**COVID-19: Guidance and advice for OISC regulated organisations and those seeking regulation**

This document provides advice and guidance to organisations are affected by the Covid 19 pandemic. It includes questions raised with the Commissioner and our responses.

Questions:

* Should I continue to see clients?
* Should we exclude workers or visitors from the workspace?
* Can I work from home?
* What should we do if staff are ill or in self-isolation and clients need work progressed?
* Will the OISC be carrying out premise audits in the coming months?
* Are competence assessments still going ahead?
* I have received a letter approving my continued registration but not received my certificate. Do I need my certificate to continue to practice?
* Will my OISC caseworker still be available to contact?
* What should I do if I cannot access my office and information that I need to send to the OISC?

**Should I continue to see clients?**

Government are providing advice for individuals and businesses about how to respond to the Coronavirus, visit [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus). We recommend that all advisers keep up to date and follow Government’ advice. While client’s may still need your advice and assistance, technology might be used to progress the client’s matter without the need for face to face meetings or unnecessary travel.

**Should we exclude workers or visitors from the workspace?**

Advice specifically for businesses and other organisations regarding your office and employees can also be found by visiting the [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) site.

**Can I work from home?**

Yes, there is no reason immigration advisers cannot work from home. As this is temporary, it is not necessary to formally change your place of work.

Information security is important, so we recommend that know your organisation’s policy for managing sensitive information. We would also advise that contact with clients is by phone or electronic communication wherever possible.

**What should we do if staff are ill or in self-isolation and clients need work progressed?**

As per the Code of Standards, organisations and immigration advisers should act in the best interest of their clients. Some useful guidance on how to provide cover in the absence of an adviser is available from the [OISC website here](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/574612/Practice_Note_on__cover_in_the_absence_of_an_adviser.pdf).

If it is necessary for an organisation or an adviser to take an action in an emergency situation, which will mean acting beyond their level of authorisation, the organisation must ensure that the client agrees to their taking action on the case. They must also keep a note of the circumstances in which they acted.

We will take a proportionate view where organisations have had to make decisions due to a reduction in staff from Coronavirus. We encourage you to discuss your plans (such as supervision systems) with your OISC caseworker if you are concerned about providing cover for another immigration adviser.

Organisations that have used this difficult period to increase their areas of work or take advantage of clients, will be deemed to have acted in an unfit manner. We also remind you that OISC immigration advisers are not permitted to issue Judicial Review proceedings.

**Will the OISC be carrying out premise audits in the coming months?**

The OISC have temporarily suspended our premise audit programme following Government advice restricting non-essential travel. We will resume our audit programme in the new business year. Given the uncertainty around how long this guidance will be in place, we are looking at how we could carry out audits differently, making use of technology. Any changes to how we take forward audits will be communicated with immigration advisers at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime, if you have any concerns please contact your caseworker.

**Are competence assessments still going ahead?**

 A new programme of OISC online assessments will begin from the 14th September 2020, replacing the previous assessment centres that were in operation. Details of the new assessment process can be found on the OISC website at the following link: [OISC Competence Assessment](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/competence-assessments-immigration-and-asylum-advisers)

**I have received a letter approving my continued registration but not received my certificate. Do I need my certificate to continue to practice?**

Once your continued registration has been approved you remain on the register of OISC regulated advisers and can continue to practice and your approval letter can be used as proof of continued registration. As our own staff are now working from home, we are unable to print our certificates, and are looking at how we can work around this.

**Will my OISC caseworker still be available to contact?**

Yes, all our caseworkers are set up to work from home, and this will continue for the foreseeable future.

However, access to the OISC office and post is limited so we request that all documents and communications are sent electronically.

**What should I do if I cannot access my office and information that I need to send to the OISC?**

Please e-mail your caseworker or the person at the OISC requesting the information if you are experiencing problems and they will work with you to agree what steps might be taken.

**What work can Level 1 advisers do to assist clients whose leave may be affected by Covid 19?**

* For clients whose leave expires between the 1st September and the 31st October who want to leave the UK but are unable to do so, you may assist such clients in applying for additional time to stay known as ‘exceptional assurance’ or ‘exceptional indemnity’ by contacting the Home Office Coronavirus Immigration Team (CIT) on behalf of the client.
* Applications which will need to rely on Covid-19 related concessions including those offered regarding the financial requirements under Appendix FM where there is evidence of a temporary loss of income due to COVID-19 during the period 1 March 2020 and 31 July 2020. For further information on this please visit [here](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents)