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**SMITH
STONE
WALTERS**

UK Immigration Practice

INSIGHT

UK IMMIGRATION NEWS & VIEWS
FROM SMITH STONE WALTERS
WINTER 2018

*Home Office
embraces new
visa technology*



SCAN SUBMIT SEND

An easy, three-step 'customer journey' is at the heart of the government's long-overdue improvements to the UK Visa and Citizenship Application Services.

The Home Office also promises that there is 'no longer the need to leave documents with UKVI after submission, delivering a more digital and user friendly service'.

Based on our early experience of the multi-million pound overhaul, we give it a cautious stamp of approval.

Applying for a UK visa has long been considered a complicated and stressful experience. You have to first file the application, find the original copies of your important documents as evidence, then pay the fee, and then present yourself in person at an immigration centre or Post Office to supply your biometric information.

Critics of the Home Office have been claiming for years that their archaic internal systems directly lead to protracted processing times. The department routinely mislays valuable documents, including applicants' passports. So we welcomed the declaration in May this year that the government would be overhauling its visa and citizenship process. The major selling point of the new system is its aim to streamline the previous way of operating and, in addition, make the service more convenient by opening 57 UK Visa and Citizenship Application centres (UKCVAS) across the country.

These centres will be equipped to capture biometric information and will replace the need for applicants to queue up at Post Offices, or attend the Home Office Public Caller Units.

Crucially, submission of the application online now allows for evidence to be scanned directly to UKVI, meaning that people no longer have to hand over important documents, such as passports, for their applications to be considered. Under the new arrangements, the vast majority of people only need to submit their photograph, fingerprints and signature in person. So far, so good.

PEACE OF MIND

Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes probably thought she was being helpful

when she said back in May that the new service would 'improve peace of mind' for applicants, even though this comment tacitly admits that the present system makes many nervous. So it was with some relief that at the end of October, we eventually heard more.

Sopra Steria, the French comms firm which was awarded the £91 million outsourced contract, has now introduced its extended range of resources.

As well as those previously promised, the company is offering additional services such as document checking, access to a translator, or the option of booking an out of office hours appointment, all at an extra cost. A pricey, airport-style premium lounge is now available in London, for those people who want to eat croissants while they're having their identity checked. Mobile pop-up centres can also be arranged for a fee at sites like university campuses or large offices. You can even summon a team of civil servants to your home for a VIP consultation - if you have a spare £9,100 and a suitably private area for them to take their photos.

While we were pleased to find out where the new UKCVAS or 'service points' would be, and when they would be opening, what was less heartening was discovering within days of the initial announcement that the launch date was being pushed back a week.

TEETHING PROBLEMS

By early December, our immigration consultants had been able to lodge some applications and book appointments via the new UKVCAS Service. Inevitably there have been teething problems. One customer waited four hours to complete his application (albeit while

in the premium lounge), while another of our clients completed the process within minutes. And one person who paid for a super priority service heard that his application had been granted within just three hours of attending his appointment.

If any customers encounter problems during their online application, the Home Office has introduced a new phoneline, which costs £2.50 per minute.

Vulnerable customers have been advised to use the specialist Service and Support Centres in Belfast, Cardiff, Croydon, Glasgow, Liverpool, Sheffield and Solihull when they become available in January 2019. They will then be offered help with travel costs and mobile services.

UKVI believes 'the new process will bring UK visa services in line with what our customers expect.' Given our familiarity with the old system, we have to hope that this means a better experience than previously.

SMITH STONE WALTERS

In this edition of Insight, we examine the new immigration service in greater detail and the various options available for clients. We present our analysis of what we know about the EU Settlement Scheme so far and the results of the pilot test. There is also our end-of-year round-up of our corporate social responsibility programme and a review of our fundraising efforts this quarter. For more information, go to www.smithstonewalters.com/signup

THE EU SETTLEMENT SCHEME IN NUMBERS



The EU Settlement Scheme, which launches nationwide on 30 March 2019, allows EU citizens and close family members to continue to live and work in the UK after Brexit and access public services. In this Special Focus, we examine the statistics surrounding the process so far.

