

Call for evidence: An inspection of UKVI's 'Front End Services'

News story

The Independent Chief Inspector invites anyone with knowledge and experience of UKVI's 'Front End Services' to submit their evidence for his forthcoming inspection.



Launching the call for evidence, the Independent Chief Inspector, David Bolt said:

UKVI's 'Front End Services' (FES) are intended to provide individuals wishing to submit a UK visa or citizenship application with a readily-accessible, easy-to-use means of making their application. My inspection will examine whether the FES currently available in the UK and overseas are achieving this and, more broadly, whether they are meeting the needs of applicants.

I am keen to hear from anyone with direct experience of the services provided to applicants by the Home Office and by its commercial partners, including examples of what worked well, what did not work and why, and what improvements you would like to see.

For applications made in the UK and overseas, I am particularly interested in:

- how accessible and easy to use was:
 - the online visa application form
 - the payment system for the visa application
 - the booking system for an appointment to submit biometrics
 - the process for submitting documentary evidence
 - any additional services offered by UKVI or the commercial partner

- the “customer experience” when attending appointments at a UK or overseas application centre, including the handling of any customer complaints
- the clarity of guidance and instructions provided by the Home Office and by FES providers to assist individuals making an application, and the availability and usefulness of advice and support, including from customer contact centres
- whether applicants needed to seek advice and support from third parties (for example legal advisors, NGOs, MPs) in order to navigate the application process and with what results

I am also particularly interested to hear about the experiences of individuals who are vulnerable and require enhanced support in booking and attending appointments and in submitting applications and whether their needs are being met. Pending the response to this call for evidence and further discussions with the Home Office, the scope of this inspection is not finalised and I would be pleased to receive suggestions about any areas that applicants or stakeholder groups feel should be included in addition to those mentioned above.

Please note: My statutory remit does not extend to investigating or making decisions about individual applications. This remains a Home Office responsibility. But I am able and do take an interest in individual cases to the extent that they illustrate or point to systemic problems. The deadline for contributions is 1st October 2020. If you will have difficulty responding by this date but would like to contribute, please contact the inspection team via email: FES@icibi.gov.uk.

How to respond

Please click [here](#) to email your submission to the Chief Inspector by 1st October 2020.

Please note:

In accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) we need your permission to process and retain the information you submit in your submission, by clicking [here](#) a consent statement will automatically be added to your email.

However if you are using a non-compatible email client then please send your submission to FES@icibi.gov.uk with ‘ Front End Services evidence submission’ in the subject line and include the following consent statement in the body

of your email, 'I consent to the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration retaining and processing the information and data in this email.'

Please do not include this statement if you do not wish to give your consent. The information you submit may be quoted in the final inspection report, but it is the ICIBI's practice not to name sources and to anonymise as much as possible any examples or case studies.

Published 3 September 2020

New Lighthouse Lab to boost NHS Test and Trace capacity

- NHS Test and Trace continues to reach the majority of those testing positive and their contacts in week 13 of operation
- Brand new large-scale technology to increase the number of tests that NHS and Lighthouse Labs can process is being introduced

A new Lighthouse Lab near Loughborough will join Britain's largest network of diagnostic testing facilities in history to increase coronavirus testing capacity.

The new lab will be brought into the lab network this month and will be able to process around 50,000 tests per day by the end of the year.

This comes as the weekly statistics from NHS Test and Trace show that the service continues to reach the majority of those testing positive and their contacts, in week 13 reaching 80% of contacts where contact information was available.

Demand for testing continues to rise, with those tested for the first time increasing by 63% since mid-June.

The new lab is part of plans to scale up testing capacity to 500,000 swab tests per day by the end October. There is currently capacity for 350,000 tests each day in the UK, across all 4 testing pillars including antibody tests and surveillance studies. The growth in demand means that existing capacity for pillar 2 swab tests is being fully utilised and in line with existing plans, the capacity is being quickly expanded.

Alongside increased Lighthouse Lab capacity, brand new large-scale processing units are being rolled out for use across both NHS and Lighthouse Labs.

Today £500 million has been announced to increase capacity and roll out new cutting-edge testing technology to deliver rapid tests. Chains of transmission will be broken almost immediately by delivering on-the-spot results. Successful trials will then be expanded and rolled out further, with new tests being used in Salford, Southampton and Hampshire over the coming weeks.

NHS Test and Trace continues to focus efforts to uplift testing by working closely with local authorities and communities where there is high prevalence of the virus.

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Public Health, Baroness Dido Harding, said:

NHS Test and Trace has been operating for more than 3 months and during that time it has consistently reached the majority of those testing positive and their contacts, almost 330,000 people at risk of unknowingly passing the virus on.

