environment.
43. Over the course of the past year, Covid-19 has presented a significant challenge to the border, and Border Force has adapted to this challenge, developing health-related enforcement regimes that have contributed significantly to the wider HM Government effort to manage the pandemic. The 2025 UK Border Strategy has a clear objective to identify and contain threats to biosecurity and public health pre-arrival and at the point of arrival in the UK. Border Force will work alongside partners and key stakeholders to meet this strategic ambition through pivoting the organisation and its various capabilities to target and mitigate any public health threats, building upon not only the past year but previous years' experience of managing all bio-threats to the UK.
44. During 2021, we will maximise the benefits of leaving the EU by ending the use of EEA ID cards to cross the border (only passports will be allowed) and applying tougher UK criminality rules.<sup>12</sup> We will also lay the groundwork for wider reforms including the future introduction of Electronic Travel Authorisations (ETAs) as part of the creation of a universal permission to travel for everyone except British and Irish citizens.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uk-digital-identity-and-attributes-trust-framework>

<sup>12</sup> Subject to the withdrawal agreement requirements for applying EU tests for conduct before 31/12/20 for the withdrawal agreements cohorts.

## **Criminality and adverse behaviour**

The Immigration Rules laid on 22 October 2020 included revised and simplified rules setting out how the powers to refuse or cancel permission on suitability grounds are to be exercised. The main policy changes which apply to most routes are:

- Powers to refuse entry to arrivals if they have a conviction which resulted in a prison sentence of at least 12 months; if they have offended and caused serious harm; if they are a persistent offender; or if their presence is not conducive to the public good.
- Mandatory refusal/cancellation on non-conducive grounds as well as on the grounds of serious harm and persistent offending, instead of these being discretionary, to protect the UK from those who would seek to do us the most harm.
- Addressing non-criminal behaviours which cause societal harm by introducing new grounds for refusal or cancellation of leave on the basis of sham marriage, and refusal or cancellation of leave at the border for customs breaches.
- New grounds for refusal or cancellation of leave in-country on the basis of rough sleeping. This will be used sparingly and as a last resort where there is persistent anti-social behaviour and where offers of support are refused.

## **Ending the use of ID cards for EU, EEA and Swiss Citizens**

45. As announced in the Border Operating Model on 8 October 2020, most EU, other EEA and Swiss nationals will require a passport to travel to the UK from 1 October 2021. From that date it will not be possible to enter the UK using an EU, EEA or Swiss national ID card, except where the holder has applied to the EU Settlement Scheme by 30 June 2021 or otherwise has protected rights under the Citizens' Rights Agreements. We do not accept identity cards as a travel document from other nationalities and, now that we have left the EU, this change remedies that discrepancy.
46. EU, other EEA and Swiss citizens who have applied to the EUSS by 30 June 2021 or whose rights are otherwise protected under the Citizens' Rights Agreements (such as frontier workers) will continue to be able to use their national identity cards to enter the UK until at least 31 December 2025. We will also continue to accept Irish passport cards and Gibraltar national identity cards issued to British citizens for travel to the UK.<sup>13</sup> However, we encourage all EU, other EEA and Swiss travellers to use a passport where possible. This allows them to use e-Gates at our ports of entry where they are available; the quickest and most efficient method of crossing the border.

<sup>13</sup> Gibraltar is a British Overseas Territory.

## Border crossing technology

47. To deliver a modern border system, we are rolling out new technology (Border Crossing BX) at the border, which improves the quality and timeliness of information available at the primary control points (PCP) for Border Force officers. This technology has been successfully piloted and is being rolled out nationally.
48. This improved capability enables improvements in the operational process at the border, delivering customer and security benefits. By summer 2021 all Border Force staff will have the ability, if required, to check at the PCP whether an individual has applied for or been granted status under the EU Settlement Scheme, should they need to do so. The BX capability will be extended to the e-gates as they are upgraded during 2021. This modernised system will also bolster our networks with partner agencies when one of their persons of interest is encountered at the border.

## Laying the groundwork for ETAs and e-visas

Visitors and transit passengers who do not currently need a visa for short stays, or who do not already have an immigration status prior to travelling, will be required to obtain an **Electronic Travel Authorisation** as an additional security measure. This is similar to systems in place in other countries; the US, for example, requires particular travellers, including UK citizens, to obtain an ESTA before travel.

**Advance Passenger Information (API)** and **Passenger Name Records (PNR)** are passenger data collected by air carriers as part of the operation of their business.

### E-visas

Most applications from individuals seeking to work or study in (and for visa nationals to visit) the UK are now made online. Our work towards a digital system for immigration status will enable us to remove the need for the visa vignette. This will reduce costs and improve border security by reducing the possibility of forgery or theft.

49. As set out in our policy statement of July 2020, we will introduce an ETA scheme as part of a wider universal 'permission to travel' requirement.<sup>14</sup> Our universal permission to travel requirement will mean everyone wishing to travel to the UK (except British and Irish citizens) will need to seek permission in advance of travel. Those with British citizenship in the Crown Dependencies or British Overseas Territories would not need to apply for an ETA in order to come to the UK. The ETA scheme will allow security checks to be conducted and more informed decisions, as to whether individuals should be granted permission to travel to the UK, to be taken at an earlier stage in advance of travel. Moreover, as part of our ambition to introduce a fully digital end-to-end customer journey, we will aim to replace the vignette which is currently manually inserted into passports or travel documents with a digital status record.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-points-based-immigration-system-further-details-statement>

50. To be fully effective, permission to travel will need to be checked and confirmed by carriers prior to boarding. As fewer permissions will be in a physical format, we will support carriers using established connections between their systems and the Government's to identify whether individuals have permission to travel. We will work with air carriers in the first instance to build on the existing use of interactive Advance Passenger Information to confirm permission to travel prior to check-in and boarding. We will also engage with maritime and international rail carriers to develop our messaging capabilities with them. We will begin work with selected air carriers for those passengers who currently travel with an Electronic Visa Waiver with a view to begin initial testing by autumn 2021.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 2: At a glance - reforms in 2021 and 2022**

| Change                            |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Graduate</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A new Graduate route to be launched in summer 2021, providing international students with the opportunity to stay in the UK to work or look for work after they graduate. Undergraduate and master's degree students will be able to stay for two years under the route, whilst PhD students will be able to stay for three years.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Global Talent</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introducing a new pathway for individuals with highly prestigious awards or prizes. This will remove the requirement, for holders of specified awards and prizes, to have the approval of a Home Office endorsing body.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Un-sponsored</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introducing a new, un-sponsored points-based route with a particular emphasis placed on those with the skills the UK labour market needs.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>International Sportsperson</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating a new International Sportsperson route that replaces the current T2 Sportsperson route and the sporting worker aspects of the T5 Creative or Sporting Worker route.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Temporary Worker</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing a fully digital process with the ChipChecker facility for EEA nationals for the remainder of the temporary work (previously T5 (Temporary work)) routes. This will include dedicated Temporary Worker routes for creative workers, religious workers, and a range of Government Authorised Exchange schemes.</li> </ul>             |

<sup>15</sup> An Electronic Visa Waiver lets you visit the UK for up to 6 months for tourism, business, study or medical treatment.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Global business mobility</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a single, sponsored Global Business Mobility route that will bring together, reform and expand a number of existing routes including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Provisions for intra-company transferees;</li> <li>o Arrangements for implementing UK trade commitments in respect of contractual service suppliers and independent professionals;</li> <li>o Arrangements for employees of an overseas business assigned to the UK to establish a branch or subsidiary;</li> <li>o Provisions to accommodate import and export related secondments.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <b>Simplification</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplifying and consolidating the rules and making questions on forms easier to answer, with more flexibility around the required evidence on the Graduate, International Sportsperson, family, private life, settlement and returning residents routes.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Sponsorship</b>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redesigning the sponsorship system to speed up end-to-end processing, improve sponsors' experience and prevent abuse of the system.</li> <li>• Providing additional support to SMEs as they adjust to using the sponsorship system.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Border crossing technology</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rolling out new technology at the border, which improves the quality and timeliness of information available at the primary control points (PCP) for Border Force officers.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Electronic Travel Authorisation</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laying the groundwork for introducing an Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme as part of a wider universal 'permission to travel' requirement which will mean everyone wishing to travel to the UK (except British and Irish citizens) will need to seek permission in advance of travel.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Ending ID cards for EU, EEA and Swiss citizens</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU, other EEA and Swiss citizens who were not residing in the UK prior to the end of the transition period or who are not covered by the terms of the Citizens' Rights Agreements will require a passport to travel to the UK from 1 October 2021.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Applying UK criminality rules</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying mandatory grounds for refusal on grounds of criminality to serious and persistent criminals whose presence is not conducive to the public good, to ensure the UK is protected from those who pose the greatest threat to society.</li> <li>• Refusing entry to anyone seeking to enter as a visitor or coming to the UK for less than 6 months if they have received a custodial sentence of less than 12 months or a non-custodial sentence or out-of-court disposal such as community service, unless a period of at least 12 months has passed.</li> </ul>                              |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Online immigration status service</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowing individuals to view their immigration status and to prove their status to others, such as landlords and employers. By summer 2021, we plan to have delivered an enhanced support offer for those who are reliant on this service (in the main EEA nationals and BN(O)s), including for those who are less digitally able.</li> <li>• Building on the success of the EUSS, we are putting in place system to system services that will allow other Government departments and public bodies to check immigration status information direct with the Home Office, instead of the individual having to prove these rights via the online service when accessing public services.</li> </ul> |
| <b>EU Settlement Scheme</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a “grace period” until 30 June 2021, the deadline by which EU citizens who arrived in the UK by 11 pm on 31 December 2020 may apply to the EU Settlement Scheme.</li> </ul>   |