(All EU Settlement Scheme data is taken from the first beta test conducted in the NW of England during August-October 2018)

BEFORE
2021

122,516 PER MONTH



Estimate of how many EU citizens must successfully register for the scheme before June 2021. Put another way, that's the entire population of Chester every single month!

ADULT



£65

Cost for each adult to register for settled/pre-settled status

CHILD



£32.50

Cost for each child to register for settled/pre-settled status

EU POPULATION

UK

6%

Percentage of the total UK population that are from the EU (2017 statistics)

ESTIMATE

1 IN 3

Amount of children of EU parents who were born in this country

REGISTERED

921

People already registered for the EU Settlement Scheme

EU CHILDREN



679,000

Number of EU national children under the age of 18 in the UK (2016 statistics)

REVENUE



£228 MILLION

Estimate of government revenue generated by EU Settlement Scheme

CITIZENS



3.8 MILLION

Number of EU citizens living in the UK

APPLICATION



8 MINS 23 SECS

Fastest completed application time so far (with Home Office support)

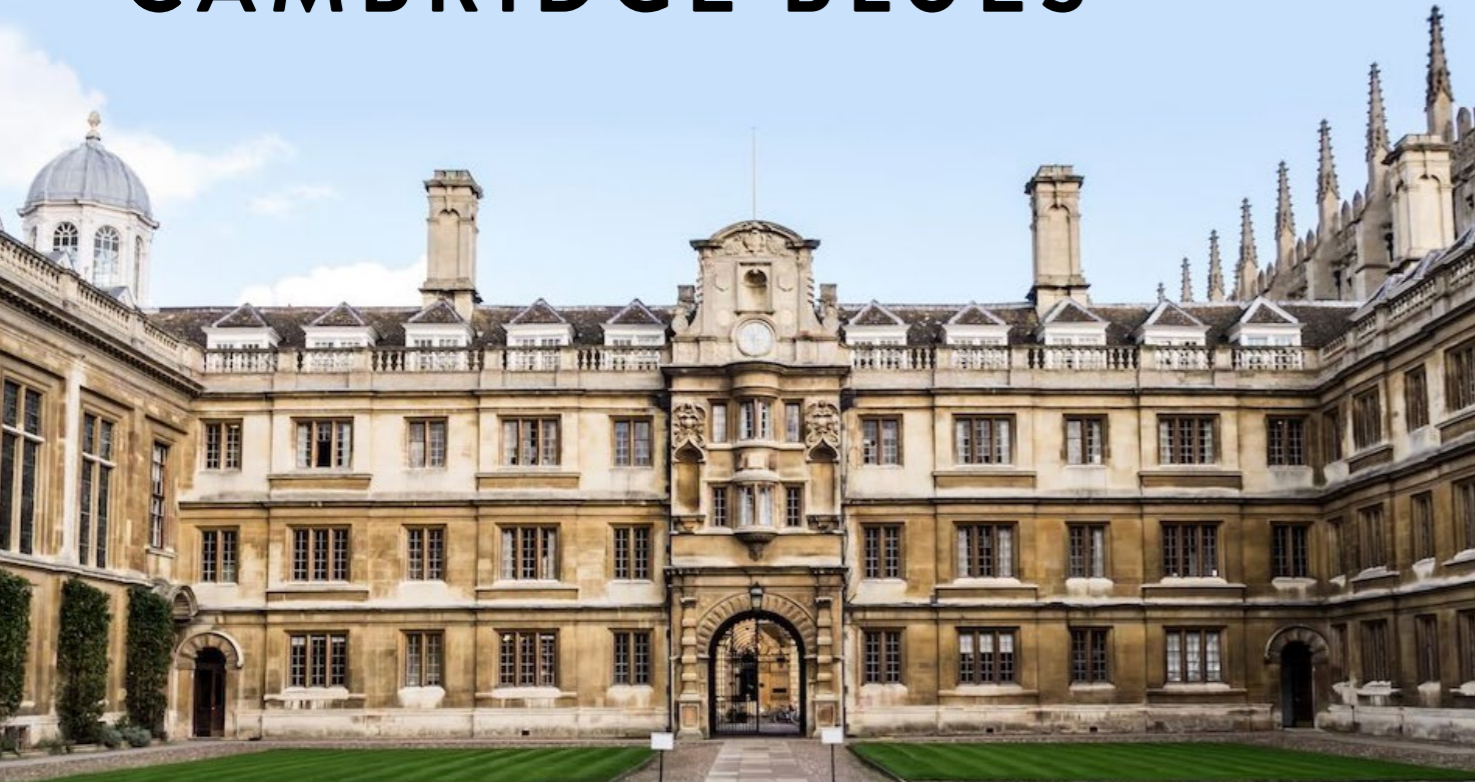
DEADLINE



30 JUNE 2021

Deadline for applications to the EU Settlement Scheme

CAMBRIDGE BLUES



Cambridge University is the latest educational establishment to announce that it will reimburse all of its European employees' application fees for the EU Settlement Scheme.

Along with Edinburgh and Durham's decision, this comes after fears that the higher education sector would neither be able to retain its EU workforce nor attract others after Brexit.

In his annual address in October, Cambridge vice-chancellor Stephen Toope said that the costs for settled or pre-settled status (£65 for adults; half that for those under 16) will be covered by the institution. Any staff who have already applied for a permanent residence card since June 2016 will be able to apply for a refund of that application fee too.

Toope said: 'Inconceivably, at this late stage we do not yet understand the full implications of Brexit. Which does not mean that we cannot prepare for it.' Cambridge 'greatly values and heavily relies on our European colleagues,' he continued.

Last year, the university lost 184 EU staff, a 35 per cent rise in departures from the year before and a threat to the city's reputation as a centre for global excellence. The number of EU student applications also fell by 14 per cent.

Brexit will affect all sectors of education in the city. The university newspaper Varsity also reported that more than 12 per cent of all the external research income for Cambridge schools comes from EU grants.



THE UKVI'S NEW FRONT-END SERVICES



What applicants need to know about the changes to the immigration service...