As the service has become part of our everyday lives, demand for testing has increased. To meet this, we continue our efforts to build and scale testing capacity to reach 500,000 tests per day by the end of October by making use of new tests, new labs and new technology.

Thanks to all the people who have come forward for a free test, and the vital work of local teams around the country making sure people are aware of testing we are breaking chains of transmission. The advice remains the same: if you have symptoms of coronavirus get tested and if you are contacted by NHS Test and Trace, follow the advice you receive.

From this week, the new equipment which will boost processing capacity for each lab beyond 100,000 tests a day will be trialled in the Milton Keynes Lighthouse Lab. The technology will allow labs to process a higher number of test samples simultaneously, reduce costs, and will be able to process saliva-based tests being piloted in Southampton and Salford announced today.

Increased lab capacity across the country will help to further improve test turnaround times while meeting additional demand, with this week's NHS Test and Trace statistics showing that 84.3% of in-person test results already being returned the day after a test was taken. The median average time it takes for a test result to be returned from a drive-through or walk-through test site is now only 24 hours, or 22 hours at a mobile testing unit.

Since launching in May, the service has reached almost 330,000 people at risk of unknowingly passing the virus on, significantly curbing the spread of coronavirus in England.

These figures demonstrate that NHS Test and Trace continues to perform well against international contact tracing standards.

[Statistics from the 13th week of operation of NHS Test and Trace](#) (20 to 26 August) show that since the service launched:

- 327,927 people have been reached by the service. This includes both those testing positive and their contacts
- 79.7% of all contacts identified were reached, which increases to 87.7% for those we had contact information for
- 78.5% of people testing positive and transferred to the contact tracing system were reached since launch
- 4,833,347 people have been newly tested under pillars 1 and 2

In the latest week (20 to 26 August):

- 81.4% of people testing positive and transferred to the contact tracing system were reached
- 80.0% of contacts we had information for were reached
- 452,679 people have been newly tested under pillars 1 and 2

New testing technology is being supplied by LGC to Milton Keynes Lighthouse Lab. Each LGC machine is able to process up to 150,000 tests per day, at reduced cost and speed.

[UK Youth Mobility Scheme 2020 for Hong Kong SAR passport holders: second ballot](#)



The UK/Hong Kong Youth Mobility Scheme is now in its seventh year and allows young people aged between 18 and 30 to live, work or study in the United Kingdom for up to 2 years. The second ballot for the Youth Mobility Scheme 2020 for Hong Kong SAR passport holders will launch in September. Unlike previous years the selection criteria has changed to a lottery based system managed by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). There will no longer be the requirement to provide a Certificate of Sponsorship.

This year there are 1,000 places in total available to HKSAR passport holders. The majority of places were allocated in first ballot which took place earlier in the year while the second ballot will be opened for the remainder of places. If your application is successful you will be able to live, work and study in the UK for up to 2 years.

How to apply

If you would like to apply for the scheme you should send one email per applicant to: hongkongyms2020.ballotrequest@FCO.gov.uk between midday (12pm) on Monday 21 September 2020 to midday on Wednesday 23 September 2020 (Hong Kong Time).

The header or subject line of your email must contain your name, date of birth (DD/MM/YYYY) and passport number as shown in your passport.

This must be written in English only.

For example: WONG Janet – 31/01/1985 – Passport123456789.

In the main text of your email you should include the following and must be written in English:

- Name:
- Date of birth:
- Passport Number:
- Mobile phone number:

The email account will be open for 48 hours only and all emails received within this timeframe will be sent an automated reply confirming receipt. When the ballot has closed, the remaining amount of applicants will be chosen at random by UKVI. If you have been successful a second email will be sent to

you by 30 September to confirm acceptance and provide further instructions on how to make an appointment, along with documentary evidence required to apply for your entry clearance.

Please note successful applicants must prepare online applications and online credit card payments no later than 30 October 2020. Failure to submit your payment online by this date will automatically remove your name from the list and your allocation will be retracted. After you have paid on-line you have 90 days to submit your paperwork for consideration.

If you are a Hong Kong SAR passport holders living overseas you can also apply following the instructions above, and if you are chosen to apply you will be able to do so in your country/territory of residence. Applications cannot be submitted for the Youth Mobility Scheme 2020 in the UK. An email will be sent to unsuccessful applicants by 30 September to inform them they have not been chosen this year and that no further action is required. Further information about the Scheme [can be found on Gov.uk](#) and any enquiries relating to the application process, online application forms and questions in general should be directed to the [UKVI International Enquiry Line](#).

