

UKVI extend Optional Super Priority Visa service in India

Super Priority Visa is an optional paid service that customers in India can choose to purchase, in addition to the visa fee, to receive a faster decision time on their visa application. Customers who choose SPV will be able to receive a decision on their UK visa application by the end of the next working day. The standard processing time for UK visas is 15 working days, which does not include evenings or weekends. Customers can also choose the Priority visa service to receive a decision within five working days.

The eight new locations, in addition to Delhi, that Indians can apply for SPV from are Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai (South) and Pune. This is valid for the following UK visa categories:

- Visitor and Transit visas
- Skilled Worker visas
- Temporary Worker visas (T5)
- Student visas

All customers travelling to UK during the pandemic should be aware of the current border, quarantine and testing regulations in place.

Further information

For information on the Super Priority Visa, visit the [VFS web page](#).

For information on UKVI processing times, see [Visa decision waiting times: applications outside the UK](#).

For information on the UK's current border, quarantine and COVID-19 testing regulations, see [guidance on entering the UK](#).

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Consultation launches on interim licences for releasing gamebirds

Defra has launched a three-week consultation today (23 February) to determine details of the new interim licensing regime ahead of the 2021 release of gamebirds on and around protected sites in England.

The consultation will seek views on the introduction of a general licence for gamebird releases on Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and within a 500m buffer zone to minimise the negative impact this activity can have on these protected sites. The consultation sets out the proposed gamebird general licence scope and conditions and seeks views on their efficacy and practicality. The consultation also provides the opportunity to share any alternative measures which could be effectively put in place ahead of the 2021 shooting season.

The proposed interim licensing regime has been developed in response to a Defra commissioned review which considered the impacts of the release of the Common Pheasant and Red-Legged Partridge on and around SACs and SPAs and whether these could be managed better given the legal need to protect these sites from significant harm.

Environment Secretary, George Eustice, said:

We are committed to developing an interim licensing regime which is effective, practical and proportionate for users, while providing the necessary protections for habitats.

The findings of this consultation will help us shape the interim gamebird release licensing regime and inform our longer-term direction of travel. We urge any relevant parties or local authorities to share their views.

The deadline for responses is 15 March 2021, respondents can submit their consultation response using the online survey provided on [Citizen Space](#).

What to do if you release gamebirds on or around SAC or SPA protected sites

The new interim licensing regime will be in place in time for the 2021 gamebird releases. The detail of this will be informed by this consultation.

The Gamebird Release Review team can be contacted on GLTeam@defra.gov.uk for further information.

The introduction of an interim licensing regime

The new licensing regime is an interim measure that will be in place in time for the 2021 releases of common pheasant and red-legged partridge within SACs

and SPAs and within a 500m buffer zone around the sites. The proposal is that this will then remain in place for 3 years, with a review after 2 years should it be appropriate to stop earlier.

The duration of the interim licensing regime will be determined by the time taken to ensure a sufficiently robust means of understanding and managing the impact of gamebird release on or around SACs and SPAs in light of the latest evidence.

Defra is keen to ensure an effective, practical and proportionate interim regime.

The preferred option set out in the consultation document is for a general licence for releases on the vast majority of SACs and SPAs. General licences do not require an application to be made and there is no fee.

General licences set out conditions that must be complied with in order to rely on the licence. The licence to be introduced in respect of releases of common pheasant and red-legged partridge is likely to have conditions relating to the number of birds, density of release and associated activities. This is because the evidence is that effects are significantly reduced where birds are released in smaller numbers and at lower densities. However, the precise thresholds for any conditions are subject to further consideration and consultation.

The intention is that where shoots cannot meet the conditions of the general licence, they will have the option to apply to NE for an individual, bespoke licence, a process which enables the impacts on the specific protected sites in question to be considered. It is proposed that individual licences would also be required for releases on certain named protected sites listed in the consultation document where existing issues are known to exist.

Defra is mindful of the potential impact on the shooting industry and is working to maximise certainty ahead of the introduction of the interim regime in time for the key decision points.

Apply to the Attorney General's Civil Panel Counsel – London A, B and C Panels

The Attorney General is seeking to appoint new members to three of her panels of junior counsel, the London A, B and C panels, to undertake civil work for government departments.

Membership of the London panels is open to both barristers and solicitors

with the appropriate qualifications.

The London A, B and C panels

London A Panel

Members of this panel deal with the most complex government cases in all kinds of courts and tribunals including the Supreme Court. They will often appear against QC's. Those previously appointed to the A panel have generally had in excess of 10 years advocacy experience in actual practice (from end of 2nd six months' pupillage for barristers, date of commencement of advocacy for solicitors).