**Table 3: Customer journey from the start of 2021**

| Step | Journey Stage          | Migrant Actions  |
|------|------------------------|--|
| 1    | Planning to come       | EU citizens and non-visa nationals will not require a visa to enter the country when visiting. <sup>16 17</sup> All nationalities, except Irish, looking to enter the UK for other reasons (such as work or study) will need to apply for permission in advance. Those who come to the UK as a visitor will normally need to leave the country before making an application to another route.  |
| 2    | Getting permission     | For those who need a visa, people will make their application online. Most EU citizens on most routes will complete their application completely online, while non-EU citizens will continue to go to Visa Application Centres to enrol their biometrics after making an online application. For those EU citizens who cannot complete an online process, they will also have to attend a VAC.   |
| 3    | Crossing the UK border | Citizens of Australia, Canada, the EU, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and the USA, who possess biometric passports, will continue to be able to use e-gates to pass through the UK border either as a visitor or with prior permission. <sup>18</sup> Other nationalities will have their status checked by a Border Force officer.  |
| 4    | Living in the UK       | EU citizens and British Nationals Overseas via the Hong Kong scheme will use the online checking service to demonstrate their immigration status and their rights and entitlements, where permitted, when accessing work and services in the UK. For many, their status will automatically be available when seeking to access benefits or the NHS. Others will continue to use their physical documentation for the time being but may also demonstrate some rights online. A document will continue to be issued to those who need to demonstrate their status to a carrier for travel to the UK for the time being. |
| 5    | Leaving the UK         | Individuals who remain in the UK after their permission has expired are not allowed to work or access services and may be charged for healthcare. Leaving the UK after permission has expired may also impact a person's ability to re-enter the UK in the future.   |

<sup>16</sup> Other than those with rights under the Withdrawal Agreements.

<sup>17</sup> After the end of the grace period EU citizens will need to get a marriage visit visa if they wish to come to the UK to get married.

<sup>18</sup> E-gates can be used by those aged 18 and over, or those aged 12 to 17 years old who are accompanied by an adult.

# Our vision for the border and immigration system beyond 2022

51. By ending freedom of movement and introducing the UK's points-based system, we have now laid the foundations for our new border and immigration system. The next phase of this programme will be truly transformational for everyone using our systems and crossing the border. We will deliver a fully end-to-end digital experience for the individual from the way they apply online, how they prove their identity, how they provide evidence that they meet the relevant criteria, to how they receive and use proof of their status to cross the border and demonstrate entitlements in the UK. We will ensure that support is available for those unable to use online services.
52. In order to deliver a world class border that is secure, controls migration and facilitates trade, we will make better use of technology and data, invest in our staff and improve collaboration across Government, with law enforcement, the private sector and our international partners.
53. Through upstream transformation to our border and immigration system we will improve our ability to identify threats before they reach the UK border. This will also support us in our ambition to be global leaders in providing a streamlined and seamless customer experience. As part of this we will explore options for contactless travel across the border.
54. Our overarching principles are to:
  - Transform the customer experience through a simplified and streamlined system based on individual needs.
  - Maximise the benefits of having full control of our borders and being better able to know who is coming to the UK and leaving, and driving up compliance against terms of admission.
  - Use data and enhanced digital systems, building on the success of the EUSS, to underpin this transformation.