	OLD UK VISA AND CITIZENSHIP APPLICATION SERVICE	NEW UK VISA AND CITIZENSHIP APPLICATION SERVICE
SUBMISSION OF DOCUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF VISA APPLICATION	<i>Applicants posted (or presented in person) their original documents and passport to the UKVI for assessment.</i>	<i>Applicants need only upload and scan their supporting documents to the UKVI. They are able to retain their passport throughout the application process.</i>
PROVIDING BIOMETRIC DETAILS IN SUPPORT OF VISA APPLICATION	<i>Applicants attended a participating Post Office to provide biometrics. Post Office fee £19.20</i>	<i>Following submission of their online application, applicants are now required to pre-book a biometric appointment at one of 57 new service centres. UKVI fees vary depending on appointment time and which service centre is booked.</i>
FILING A PRIORITY VISA APPLICATION AT A UKVI PREMIUM SERVICE CENTRE (PSC)	<i>Applicants could pay a premium fee to attend a pre-booked appointment at one of six UKVI PSCs and present their visa application for consideration on the day.</i>	<i>The level of service required is chosen (and paid for) at the time the visa application is filed online. Following attendance at the biometric appointment, the application is then considered by the UKVI in line with the chosen level of service.</i>
LEVELS OF SERVICE AVAILABLE	<i>The previous service levels available for consideration of a visa application were: Standard postal: up to eight weeks Priority postal: two weeks Premium: Same day The cost of these services varies dependent on the application type.</i>	<i>The new service levels available for consideration are broadly similar: Standard: up to eight weeks Priority: two weeks Super Priority: 24 hours The cost of these services vary dependent on the application type.</i>
TRAVEL DURING CONSIDERATION OF A VISA APPLICATION	<i>In certain instances, applicants with extant visa conditions were able to file a new visa application and still travel ahead of receiving their new immigration status.</i>	<i>Once an application is lodged online, the applicant MUST NOT TRAVEL until they have their new BRP. If an application is filed using the standard service, this could result in the applicant being grounded during an 8+ week processing period.</i>
PRE-BOOKING A PREMIUM VISA APPLICATION SUBMISSION	<i>The previous service allowed applicants to book a specific appointment in advance of preparing their visa application for submission on the day of their appointment.</i>	<i>Appointments can now only be booked once the application is filed online. Preferred appointments dates may not always be available unless they are willing to pay an additional fee for next day and same day appointment.</i>

