

News story: Twenty three universities join student visa pilot

A pilot which is looking at streamlining the process for international Masters students wanting to study in the UK has been extended to an additional 23 universities, the Immigration Minister announced today.

Currently in its 2nd year with the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Bath and Imperial College London, the pilot will streamline the process for international students looking to study on a Masters course of 13 months or less in the UK.

It also provides greater support for students who wish to switch to a work visa and take up a graduate role, by allowing them to remain in the UK for 6 months after they have finished their course.

Responsibility

Universities taking part are given responsibility for eligibility checks, meaning that students can submit fewer documents than required in the current process alongside their visa applications.

Applicants that do not meet immigration rules will be refused. All students will continue to require Home Office security and identity checks.

The additional 23 universities to benefit from the pilot include 2 in Scotland, 2 in Wales and 1 in Northern Ireland as well as universities from across England.

Immigration Minister Brandon Lewis said:

I am delighted to announce the expansion of this pilot which is part of our ongoing activity to ensure that our world-leading institutions remain highly competitive.

The UK continues to be the 2nd most popular destination for international students and the number coming to study at our universities has increased by 24% since 2010.

This is a clear indication that genuine students are welcome and there is no limit on the number who can come to study in the UK.

Increase

The most recent Home Office statistics show that the number of students applying for visas increased by 8% over the past year, and there has been a 9% increase in the number of students applying to Russell Group universities.

The 23 additional universities will be able to apply the pilot to their 2018/19 intake. The universities were selected as their visa refusal rates are consistently the lowest in their area or region.

The 23 universities to be added to the pilot are:

- Cardiff University
- Goldsmiths University of London
- Harper Adams University
- Newcastle University
- Queen's University Belfast
- The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
- University of Bristol
- Durham University
- University of East Anglia
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Essex
- University of Exeter
- University of Glasgow
- University of Leicester
- University of Liverpool
- University of Manchester
- University of Nottingham
- University of Reading
- University of Sheffield
- University of Southampton
- University of Wales Trinity St. David (Swansea Campus)
- University of Warwick
- University of York

Press release: Highways England is 'gearing up' to remove miles of roadworks in time for Christmas

Almost 400 miles of roadworks across England will be lifted and completed in December, leaving almost 99 per cent of motorways and strategic A roads roadworks-free in time for Christmas.

All roadworks will be lifted or completed by 6am on 22 December until 12.01am on 2 January to help people get away this Christmas with as little disruption as possible.

With the festive countdown well and truly underway, the UK's largest coach operator National Express, has praised Highways England for its role in helping people get to their destination on time.

Chris Hardy, National Express Coach Managing Director, said:

We'll be moving hundreds of thousands of passengers around the UK during the festive period, including on Christmas and Boxing Day when there are no rail services; and New Year's Day.

We work with Highways England round the year to support them in maintaining and improving the road network so that we can offer our customers a reliable and convenient service.

It's great that they've lifted road works during a busy time for travel, helping us to make sure we can get passengers where they want to be for Christmas.

And with thoughts turning to the all-important getaway, Highways England is also calling on motorists to do their bit before getting behind the wheel.

Highways England's customer service director, Melanie Clarke, said:

We're doing everything we can to make journeys as smooth as possible this Christmas and that's why we're keeping 99 per cent of the road network we manage, free from roadworks.

Safety is our top imperative and we know from experience that almost half of breakdowns are avoidable and these can easily be avoided with simple checks. Christmas is always a busy period on the road network and we'd urge all motorists to make sure they do their bit to check their vehicle is roadworthy before setting off over the festive period.

Highways England has also launched a special [festive animation](#) which shows Santa carrying out vital checks to his sleigh before embarking on the most important journey of the year – and he's got a little help from his festive friends including Rudolph!

Some of Santa's pre-flight checks include:

- checking that there is plenty of grip on his sledge – motorists should check their tyre tread to make sure it is within the legal limit
- making sure Rudolph's nose is shining bright – always make sure lights on the vehicle are working correctly before setting off
- making sure the reindeer are full of fuel before travelling – make sure that you always keep your tank at least one quarter full to avoid running out of fuel on your journey

The animation can be found online at the Highways England YouTube channel. Latest statistics from Highways England show almost half of all breakdowns are caused by basic mechanical problems which could be avoided with simple checks.

