

MEDIA INFORMATION

INDIA, 02 September 2020

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

- Health precautions introduced throughout the visa application system, including the doorstep 'On Demand Mobile Visa' service available for student visa customers.
- UK Visas and Immigration has introduced greater flexibility in visa rules, allowing students to apply for visas when they are able to travel to the UK, rather than at the start of their studies.
- Students completing courses online will still be eligible to apply for the Graduate Route, provided they are in the UK by 06 April 2021.

As part of its commitment to enhance the visa system 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, especially incoming international students.

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 UK Visa Application Centres. To ensure health safety norms are followed, the centres have implemented a mandatory appointment system, besides checking body temperature of all customers at the entrance, and maintaining physical distancing measures. Additionally, staff also carry out preventive measures such as disinfecting high-contact surfaces, body temperature screenings, use of hand sanitisers, regular hand washing, etc.

Since 06 July 2020, UK Visa Application Centres have re-opened in 11 cities in India in a phased manner: Ahmedabad, Bengaluru (Global Tech Park only), Chandigarh, Chennai, Jalandhar, Kochi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai (Mahalaxmi only), New Delhi (Shivaji Metro Stadium only), and Pune – and these centres are receiving Tier 4 applications. All of the above locations are operational subject to local lockdown regulations.

Students who begin courses online can apply for visa later

To limit disruption caused by ongoing COVID-19 travel restrictions, UKVI is allowing incoming international students to apply for study (Tier 4) visa 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 and apply for a UK study visa when they are ready to do so.

New Graduate Immigration Route policy enhanced

The new Graduate Immigration Route that allows students who complete undergraduate or Master's degrees to stay and work, look for work, and gain experience in the UK for up to two years (three years for PhD students) from Summer 2021, has been modified to accommodate students who start their courses

overseas, online. These students will be eligible to apply for the Graduate Route, provided they are in the UK before 6 April 2021 and complete the final semester of their studies in the UK.

The Graduate Immigration Route policy was announced in September 2019 to help the UK attract and retain even more of the best international graduates from India, ensuring those graduates secure skilled jobs and contribute to the UK's economic growth.

In 2019/20, student visas from India were 4.5 times what they were in 2016

- According to data from UKVI, almost 50,000 student visas to the UK were granted to Indian nationals in the year ending March 2020. This was a 136% increase on the year ending March 2019.
- This increase was the largest number of grants to Indian students since the year ending September 2011.
- Globally, in the year ending March 2020, almost 300,000 student visas were granted (including dependents). This is a 23% increase on the year ending March 2019 and the highest level since the year ending June 2011.

David Ratcliffe, UK Visas and Immigration Regional Director, South and South East Asia said:

“Over the last few years we have seen a huge increase in the number of Indian students choosing the UK's world-class higher-education system as the destination for their studies. Despite the challenges of Corona-virus, we are confident that many thousands more will join their compatriots at university in the UK this autumn.

“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 autumn will be able to apply for 2 years additional post-study leave to kick start their career in the UK.”

‘On-Demand Mobile Visa’ to apply for a visa at your doorstep

All visa customers, including students, can also avail of the optional On-Demand Mobile Visa service* that enables them to submit their visa application and enrol biometrics from the comfort and safety of their home. Once a visa decision is reached, passports can be couriered to the customer's home. Customers in India can visit <https://www.vfsglobal.co.uk/in/en/premium-services/on-demand-mobile-visa> to book this service at attractive rates.

*Booking the On-Demand Mobile Visa does not guarantee quicker turnaround times or a positive decision on visas, that are at the sole discretion of UKVI.

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 reassure them of a safe and seamless visa application process, at our Centres or via the doorstep service.”

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 Immigration Route](#).
- 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 visa 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 3399 Application Centres, operations in 144 countries across five continents and over 224 million applications processed (since inception in 2001) as on 30 June 2020, VFS Global is the trusted partner of 64 client governments.

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