London B Panel

Members of this panel deal with substantial cases but not in general as complex as those handled by the A panel. They will generally be instructed where knowledge and experience of a particular field is required. Those previously appointed to the B panel have generally had between 5 and 10 years advocacy experience in actual practice (from end of 2nd six months' pupillage for barristers, date of commencement of advocacy for solicitors).

London C Panel

Members of this panel will be expected to have at least two years' experience in actual practice (from end of 2nd six months' pupillage for barristers, date of commencement of advocacy for solicitors). Those appointed to the C panel will often (but not exclusively) provide the A and B panel members of the future and so should have the potential to join the A panel.

In choosing which of the panels to apply to, candidates will want to make a careful decision based on which best suits their level of expertise and experience.

Appointments will be for five years.

Experience and specialisms

As is the case every year, the Attorney General is looking for applicants with experience in general public and administrative law; employment; or personal injury. For the 2021 exercise, the Attorney is also looking to deepen the capacity of the panels by appointing specialists in the following areas:

- Admiralty – Maritime/Shipping
- Charity/Trust
- Clinical negligence
- Competition and State Aid
- Construction
- Contract / Commercial Law
- Corporate

- Costs (including routine &/or mass group litigation experience)
- Data Protection
- Defamation
- Directors' Disqualification
- Education, including teacher regulation proceedings
- Energy/Utilities
- Environmental Law
- Equality and Discrimination
- EU Law
- Extradition
- Family and Public Children's Law
- General Tax Work – Direct and Indirect, Personal and Business
- Human Rights
- Industrial Diseases
- Industrial Relations
- Inquests
- Insolvency
- Intellectual Property
- International Arbitration
- Land and Planning/Environmental
- Mental Health/Mental Health Capacity Act 2005
- Pensions
- Planning (including Environmental Impact expertise)
- Procurement
- Property (including Landlord and Tenant)
- Rating and Valuation
- Social Security, including free movement, social justice and statutory payments
- State Aid
- Trade expertise, International Trade
- VAT and Duties

The Attorney General is also looking to appoint applicants capable of advising departments on the interface of public and commercial law issues, and also where criminal or regulatory issues arise in public law cases.

Application

To obtain details about the application process, we recommend reading our [Information for candidates](#) (MS Word Document, 57.7KB) and [Frequently Asked Questions](#) (MS Word Document, 60.9KB).

To make an application, please email panelcounsel@governmentlegal.gov.uk and register an interest in applying. Please note that registering an interest does not commit you to making an application if you later decide not to do so.

Once you have registered, you will be provided with a link to access our online portal to obtain the full application pack.

Completed applications must be submitted by noon on Thursday 8 April 2021.

We will be hosting a virtual recruitment seminar to be held via Zoom on Tuesday 9 March in the evening for anyone considering applying this spring. Please see the attached [Flyer](#) (MS Word Document, 57.5KB) for more information.

Further information and mentoring

If you have any queries, please feel free to raise them in the first instance with the Government Legal Department Panel Counsel Secretariat via email panelcounsel@governmentlegal.gov.uk

We wish to encourage applications from as wide a range as possible of those eligible to apply. We will therefore endeavour to put advocates who are considering applying and who want to discuss the application process in touch with an established Panel member. The mentor will discuss either by telephone or in a meeting the application process, the eligibility criteria and the presentation of relevant information on the application form.

If you are considering applying and want a mentor please contact the Panel Counsel Secretariat via email:

panelcounsel@governmentlegal.gov.uk on or before Friday 12 March 2021.

VAT Deferral New Payment Scheme – online service opens

Over half a million businesses that deferred VAT payments last year can now join the new [online VAT Deferral New Payment Scheme](#) to pay it in smaller monthly instalments, HMRC announced today (23 February 2021).

In order to take advantage of the new payment scheme businesses will need to have deferred VAT payments between March and June 2020 under the VAT Payment Deferral Scheme. They will now be given the option to pay their deferred VAT in equal consecutive monthly instalments from March 2021.

Businesses will need to opt-in to the VAT Deferral New Payment Scheme. They can do this via the online service that opens on 23 February 2021 and closes on 21 June 2021.

Jesse Norman, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, said:

The government has provided a package of support worth over £280 billion during the pandemic to help protect millions of jobs and businesses.

This now includes the VAT Deferral New Payment Scheme, which will help provide businesses with the breathing space they may need to manage their cashflows in the weeks and months ahead.