Furthermore, nearly a quarter are caused by tyre problems; with more than 7,000 cases nationwide of vehicle breakdowns on the strategic road network due to lack of fuel over the course of a year.

Motorists can head online to the Think website where they can watch bespoke videos showing how to carry out basic vehicle checks.

Those wishing to find out more about driving on smart motorways can [go to our webpage](#) for further information.

Drivers planning to use the Dartford Crossing are reminded to pay Dart Charge in advance or by midnight the day after crossing.

More information can be found on our website or by calling our information line (0300 123 5000) they can keep up to date with conditions on the roads.

For more detailed information on how to carry out your vehicle checks, search Think!

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[News story: VIDEO: A historic year at Sellafield.](#)

Huge strides are being made in the clean-up mission.

Highlights included cutting holes in the world's oldest nuclear store and bringing down the site's tallest chimney.

Thanks to our world-class workforce and supply chain for making 2017 a year to remember...

[Sellafield Ltd's achievements 2017](#)

News story: UK takes delivery of final F-35B Lightning this year

The UK has taken delivery of its 14th F-35B Lightning II which flew into Beaufort, South Carolina last week. Crown copyright.

Operated jointly by the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, the F-35 Lightning jets will be able to operate on land or embarked on the UK's new aircraft carriers. This delivery is a significant milestone for the Lightning Programme and in particular, alongside the formal commissioning of the HMS Queen Elizabeth Carrier into the Royal Navy earlier this month, demonstrates the advancement towards the establishment of the UK's Carrier Enabled Power Projection capability.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

This Christmas delivery is the 14th jet to join our fleet of fifth-generation F-35 fighters over in the US. The Carriers have taken centre-stage this year, and next year we look towards these aircraft joining us in Britain and taking off from HMS Queen Elizabeth's enormous deck to undertake First of Class Flight Trials. With our famous Royal Air Force coming into its 100th anniversary, the F-35 keeps us right at the cutting-edge of combat air power.

Peter Ruddock, Chief Executive of Lockheed Martin UK said:

There are more than 500 UK companies in our supply chain who play a vital role in producing every F-35 and we are proud to have delivered the UK's 14th aircraft on schedule. More than 260 F-35s are now flying from 14 bases around the world and we look forward to supporting the UK's Lightning Force, as they prepare to bring their F-35s to the UK and achieve initial operational capability next year.

There are currently some 200 British personnel based at Beaufort testing the aircraft and getting them ready to arrive in the UK next summer as 617 Squadron. Preparations are also being made for First of Class Flight Trials, due to take place on HMS Queen Elizabeth later next year. The programme is on schedule to achieve Initial Operating Capability from land next year with Initial Operating Capability Carrier Strike in 2020. In addition to its short take-off and vertical landing capability, the F-35B's unique combination of stealth, cutting-edge radar, sensor technology, and electronic warfare systems brings all of the access and lethality capabilities of a fifth-generation fighter.

The UK has taken delivery of its 14th F-35B Lightning II which flew into Beaufort, South Carolina last week. Crown copyright.

In 2018, the aircraft – along with the Navy and RAF pilots and ground crew – will arrive in the UK to officially stand up at RAF Marham in Norfolk. RAF Marham will be the Main Operating Base for the Lightning Force in the UK and from here, they will deploy forward to either embark on-board our Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carriers, or operate from Deployed Operating Bases.

Following successful trials on the land based ski-ramp design which is featured on the UK flagship, and with the RAF Marham runway infrastructure completed as part of a £250m major investment programme in preparation for the F-35 arrival, Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin earlier this year announced that the F-35 was cleared for take-off.

As the only level one partner on the F-35 programme, the UK has been working closely with the US from the outset. UK industry will provide approximately 15% by value of each F-35 to be built, which are due to total more than 3000 in number. The programme has already generated \$12.9Bn worth of orders for the UK and at peak production the programme will support over 24,000 jobs in the UK.

Some milestones reached on the F-35 programme this year include:

- 10% production milestone reached
- Runway resurfacing at RAF Marham complete
- F-35 is cleared for take-off from HMS Queen Elizabeth following successful land trials using the ski-ramp design
- Commanding Officer of 617 Sqn, Wing Commander John Butcher takes his first flight in an F-35B
- Delivery of 14th F-35

[Press release: Interim report into the Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety](#)

The Chair of an independent review into building regulations and fire safety has found that a “universal shift in culture” is required to rebuild trust amongst residents of high-rise buildings and significantly improve the way that fire safety is assured.