IMMIGRATION HEALTH SURCHARGE

Is this a critical condition for our doctors and nurses?

The doubling of the Immigration Health Surcharge from £200 to £400 could raise as much as £220 million in extra funding for the NHS, claims Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes.

The compulsory fee was created to deter 'health tourism' - people coming to the UK for free medical treatment and then returning home. But in reality, this charge is paid by people from outside the EU who are seeking a visa to stay for six months or more. Ironically, some of them will be moving here to take up jobs in the NHS. A health worker from outside the EU who has been offered a three-year role within the NHS would need to pay for three years' worth of health surcharge (£1,200) in one go. That's the equivalent of a whole month's wages for a nurse (based on £22, 128 per annum starting salary). This charge is on top of their visa application fee (between £450 and £580 depending on their occupation).

If they bring dependents with them, they will need to pay their fees for the three years as well. To counter this, some NHS trusts are offering loans to their overseas recruits to bridge the costs.

The chair of the Royal College of Nursing council, Maria Trewern said: "Patient care is suffering because we don't have enough nurses. There are 41,000 vacancies in England alone. The immigration health surcharge not only imposes an enormous personal cost on hardworking nurses and health care assistants, but risks driving away overseas staff at a time we need them most."

Dr Chaand Nagpaul, chair of the British Medical Association council, believes that this sharp rise in the surcharge will deter other foreign medical recruitment too. "This policy will do nothing but further penalise international doctors who are choosing to work in an under-staffed, under-funded and under-resourced NHS," he said.

"These doctors are delivering key health services and already paying tax and National Insurance contributions. It is absurd that immigration policies continue to seek to penalise overseas medics in the middle of the worst recruitment crisis the NHS has seen. We would like to see doctors exempt from this charge."



"The doubling of the Immigration Health Surcharge from £200 to £400 could raise as much as £220 million in extra funding for the NHS"



SECOND PHASE OF EU SETTLEMENT SCHEME TRIAL STARTS

After a satisfactory trial in the North-West of England, the registration for the post-Brexit immigration status for EU nationals has been extended to include:

- EU staff who work in Higher Education.
- EU children who are looked after by the councils in Kent, Lincolnshire, Haringey, Waltham Forest and Sheffield.
- EU citizens who are receiving support from specific organisations across the country including women's aid centres, charities for the homeless or those in poverty and certain refugee groups.
- NHS workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland from the EU, including GPs, dentists, and those employed as chiropractors, osteopaths, pharmacists and social workers.

The EU Settlement Scheme is expected to be fully open by March 2019 and the deadline for applying will be 30 June 2021. For more information on the scheme and the results of the first pilot, please see our Special Focus, starting on page 4.

FUNDRAISING FUN

Smith Stone Walters is proud to have chosen Rainbow Trust Children's Charity as its charity partner for the past five years.

This organisation helps families facing the unimaginable reality that their child might die. Since we started fundraising we have committed to collecting £4,500 annually to support Rainbow Trust's vital work and raise awareness. The total we have raised since 2013 is in excess of £25,000!



MARATHON EFFORT

As part of our corporate social responsibility programme, we participate in events throughout the year. In October, SSW director David Hugkulstone (left) ran 13.1 miles in extremely challenging weather conditions in the London Half Marathon. This race takes in some of the capital's world-famous landmarks, including four of London's eight Royal Parks - Hyde Park, Green Park, St James's Park and Kensington Gardens.

David completed his half-marathon in less than two hours, an admirably fast time! His event raised more than £650 for Rainbow Trust!