Further information

British National (Overseas) passport holders are already eligible to apply for a visa under the Youth Mobility Scheme to the UK and are not subject to any quota or sponsorship requirements.

Published 3 September 2020

Last updated 21 September 2020 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 21 September 2020

Added translation

2. 18 September 2020

Due to technical difficulties we have updated the email address for applicants to ensure their applications for the second ballot can reach us.

3. 3 September 2020

Added translation

[Announcement of extension to a public](#)

appointee

News story

The Secretary of State has announced the extension to Dame Anne Owers' tenure as National Chair of the Independent Monitoring Boards.



The Secretary of State has announced a short extension to Dame Anne Owers' tenure as National Chair of the Independent Monitoring Boards from 1 November 2020 until 31 May 2021.

Extensions are regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, and have been made in line with the Governance Code on Public Appointments.

Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs) provide statutory, independent oversight, monitoring the treatment and care of prisoners and detainees. They operate in prisons, young offender institutions, immigration removal centres, some short-term holding facilities and on flights for those being removed from the UK.

Biography

Dame Anne Owers was appointed as the first National Chair of the Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs) in November 2017.

Dame Anne was the Chair of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), (now the Independent Office for Police Conduct) from 2012 to 2017. She was Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons between 2001 and 2010 and chaired a review of prisons in Northern Ireland from 2010 to 2011.

Prior to that she was the Director of Justice, the UK human rights and law reform organisation (1992-2001) and General Secretary of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (1986-1992).

She currently chairs Koestler Arts, the prison arts charity. She was also a member of the advisory group to the Lammy review of race and criminal justice.

Counter-drone tech and state-of-the-art radar for the RAF

The new contract will secure over 600 jobs and make sure the UK remains at the forefront of radar technology development.

The RAF is also one step closer in bringing its ORCUS technology into force, which can jam radio signals from drones and has already been successfully deployed during drone sightings at airports.

Confirming the news at the Defence Procurement, Research, Technology & Exportability (DPRTE) 2020 event, the Minister, said:

It is vital that our Armed Forces are equipped with the latest technology to counter emerging threats from our adversaries.

Today we announce the investment in the latest in radar technology for our fighter jets and pioneering new defence systems to counter threats from drones. This demonstrates our commitment to maintaining security in the air whilst supporting highly-skilled jobs across the UK.

Typhoon radar

The new Typhoon radar investment will ensure the aircraft are equipped with world-class technology. Crown copyright.

Typhoon aircraft will be equipped with next-generation radar thanks to £317 million investment that will allow it to locate, identify and suppress enemy air defences using high-powered jamming.

The integration of the new European Common Radar System (ECRS) Mk2, which is based on Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) technology, will provide a capability edge in the increasingly contested battlespace.

Currently fitted with mechanically-scanning radar, the Typhoon is designed to be continuously upgraded to meet operational demand no matter the challenge or threat. The ECRS Mk2 will allow the aircraft to simultaneously detect, identify and track multiple targets in the air and on the ground in the most challenging environments.

Planned to be in service by the mid-2020s, the radar development programme will sustain hundreds of highly skilled jobs, including more than 300 at Leonardo's Edinburgh site and 100 at their Luton site; 120 at BAE Systems' site in Lancashire and 100 at their site in Dunfermline, Fife; and 50 at sub-contractor Meggitt in Stevenage.

Counter-drone technology

ORCUS counter-drone technology is part of the RAF's SYNERGIA research and development programme. Crown copyright.

The Royal Air Force's SYNERGIA counter-drone research and development programme has reached a significant milestone with the ORCUS counter-drone capability achieving initial operating capability (IOC). IOC was achieved after ORCUS completed successful testing of a full range of integrated detect, track, ID, and defeat technologies.

Vital to protecting UK air bases from hostile drone activity, ORCUS will enable the RAF to evaluate a range of capabilities including advanced radar, electro-optic and radio frequency sensors, plus an electronic attack countermeasure. The device looks similar to a camera module placed on top of a tripod, allowing for unparalleled versatility in operations.

The technology is part of the RAF's Counter-Unmanned Aerial System (C-UAS) research and development programme with Leonardo to establish the most effective way to detect, track, identify and defeat hostile drones.

Elements of Leonardo's C-UAS equipment played a supporting role in RAF Force Protection in 2018 and 2019, following drone sightings at Gatwick and Heathrow airports, allowing airport operations to resume.

The current phase of the programme, which started in 2019, supports more than 50 highly skilled jobs with over 20 at Leonardo, with the primary integration work undertaken at its Basildon and Southampton sites and real-time testing taking place at several MOD locations within the UK.