## Border of the future

55. On 17 December 2020 HM Government published a '2025 UK Border Strategy', which was the result of extensive engagement with industry through a public consultation. The strategy sets out an ambitious plan to transform the border over the next five years and beyond to create the most effective border in the world. It will drive innovation and the adoption of technology at the border, making the UK more secure,

whilst making it easier for legitimate goods and people to move across it. The Home Office are responsible for delivering on the key people elements of that strategy.

56. Investment in border processes, biometrics and technology will result in a border that operates with a fully digital end-to-end customer journey, improving both security and the passage of legitimate travellers through the border. We are already engaging with academia and technology suppliers to work on creating innovative solutions for the UK border. In addition, we are working to develop a uniform set of border standards in relation to both technology and infrastructure.
57. Our new approach to border control stands not only to improve border security and passenger flow, but also public confidence in our system. It will mean Border Force officers will have a much clearer picture of who is here, whether individuals are complying, and enabling action to be taken when they are not.
58. It will also improve the UK's ability to identify potential threats before they reach the border to enable targeted and effective interventions through co-ordinated multi-agency operations. Upstream interventions are a key part of preventing dangerous or illicit people and goods from reaching the UK.

### **Universal permission to travel**

59. As part of a phased programme to 2025, we will introduce a universal 'permission to travel' requirement which will require everyone wishing to travel to the UK (except British and Irish citizens) to seek permission in advance of travel. This will facilitate the passage of legitimate travellers, keep a wider range of threats away from the UK and allow Border Force officers to focus on persons of interest.
60. As part of the universal permission to travel, we will introduce an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme. Our ETA scheme will be fully in place by the end of 2024, and we expect to process up to 30 million ETA applications per year, based on pre Covid-19 arrivals. As a result, we intend to make the process for granting an ETA application largely automated. However, complex or adverse decisions will always be taken by a trained officer or caseworker.
61. The ETA scheme will enable the Government to conduct security checks on passengers and make more informed decisions on information obtained at an earlier stage, as to whether individuals should be allowed to travel to the UK. The ETA scheme will therefore be an additional security measure, allowing us to block threats from entering the UK, whilst also providing individuals and carriers with more assurance at an earlier point in time about their ability to travel to the UK. It will also enable automation of the processing of passengers on arrival.
62. We are also improving critical infrastructure to support a range of Home Office systems, and those of key security partners, law enforcement and other Government Departments. This will allow for enhanced working between frontline Border Force officers, immigration decision makers and police, enabling law enforcement information to be accessed at the border. This will help protect the UK from those who pose the greatest threat to society.

63. To deliver a fully digital end-to-end system, we are working with carriers on how we best deliver information to them on an individual's permission to travel. At present, visa nationals in particular will need to show the carrier a physical document to prove they are eligible to enter the UK, generally before they board. We intend to provide that information directly to the carriers in digital format, but this requires partnership working and strong engagement to ensure it is deliverable by 2024.
64. At the border, we will ensure the smooth flow of those legitimately coming to the UK. Individuals with an electronic permission will not need to show physical proof, as our Border Force Officers will be able to check using our border systems. Our intention is to significantly increase the use of automation, in particular ensuring that the majority of all arrivals to the main UK ports will pass through some form of contactless corridor or automated gates for identity and security checks.
65. Universal permissions to travel, data and advanced risk analytics will allow Border Force Officers to focus on people who pose the greatest risk, with this examination likely to take place after the individual has been through the automated checks. This will improve the customer experience for millions of people crossing the border each year and allow our officers to focus their time on tackling those who pose the greatest threat from crossing our borders.
66. The accuracy and richness of operational data captured with the new model for digitising the border will enable greater certainty on whether a person is 'in' or 'out' of the UK at any given point in time. The use of automation to generate, or update, a digital status from a border crossing outcome event will enable the ability to accurately calculate and share a person's status with third parties and other Government departments that give access to benefits, services and work to those who are eligible. It will also deny them to those here illegally or without the necessary entitlements, reducing the major pull factors for illegal migration.
67. During the lifetime of this strategy, we also intend to explore further options for crossing the border which could include contactless passage through border controls. We are already working with a group of academics to identify trends and opportunities in this space.
68. Meanwhile our generous business visitor arrangements, coupled with the ability for individuals from certain countries to use the e-gates (except for specific purposes), will continue to facilitate short term business mobility.<sup>19</sup>

## Identity

69. Proving and checking an individual's identity is at the heart of our immigration system. We intend to develop identity solutions that will enable us to capture a person's identity (biographic and biometric) once, as early as possible, in new, unobtrusive ways. This is key to delivering a good customer experience and strong security.