HALLOWEEN BITES

We held a bake sale in the Bromley and London offices on 31 October. Members of staff brought in home-made savoury and sweet goodies for everyone to buy.

There was a great selection of tempting treats including muffins, sausage rolls, pizza, ginger loaf, banana bread, orange and brandy cake and a fresh cream cake. In a nod to Halloween, we had gingerbread biscuits in the shapes of ghosts and skeletons. The whole event was a spooktacular success, raising £140 in total.

CHRISTMAS CAROLS

The annual Rainbow Trust Christmas carol concert took place on the 6th December in the beautiful St Paul's Church, Knightsbridge.

This year was extra special as it is 10 years since the first London Carol Concert, over which time the charity has raised more than £305,000 from these events.

Cheam School Chapel Choir led the hymn singing, and there were a wonderful array of Christmas carols, performances and readings, including some from celebrities like Olympian

rower Sir Matthew Pinsent and TV presenter Anne Robinson. Mulled wine and mince pies warmed the congregation through before the concert and got everyone in the festive spirit.

This very special evening helped Rainbow Trust to raise vital funds to support seriously ill children and their families now and in the long term.

OUR EU SETTLEMENT SCHEME SEMINAR

In October, with less than six months to go until Brexit, Smith Stone Walters was delighted to host a successful and timely seminar about the upcoming EU Settlement Scheme.

Our venue was the stunning Tower Room overlooking the Thames, at the London & Partners office in central London. A large audience of invited clients gathered to listen to a representative from the Home Office management team. He presented an update on the progress made to date and details on how the scheme will operate.

During his speech, the Home Office spokesperson explained that the private testing of the scheme has been extended. The Home Office considers phase one to have worked well, with a number of EU nationals already securing their new immigration status via the scheme.

The presentation also detailed the application process and reaffirmed the fact that every EU citizen and their dependants who wish to continue to live in the UK after Brexit will need to register between March 2019 and June 2021, in order to be granted their specific immigration status.

The immigration status granted under the EU Settlement Scheme will be either indefinite leave to remain ('settled status') or five years limited leave to remain ('pre-settled status').

After the presentation, SSW director James Walters (pictured) discussed the potential impact this will have on employers who have an EU workforce and what measures they could be taking to ensure their EU population engages with the scheme.

At Smith Stone Walters we have been preparing a range of services to support our corporate clients, from auditing and assessment of EU migrant population to supporting the filing of upcoming applications.

For more information contact your Smith Stone Walters account manager.



WHAT OUR CLIENTS SAY ABOUT US



We are experts in the field of immigration, but don't just take our word for it. Here are some of the comments that satisfied customers have made about our services over the past few months.

"Jack (SSW New York) made the whole immigration process painless from start to finish. He did an excellent job in walking me through the process, keeping me informed and expediting completion. Moving is by definition stressful, and having a professional firm like SSW facilitate the mechanics on my behalf was a welcome relief."
TO, Media distribution company

"Visa applications are an extremely stressful and tedious process, and as soon as we started working with Tess (SSW Hong Kong) she took the stress away from this. She was absolutely lovely, and when she went on leave made sure to introduce me to another colleague just in case I had any questions."
BD, Employee engagement platform

"Very quick service. The information provided by Rachana (SSW India) was very good and she explained the process very well. I received my visa on time without any delay."
VB, multi-national telecoms

"Kathrine (SSW UK) helped me navigate a very complex and tricky process - she also replied to my emails very promptly and patiently addressed any queries I posed to her."
NC, International accountants

"It was a pleasure working with SSW especially with Kiran (SSW UK). She presents herself professionally and is always prompt in attending to my queries."
JC, international healthcare technology

The new UK Visa and Citizenship Application Service

In our Editorial on p2-3, we discussed the introduction of the Home Office's new immigration services. In this Focus, we look a little closer at the UK Visa and Citizenship Application Services centres (UKVCAS) and the 'streamlined customer journey' that should benefit applicants from now on.

What are the key benefits of the new visa application service?

