MINISTERIAL CORRESPONDENCE

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Introduction

This instruction sets out for Workflow Managers, Case Owners, Senior Caseworkers and Team Leaders in Asylum Teams the processes to be followed when handling correspondence sent to Ministers and drafting responses to Members of Parliament.

The instruction is drafted on the basis that the Correspondence Tracking System (CTS) is available to teams. As CTS is not yet available universally, additional notes have been added describing interim arrangements for teams which do not yet have direct access to CTS.

This instruction replaces the previous instructions on Ministerial correspondence issued in August and November 2006.

Ministerial Correspondence

Members of Parliament (MPs) write to Ministers on behalf of constituents regarding any area of UK Border Agency (UKBA) business.

Regional Asylum Teams will be involved in drafting responses to letters about:

- Specific asylum applications and related issues; and
- Specific regional asylum issues.

Letters about New Asylum Model processes and general issues should be referred to:

New Asylum Model Briefing and Correspondence Team	Briefing and Correspondence Team

Letters about asylum policy, including support policy, should be referred from April 2007 to:

Relevant policy team	Asylum Policy Directorate

Letters about legacy or asylum cases and related issues should be referred to:

Relevant casework team	Legacy Directorate

There are two types of Ministerial correspondence:

- **Official Replies** (also referred to as 'Treat Official' cases), which are signed off at local level by the G7 Team Leader; and
- **Private Office** replies, which must be returned to Private Office for Ministerial approval and signature.

Both are accessed through the Correspondence Tracking System (CTS).

Replies to Ministerial correspondence are in the public domain and are therefore subject to a high level of scrutiny. All government departments have targets for completion of responses. Asylum Teams must therefore ensure that this work is treated with the highest priority and care. The process is subject to non-negotiable deadlines against which all Directorates are monitored.

Notification of Ministerial Correspondence

Incoming MP letters are processed initially by the MPs' Correspondence Section (MPCS). MPCS will scan the correspondence onto the CTS and where appropriate refer the case to the Workflow Manager in the relevant Asylum Team.

Where a Case Owner receives an MP's letter directly, they must immediately send the correspondence to MPCS by fax, to be scanned onto CTS and allocated in the correct manner.

Workflow Managers will be notified by CTS that new correspondence has been received. When new correspondence is received, Workflow Managers must establish whether the case is for their team. If it is, the Workflow Manager must enter a barrier to removal on CID. If it is not, the Workflow Manager must reject the case on CTS giving their reasons.

Each letter has a reference number. Official replies – for signature by an official – are identified by the reference number beginning with B and are contained in the Official Reply section of CTS. Private Office replies, for Ministers, are contained in the Private Office section of CTS and the reference number begins with M.

The Workflow Manager will allocate the case to the relevant Case Owner to prepare a draft reply. The Workflow Manager will notify and send the correspondence to the Case Owner by email. If the Case Owner believes that the letter should be answered by someone else, they must immediately inform the Workflow Manager by email, who will reallocate the case or return it to MPCS. The Case Owner must add a minute to CID detailing the reasons the case is being reallocated.

Once the Case Owner has completed their draft reply, they must inform the Workflow Manager by email. The response must then be sent by the Case Owner to the Senior Caseworker by email. The Workflow Manager must then allocate the case on CTS to the Senior Caseworker. Final sign-off is by the Team Leader.

It is the responsibility of the Workflow Manager to ensure that deadlines for drafting, quality assurance of the draft and sign-off are met.

The Case Owner must make a note on ASYS and the CID database of the MP's name and give a brief outline of the correspondence.

Further guidance on the Ministerial correspondence processes can be found in the Process Map.

Additional guidance for teams which do not yet have direct access to the Correspondence Tracking System (CTS)

For teams which do not yet have direct access to CTS, updating of CTS will be carried out by MPCS (this process is described by MPCS as 'off-line'). In process terms this means that:

- At the beginning of the process, MPCS will download the letter from CTS and forward it, together with a draft reply template, to the Workflow Manager specifying the deadline for response;

- During drafting/clearance within the Asylum Team, the only difference is that the draft response will be forwarded by email at each stage rather than, beyond the Case Owner, via CTS. The steps remain the same, i.e. Workflow Manager to Case Owner (for drafting), to Senior Caseworker (for QA – Case Owner also notifies Workflow Manager), to Team Leader (for final QA/sign-off), to Workflow Manager (for transmission to MPCS and, for Treat Official replies, the MP).