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<sup>19</sup> Those from the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, United States, Canada, Singapore, Japan and South Korea.

### How does an individual prove their identity now?

How individuals prove their identity when applying for immigration status in the UK depends on where they are from and what type of passport they have. They will either go to an appointment at a VAC or use the 'UK Immigration: ID Check' app to scan their identity document.

At present, most EU citizens will use the 'UK Immigration: ID Check' app to scan their identity document. EU citizens that cannot access the app are required to attend a VAC to provide their fingerprints and have their photograph taken.

Most non-EU citizens are required to attend a VAC to provide their fingerprints and have their photograph taken. However, with the launch of the digital application process for the Hong Kong BN(O) visa, the first group of non-EU citizens are now able to use the app to enrol their biometrics.

70. Building on the success of identity checking for the EUSS, our overall goal for the points-based system is to:
  - Capture fingerprint and facial biometrics from all applicants to establish their identity; and
  - Introduce biometrics reuse to enable fingerprints to be enrolled once only and details updated remotely and securely by the individual.
71. Facial biometrics will be re-enrolled when required using technologies that provide convenience to the customer, as much as possible. Fingerprint biometrics provide the mechanism for undertaking security checks, whilst facial biometrics will be the modality to better facilitate automation and customer convenience, particularly when put alongside new technology that allows us to read passport chips.
72. At present, we operate a mixed approach to biometric capture with some nationals applying on specific routes (for example an EEA national applying for a Skilled Worker visa or a BN(O) applying for a Hong Kong BN(O) visa) required only to provide facial biometrics, avoiding the need to travel to a VAC to complete their application. We will explore early opportunities to shift other existing cohorts away from VACs.
73. Longer term, we are exploring new digital mechanisms for capturing fingerprint and facial biometrics, and securely binding them to the individual, for all applicants whilst ensuring that our design is flexible enough to incorporate new modalities should they come to the fore in future years.

## Simplified systems and processes

### Application process

74. The points-based system builds on improvements made to the customer experience in the EUSS. Our approach with the EUSS has been to make it as straightforward as possible for EU citizens, and their family members who want to stay in the UK, to get the UK immigration status they are eligible for.
75. Our vision for 2024 is to move to a situation where the vast majority of identity checks are undertaken digitally, reducing significantly the need for an individual to attend a VAC overseas or in the UK. This would mean that a regular applicant to the immigration system would only need to present the first time at a VAC to provide fingerprint biometrics. For further applications, we would allow for the uploading of photo biometrics online (as for the EUSS) and would recheck fingerprint data previously captured on our systems for suitability checks. We intend to make significant progress on this for applications made by those already living in the UK in 2021.
76. We will introduce other changes to remove the need to either visit a VAC or post in documents through developing online document upload facilities. For secure English language testing, where in person attendance is required for security reasons, we have removed the need to repeat the test on subsequent applications where the individual has been living in the UK for at least 12 months.

### Online evidence of immigration status: long-term vision

77. For an individual granted immigration status, we are in the process of moving away from providing physical documents that evidence immigration status, such as vignettes and Biometric Residence Permits and replacing these with a fully digital system. This will deliver on commitments to provide e-visas for people migrating to the UK alongside ETAs for visitors.
78. Moving to a fully digital system will replace different physical documents with a single digital product, accessible to the individual via a secure online service at any point in their journey. It will give the individual control of their own status information and who sees it and removes the inconvenience of having to travel to a Post Office or other location to collect a physical card after arrival in the UK.
79. The move towards a digital system for immigration status information started with the launch of the online right to work checking service, which employers have been able to use instead of checking physical documents since January 2019. Most individuals granted status under the EUSS are provided with a fully digital product, accessible via the online 'view and prove your immigration status' service. This service has been extended to EU citizens applying under the future immigration system, will be rolled out more broadly over the next few years and began with the new BN(O) visa route.
80. Individuals will need to use their digital status to prove their right to work in the UK and their right to rent property in England. They should also be able to share their immigration status digitally in other situations where they may be asked to evidence their eligibility to access certain services. This can be done via the 'view and prove'

service. Where individuals are seeking to access public services, such as benefits and healthcare, we will increasingly make this data directly available via system to system services. Such services are already in place for HMRC and DWP, with usage of the service in DWP being introduced incrementally. A similar service for the NHS has gone live, and we will continue to work with other public service providers to look to extend these services.

