

MEDIA INFORMATION

26 October 2020

Flexibility in visa rules, enhanced health precautions for students travelling to the UK for new academic year

- **Appointments available for students at Premium Application Centers in the US, health precautions throughout the visa application process are in place for student visa customers.**
- **UK Visas and Immigration has introduced greater flexibility in visa rules, allowing students to commence study remotely, then apply for visas when they are able to travel to the UK.**
- **Students can now apply up to 6 months before they are due to start their course in the UK.**
- **Students studying courses online will still be eligible to apply for the Graduate route, provided they are in the UK by 6 April 2021 to complete their course.**
- **As of 5 October, the UK launched a new and improved Student Route, which falls under the UK's new points based immigration system. This single global system will provide a more streamlined experience for international students.**

As part of its commitment to enhance the visa experience for students, United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI) has introduced flexibility in visa rules, with health precautions throughout the visa system along with visa services partner VFS Global, to ensure a comfortable and safe environment for all customers.

Students who begin courses online can apply for visa later

Whilst we know that many students in the region have been able to apply for their student visa, to limit disruption caused by ongoing COVID-19 travel restrictions, UKVI is allowing incoming international students to apply when they are due to travel to the UK, rather than the start of their course. This means students who have already gained admission can begin their courses online remotely and apply for a UK study visa when they are ready to do so.

Premium Application Center appointments available for students

In view of academic semesters beginning in the UK, student visa customers can schedule appointments at all Premium Application Centres, operated by VFS Global, in ten cities in the US.

Students who cannot book an appointment online due to non-availability of slots at their preferred time, can schedule an appointment on demand by submitting a request at this link: <https://www.vfsglobal.co.uk/us/en/news/notice-for-tier-4-students-needing-to-book-an-appointment>.

This is a facility offered exclusively for student visa customers in the US and ensures a convenient visa application process for whenever these students are ready to travel. Submitting applications at Premium Application Centres comes at an additional fee.

Students in the US wishing to access UK visa Standard service at no extra charge, have the option of booking an appointment at a USCIS Application Support Center, These centres are not operated by VFS

Global and must be scheduled through the online appointment system. For more information on how this process works, visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/usa-apply-for-a-uk-visa/apply-for-a-uk-visa-in-the-usa>

New Graduate route policy enhanced

The new [Graduate route](#) will allow students who successfully complete a undergraduate or postgraduate degree to stay and work, look for work, and gain experience in the UK for two years (three years for PhD students).

The route will be launched in Summer 2021, and students who start their courses online overseas will be eligible to apply for the Graduate route provided they are in the UK before 6 April 2021 and complete their course in the UK. The Graduate route was announced in September 2019 and will help the UK attract and retain the best international graduates, ensuring those graduates have the opportunity to secure skilled jobs and contribute to the UK's economic growth.

Health precautions across the visa system

In order to ensure a safe environment for customers and employees, VFS Global has established standardised protective measures to be followed across all its Premium Application Centres. To ensure health safety norms are followed, the centres have implemented a mandatory appointment system and are maintaining physical distancing measures. Additionally, staff also carry out preventive measures such as disinfecting high-contact surfaces, body temperature screenings, use of hand sanitisers, etc.

Student customers making applications via the Standard visa service will attend a USCIS Application Support Center (ASC) to provide their biometrics. Information about health and safety precautions at ASCs can be found here - <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/uscis-office-closings>

New and improved Student Route, replacing the Tier 4 process

The new and improved Student Route, the first of the UK's new points-based immigration system to launch, is now open for applications. The Student route improves on the previous Tier 4 route, making for a more streamlined experience for international students. The new route includes the option for students to apply for their visa six months in advance, compared to three months under the former Tier 4 system. Visas that have been issued through the Tier 4 route are still valid and those eligible will still be able to apply for the Graduate route when it opens in summer 2021.

According to data from UKVI, in the year ending June 2020, almost 13,500 student visas in total to the UK were granted to nationals from the US, 99% of all who applied were successful.

Since August 2020, Premium Application Centres for UK visa customers have re-opened in 10 cities across the United States of America in a phased manner: Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Seattle, Washington DC and San Francisco – and these centres are receiving student visa applications.

All of the above locations are operational subject to local lockdown regulations.

Commenting on this, Martin Potter, Head of Customer Experience and Account Management for UK Visas and Immigration, said: "Over the last few years we have continued to see thousands of students from the United States choose the UK's world-class higher-education system as the destination for their

studies. Despite the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important we provide international students with the support and flexibility they need to pursue their studies in the UK, in a safe manner.”

“For those travellers, our message is clear: your safety is our highest priority. Throughout the visa application process and your travel to the UK, we are taking measures to ensure you are safe and secure. In addition, the new Graduate route is guaranteed to open next summer – meaning those students heading to the UK this fall will be able to apply for two years additional post-study leave to kick start their career in the UK.”

Commenting on this, Vinay Malhotra, Regional Group Chief Operating Officer (South Asia, Middle East, North Africa and Americas), said: “As borders re-open and travel resumes, we are committed to maintaining the highest standards of health and safety precautions, according to the guidelines of the World Health Organisation and local authorities. We are conscious that this is the time students will be applying for visas to travel to the UK for higher education, and would like to assure them of a safe and seamless visa application process at our Centres.”

You can access more information on UK student visas [here](#).

Notes to the editor:

- Please visit these links for more information on the [UK immigration system](#) or the [Graduation route](#).
- For further information on the new Student Route, please click [here](#).
- Click [here](#) to find out more about UK travel corridors or border restrictions due to COVID-19.
- For information related to re-start of UK visa operations across VFS Global Centres, please visit the [‘COVID-19 Customer Advisories’](#) page.

About VFS Global

VFS Global is the world's largest outsourcing and technology services specialist for governments and diplomatic missions worldwide. VFS Global has Swiss parentage and is a portfolio company of EQT, a leading global private equity firm headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden. With 3430 Application Centres, operations in 144 countries across five continents and over 225 million applications processed (since inception in 2001) as on 30 September 2020, VFS Global is the trusted partner of 64 client governments.

Media Contact

Sukanya Chakraborty
sukanyac@vfsglobal.com
communications@vfsglobal.com