At the end of the process:

(i) For replies which are to be approved and signed by the Minister, the locally approved draft response (Word document) must be emailed by the Workflow Manager to the POISE email box ‘MPCS CTS Offline Management’ for MPCS to check the format, load the draft response onto CTS and forward it to Private Office to submit to the Minister

(ii) For Treat Official replies, the locally signed and issued letter must be scanned and sent by the Workflow Manager to the POISE email box ‘MPCS CTS Offline Management’ for MPCS to update CTS and close down the case.

With the exception of CTS updating, all steps outlined in the main guidance section must still be followed – in particular Case Owners must ensure that CID and ASYS are updated appropriately.

Drafting the Response

The Case Owner must examine both ASYS and CID to look at the applicant's case history in order to assist with the draft response. The Case Owner will receive a template from the Workflow Manager on which to draft the response.

If contributions are required from colleagues, these must be commissioned by the Case Owner as soon as possible. Information about asylum processes or general issues **must be cleared through the Briefing and Correspondence Team.**

The response must be drafted on Microsoft Word.

Once the draft response has been completed, the Case Owner must submit it for quality assurance to the Senior Caseworker via email, along with any notes or additional information. The Case Owner must update the ASYS minute sheet (Tab 5) and CID, to show what action has been taken and the date the case was referred to the Senior Caseworker. The Case Owner must also inform the Workflow Manager by email that the draft has been completed and passed to the Senior Caseworker by email. The Workflow Manager must then allocate the case on CTS to the Senior Caseworker.

On receipt of the draft response, the Senior Caseworker must accept the case on CTS. The quality assurance is carried out in order to check the draft for accuracy and ensure it meets the required standard. When the Senior Caseworker has completed their quality checks, they must copy and paste the draft response onto CTS. The final draft must then be forwarded by the Senior Caseworker via CTS to the Team Leader, along with any notes or additional information of which the Team Leader needs to be aware.

The Team Leader carries out a final quality assurance check. Subject to that they sign off Treat Official replies and update CTS. The signed Treat Official reply must then be sent by the Asylum Team to the MP and the case closed on CTS.

Private Office correspondence must be sent to Private Office, via CTS, along with any notes or additional information.

Where the Team Leader or Private Office deems the draft unsatisfactory, it will be returned to the Case Owner for corrections to be made.

Additional guidance for teams which do not yet have direct access to the Correspondence Tracking System (CTS)

Cases are processed slightly differently for teams not yet on CTS, reflecting interim arrangements whereby MPCS update CTS – see the section Notification of Ministerial Correspondence. This does not change the clearance arrangements.

Deadlines

The deadline known as a ‘Unit Deadline’ for responding to MPs’ correspondence is non-negotiable and units’ performance is monitored by both the Home Office Private Office and UKBA. The Unit Deadline is the latest date by which the entire process must be completed and the approved draft referred to the Private Office or Team Leader for signature. The Correspondence Tracking System (CTS) will have the deadline on the system. The Workflow Manager will inform the Case Owner of the deadline.

Case Owners must complete a draft response and forward it to their Senior Caseworker via email for quality assurance, no fewer than four working days before the Unit Deadline. Case Owners must aim to complete a draft response as far ahead of the Unit Deadline as possible so that the Senior Caseworker is able to quality assure the draft and forward it on to the Team Leader before the deadline.

Where a Case Owner believes that there may be a delay in preparing a draft, they must consult the Senior Caseworker and make their Workflow Manager aware by email at the earliest possible opportunity.

Because of the tight timescales involved in preparing and clearing responses, the Workflow Manager and Case Owners must make arrangements for their in-boxes to be monitored during any significant absences from the office. In the event of unplanned absences, such as sick leave, Team Leaders must ensure that the Workflow Manager and Case Owners’ in-boxes are monitored.

Cases for the Office of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (OPHSO)

Cases for the Office of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (OPHSO) must be dealt with by a Senior Caseworker. They are generated through Members of Parliament and refer to cases where there are issues that may have not been satisfactorily resolved. These cases are rare.

The Senior Caseworker will be notified by the UKBA Briefing and Complaints Unit about a preliminary OPHSO enquiry and will forward correspondence setting out the background to the case and a series of questions. There is normally a very short deadline for responding to these enquiries.

The Senior Caseworker must co-ordinate a response to the correspondence. This must include a background history of the case and answers to the questions raised.