81. It is our goal to phase out physical documents and move to a fully digital system by the end of 2024. The majority of physical documents currently held by individuals to evidence their status will expire by the end of 2024, by which time we plan to have a fully digital system in place. However, because of the wide range of instances where physical documents are used to prove eligibility we will transition from physical to digital over a series of phases.
82. By implementing a phased approach, we can deliver improvements to the user experience sooner. This will be achieved through a combination of route-based reforms (for example the BN(O) visa) and reforms to the current process of issuing documents to reduce or, where possible, remove the need for physical forms of evidence. This will be supported by continuing to develop the infrastructure and services to ensure immigration status information can be checked digitally, either online or via system-to-system services, where needed. This incremental approach will be supported by clear communications, so that individuals and checkers understand what they need to do. As part of this process we will also ensure that individuals who have been in the UK a long time, often with older paper-based documents, have access to online immigration status services, so that we avoid the unacceptable situation in which some of the Windrush generation found themselves.

## **Customer experience**

83. We intend to deliver world-class customer services by facilitating self-service and digital experience as far as possible and responding to customer needs throughout the entire customer journey. Our goal is to increase the ability of customers to self-serve, whilst reducing the instances whereby customers have to visit front-end services. We will continue to offer an Assisted Digital service which provides UK-wide support to applicants who do not have access to technology, or the digital skills or confidence, to complete the applicant form online and will enhance our support for those unable to use the online immigration services. We will improve the customer experience by:
  - Building upon our customer insight and a mature and integrated continuous improvement function to understand the customer and inform iterative customer experience enhancements to service delivery.
  - Supporting customers to navigate the immigration system, understand how to apply and being clear on what is expected of customers through online tools and guidance. This will lead to more fully self-service experiences for customers and reduce the need for contact.
  - Implementing better, more digital customer contact. By improving our channels (such as call centres) and optimising the use of digital customer accounts we will be able to both deal with increased volumes and more effectively respond to customer queries.

- Embedding a customer-centric culture in our work, ensuring that the customer is at the heart of the process and not just a case.
84. Further investments and improvements to our caseworking operations will support a smoother customer journey, provide new tools and technologies to enhance our operational processes and increase our efficiency and effectiveness. A combination of automation and other technologies will allow us to establish better processes for the sourcing and handling of supporting evidence, which will make the processing of applications simpler and reduce lead times, reducing the burdens on the customer and caseworker alike. As we make these improvements, we will also ensure we are meeting our equality obligations so that our staff have the tools they need to deliver and to treat everyone according to their individual circumstances.

**Table 4: End state customer journey in 2024**

| Step | Journey Stage          | Migrant Actions  |
|------|------------------------|--|
| 1    | Planning to come       | Visitors and passengers transiting through the UK who do not currently need a visa for short stays, or who do not already have an immigration status prior to travelling, will apply for an ETA. All nationalities, except Irish, looking to enter the UK for other reasons (such as work or study) will need to apply for permission in advance. Those who come to the UK as a visitor will normally need to leave the country before making an application to another route. |
| 2    | Getting permission     | For those who need an ETA or visa, they will make their application online. VACs will continue to operate in reduced circumstances where biometric enrolment is still required, and this cannot be done online. All persons will receive either a digital visa or ETA.   |
| 3    | Travelling to the UK   | Travellers' immigration permissions will be checked electronically by carriers, rather than through immigration documents, as is currently the case.   |
| 4    | Crossing the UK border | The ability to use automated gates at the UK border will be expanded to more persons from all nationalities.   |
| 5    | Living in the UK       | All persons with an immigration status will be able to use the online immigration status service to demonstrate their immigration status and their rights and entitlements, where permitted, when accessing work and services in the UK. Their status will automatically be available to relevant Government departments when seeking to access benefits or public services so they as individuals do not have to demonstrate this.  |
| 6    | Leaving the UK         | Individuals who remain in the UK after their permission has expired are not allowed to work or access services and may be charged for healthcare. Leaving the UK after permission has expired may also impact a person's ability to re-enter the UK in the future.   |

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