Applicants will be able to retain their passports and other valuable evidence rather than sending them separately to the Home Office. They will be able to digitally scan their information, making the process modern and more secure. It also eliminates any risk of their original documents being misplaced by the Home Office or lost in the postal system. Once they have uploaded their application form and digital copies of their documents, applicants will be directed to attend a biometric appointment at one of the new service points.

Where are the service points located?

The applicant has a choice of centres or service points to attend. Applicants are able to pay extra for optional 'add-ons', such as a next-day appointment, a walk-in appointment or for an 'on-demand' mobile application service:

- **Core service points:** These service points offer free of charge appointments. There are six altogether located in Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Cardiff, Belfast and Croydon.
- **Enhanced service points:** An appointment at one of the enhanced service points also includes a document scanning and document checking service provided by the Home Office's out-sourced contractor Sopra Steria. These are located around the country, mostly in local libraries.

- **Premium lounge:** The first premium lounge, located in the City of London, offers a more personalised customer experience. For an additional fee, the application process is completed in an individual application suite where biometric collection and document scanning can take place in an environment of seclusion and privacy.
- **VIP service:** The VIP service is a mobile service will visit you in your home, office or other location. The price for this convenient service starts from £9,100.
- **On-demand pop-up:** An on-demand pop-up service is a service point that comes to a location convenient to you. This 'price-on-application' service provides application facilities for organisations with more than 10 applicants.

What happens at a service point?

The service points enable applicants to enrol their biometric information and (if necessary) have their supporting documents checked. Enrolling biometric information means customers will be asked to:

- Scan the biographical details page of their current passport
- Have a digital photograph taken of their face
- Have their fingerprints scanned
- Provide a digital signature

The process takes less than five minutes and does not involve any ink or mess.

Where the applicant has already submitted digital copies of supporting documents with their online application, the process will be complete and they will be able to leave the service point with their original passport. A Home Office decision as to whether they have been granted their leave to remain will follow by email.

What are the levels of service?

Applicants must still pay an additional charge to have their applications decided expeditiously. There are three levels of service offered by the Home Office:

- **Standard service:** Applications will be considered within the current timescales of up to an estimated six months or eight weeks, depending on the type of application
- **Priority service:** Applications will be considered within 10 working days
- **Super priority service:** Applications will be considered within 24 hours

Who does the new process apply to?

Currently, the new process applies to individuals who are applying:

- To extend their leave to remain in the UK under the Points-Based System eg. Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 4 or Tier 5
- As the partner or child of someone with leave to remain under the Points-Based System
- As a member of the Armed Forces or their dependants
- To extend their leave as a Turkish business person or worker or as their dependant partner or child
- To settle in the UK in certain categories (including on the basis of long residence in the UK or as the child/partner of someone settled in the UK)
- For British citizenship by naturalisation
- To register for British citizenship (including children under 18)
- To update, replace or transfer a biometric residence permit
- For a Home Office travel document

Customers on the remaining routes will continue to need to use the existing service until January 2019. This includes most customers applying to join family members in the UK as a dependant, other than a PBS dependent, armed forces dependent or ECAA dependent.

Can I travel while my application is being considered?

Once an applicant has attended their appointment at a service point and provided their biometric data, although they will retain their passports, they should not travel. If they do, their application will be withdrawn.

How can Smith Stone Walters help?

The new service offered by UKVI and Sopra Steria is yet to be fully tried and tested. Given the scale of both system and process change, teething problems are unfortunately inevitable. A similar approach has already been rolled out overseas in respect of visa applications submitted 'out of country' and unfortunately problems continue to plague that particular service.

By partnering with Smith Stone Walters, you can be assured that your application will be managed effectively. We will put right any issues caused by the Home Office's failings and provide you with the peace of mind that your employees' case will be successfully resolved.

Contact us for friendly and up-to-date immigration advice on your options by calling [0208 461 6660](tel:02084616660) or emailing us at info@smithstonewalters.com



“Applicants will be able to digitally scan their information, making the process modern and more secure”

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