The new payment scheme is part of a wider government package of support, worth more than £280 billion, which is helping to protect millions of jobs and businesses. So far, around £34 billion has been injected into the UK economy following the half a million businesses that deferred their VAT payment last year.

The new payment scheme will continue to help the economy recover by enabling businesses, impacted by the pandemic, to manage their business cash flow at a critical time.

Businesses can spread their payments with 2 to 11 equal monthly instalments, interest free. Payments can start from March 2021, and the earlier businesses opt-in, the more instalments are available to help spread the cost and provide further support.

Eligible businesses that are unable to use our online services can ring the HMRC Coronavirus Helpline on 0800 024 1222 to join the scheme until 30 June 2021.

The scheme is open to businesses that deferred VAT due from 20 March to 30 June 2020 (under the VAT Payment Deferral Scheme) and still have payments to make.

They can:

- pay the deferred VAT in full, on or before 31 March 2021
- opt-in to the VAT Deferral New Payment Scheme online between 23 February and 21 June 2021
- contact HMRC by 30 June 2021 if they need to agree extra help to pay

You can pay your deferred VAT in 2 to 11 consecutive instalments starting in March, April, May or June 2021, without adding interest.

Those joining online are able to set up direct debit payments. The joining date is slightly longer for those unable to use our online services due to the way payments are processed.

You can find details of [what businesses must do before they opt-in](#).

If you [need extra help to pay](#) and have not contacted HMRC by 30 June 2021, you may be charged interest or a penalty.

The VAT Deferral New Payment scheme will require a direct debit to be set up as part of the digital opt-in process and this must be done by the authorised bank account holder. Because of that, HMRC is unable to provide an agent service for the scheme.

Details of the [VAT Deferral New Payment Scheme and its operation are](#)

[available on GOV.UK](#) to allow agents to appropriately advise and support their clients both prior to and during the opt-in process.

The HMRC Coronavirus Helpline 0800 024 1222 is open 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday, except bank holidays.

More information is available about the [VAT Deferral New Payment Scheme](#), including further detail for people who are unable to opt-in online and what to do if you are a Payment on Account or an Annual Accounting customer.

The VAT Deferral New Payment Scheme was [announced by the Chancellor in the Winter Economy Plan](#).

Over half a million [businesses have deferred their VAT payments](#).

The government has invested more than £280 billion throughout the pandemic to protect millions of jobs and businesses. You can find a [summary of existing economic support on GOV.UK](#).

Follow the [National Cyber Security Centre's 6 essential steps to keep yourself and your business secure](#).

[**New homes boost as Government steps in to acquire two sites in Harrogate**](#)

Both sites will have provision for 40% much needed affordable homes, helping to meet demand in the area. The developments will offer an opportunity to bring forward housing in an area with high affordability pressures and will help meet local housing needs.

In Ripon, a 23 ha site, known as West Lane, has outline planning consent for 390 new homes which will include 156 affordable homes. It was allocated in the adopted Local Plan in March 2020.

The 28 ha Bluecoat Park site In Harrogate is also allocated in the local plan. It currently has an outline planning permission for 450 new homes which is due to expire this month and Homes England intends to submit a new planning application later this year.

Both sites have stalled for various reasons, including the associated enabling costs and planning permissions which are due to lapse imminently. The Government's intervention will see these issues resolved and the delivery of homes that would not otherwise have come forward.

These acquisitions further highlight Homes England's commitment to the area, following the planning submission in September for the redevelopment of Ripon Barracks for up to 1,300 homes as well as local infrastructure including a

primary school, sports pitches, a dedicated employment zone and local retail facilities.

Homes England will continue to work with the local authority as well as other local stakeholders on its plans for both sites over the coming months.

Housing Minister Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP said:

“This is fantastic news for Harrogate and a realisation of this Government’s mission to deliver quality, affordable homes, that are fit for future generations.

“I look forward to seeing the plans these communities develop take shape over the coming months.”

Stephen Kinsella, Chief Land and Development Officer, Homes England said:

“By purchasing these two sites, we’re once again showing our commitment to step in, unlock land and get new homes built where they are most needed. Following unsuccessful attempts by the market to deliver these sites, our intervention means these homes will be delivered sooner and with high standards of design.

“We have a strong relationship with Harrogate Borough Council, and we look forward to working with them on our plans for the two sites.”

Trevor Watson, director of economy and culture, Harrogate Borough Council, said:

“We welcome Homes England’s involvement in seeking to bring forward and unlock these stalled sites.

“They are important in helping to deliver our strategic objective to provide new homes that meet the needs of the district.”