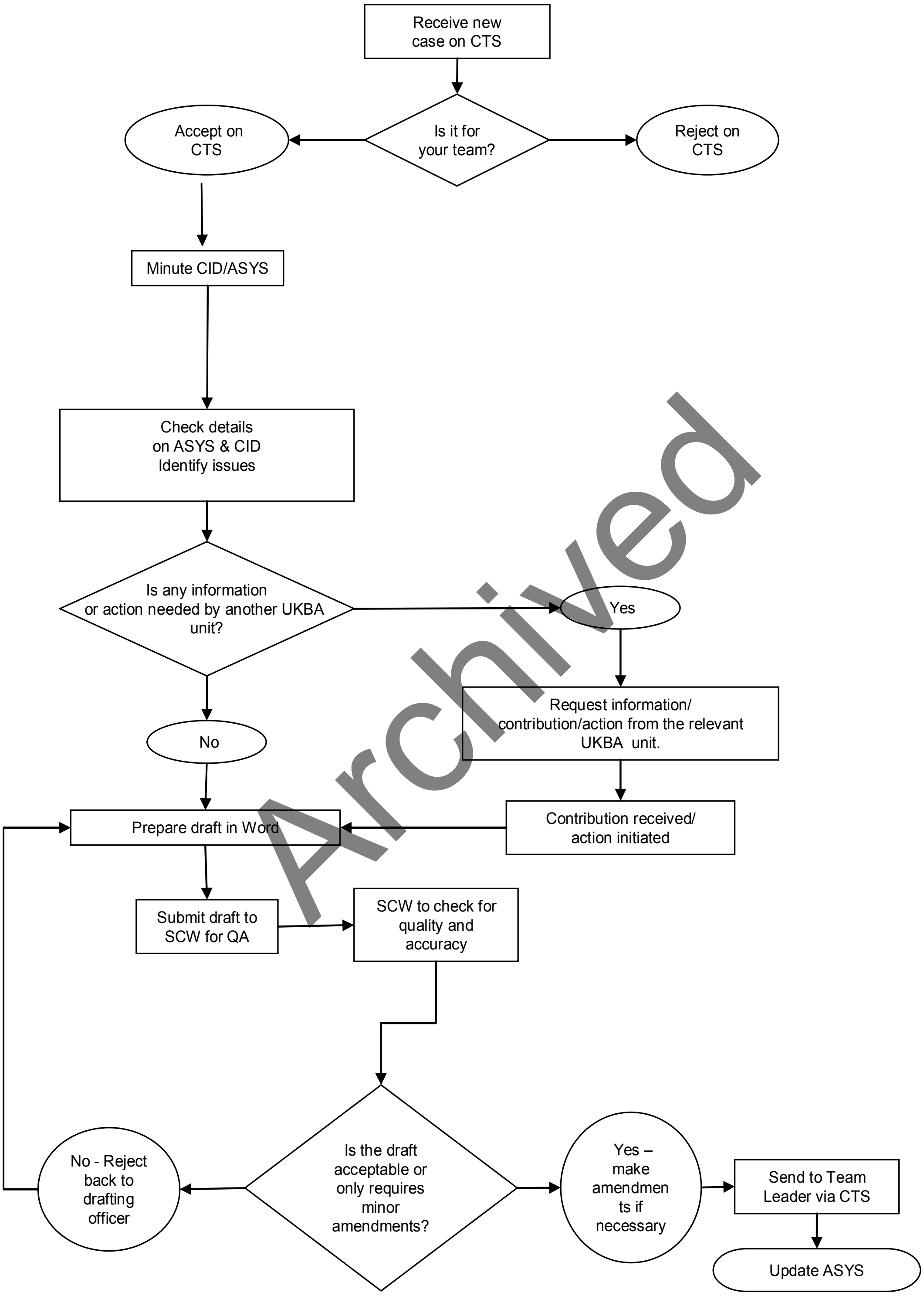
In circumstances where action taken by a Case Owner has not been fully correct, the Senior Caseworker is responsible for ensuring any errors are rectified and written apologies are sent to the applicant and their representative.

UKBA Briefing and Complaints Unit will consult the Senior Caseworker where it considers a consolatory payment should be issued.

A formal reply is then prepared by UKBA Briefing and Complaints Unit and sent to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

Failure to deal with these cases promptly and in a satisfactory manner may result in a full OPHSO enquiry.

Process Map



Receive new case on CTS
Is it for your team?
Accept on CTS
Reject on CTS
Minute CID/ASYS
Check details on ASYS & CID Identify issues
Is any information or action needed by another UKBA unit?
Yes
Request information/ contribution/action from the relevant UKBA unit.
Contribution received/ action initiated
No
Prepare draft in Word
Submit draft to SCW for QA
SCW to check for quality and accuracy
Is the draft acceptable or only requires minor amendments?
No - Reject back to drafting officer
Yes – make amendmen ts if necessary
Send to Team Leader via CTS
Update ASYS

Document Control

Change Record

Version	Authors	Date	Change Reference
1.0	BF AB	23/02/07	New web style implemented and interim, non-CTS guidance added.
2.0	CB	05/11/2008	Re-branding and general update.