Dame Judith Hackitt, who was appointed by government to lead an Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety following the Grenfell fire, has [published her interim findings](#) today (18 December 2017).

Alongside her interim report, Dame Judith is calling on the construction industry, building owners, regulators and government to come together to address the 'shortcomings' identified so far.

The interim report finds that:

- a culture change is required – with industry taking greater responsibility for what is built – this change needs to start now
- the current system for ensuring fire safety in high-rise buildings is not fit for purpose
- a clear, quick and effective route for residents to raise concerns and be listened to, must be created

Chair of the review, Dame Judith Hackitt said:

I have found that the regulatory system for safely designing, constructing and managing buildings is not fit for purpose. The current system is highly complex and there is confusion about the roles and responsibilities at each stage. In many areas there is a lack of competence and accreditation.

While this does not mean all buildings are unsafe, it does mean we need to build a more effective system for the future. That is why I am today calling for the construction industry, building owners, regulators and government to come together to identify how to overcome these shortcomings together.

The [interim report](#) sets out 6 broad areas for change:

- ensuring that regulation and guidance is risk-based, proportionate and unambiguous
- clarifying roles and responsibilities for ensuring that buildings are safe
- improving levels of competence within the industry
- improving the process, compliance and enforcement of regulations
- creating a clear, quick and effective route for residents' voices to be heard and listened to
- improving testing, marketing and quality assurance of products used in construction

Dame Judith has consulted widely in developing her interim report and will continue to do so in the coming months before making her final recommendations.

She continued:

I have been deeply affected by the residents of high rise buildings I have met and I have learned so much from them. These buildings are their homes and their communities. They are proud of where they live, but their trust in the system has been badly shaken by events

of the last few months. We need to rebuild that trust.

The independent review will now undertake its second phase of work – including targeted work in partnership with the sector and other stakeholders.

A summit involving government and representatives from the building industry will take place in the New Year and a final report will be published in spring 2018.

See the [Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: interim report](#).

The 6 broad areas for change are outlined in summary from page 9 of the interim report and in greater detail from paragraph 1.6 on page 16.

Consultation

In producing her interim report, Dame Judith Hackitt has:

- issued a call for evidence which received more than 250 responses
- held a series of round-table discussions with industry representatives, professional bodies, tenants and landlords organisations and residents' groups
- held a series of bi-lateral discussions

About the Review

The Review was [commissioned in July 2017](#) and the [terms of reference](#) were published in August 2017.

It is reporting to the Communities Secretary Sajid Javid and the Home Secretary Amber Rudd and is examining:

- the regulatory system around the design, construction and on-going management of buildings in relation to fire safety
- related compliance and enforcement issues
- international regulation and experience in this area

The Review is complementary to the [Public Inquiry](#). It is forward looking and focused on ensuring a sufficiently robust regulatory system for the future and to provide further assurance to residents that the complete system is working to ensure the buildings they live in are safe and remain so. The work of the Review will be shared with the Inquiry team.

Short biography of Dame Judith Hackitt

Dame Judith was Chair of the Health and Safety Executive from October 2007 to March 2016. She previously served as a health and safety commissioner between 2002 and 2005.

She was made a Dame in the 2016 New Year Honours for services to health and

safety and engineering, and in particular for being a role model for young women. She was awarded a CBE in 2006.

In April 2016, she was appointed as Chair of EEF, The Manufacturers' Organisation.

Dame Judith is a chemical engineer and graduated from Imperial College in 1975. She worked in the chemicals manufacturing industry for 23 years before joining the Chemical Industries Association (CIA) in 1998. She became Director General of CIA (from 2002 to 2005) and then worked in Brussels for the European Chemical Industry Association (CEFIC).

She was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering in July 2010 and currently chairs the External Affairs Committee.

Dame Judith is a Fellow of the Institution of Chemical Engineers and a member of council. She was President of IChemE from May 2013 to May 2014.

Dame Judith is also Chair of Semta – the Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Alliance, and a non-executive director of the High Value Manufacturing Catapult.