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Dear Mr Valdez-Symonds

Thank you for your email correspondence of 4 June to the Home Office Minister for Future Borders and Immigration about your concerns regarding the replacement of physical immigration documentation with online digital status. Please note you are receiving a reply from an official.

The Home Office is developing a border and immigration system which is digital by default, which means we will increasingly replace physical and paper-based products and services with accessible, easy to use online and digital services. Our ambition is to have physical documents replaced by access to online evidence of immigration status by the end of 2024. This change is being rolled out incrementally and we will continue to take into consideration the particular characteristics of cohorts as we do so, to ensure no one is left behind as we move to a digital system.

Our approach reflects the way in which people increasingly live their lives and it mirrors the process adopted by other countries in administering their immigration systems, as it is more secure and provides more up to date information than reliance on physical documents. Many people already use digital services, for example to access banking, claim benefits or pay their taxes. As you are aware, our digital journey began with those applying to the EU Settlement Scheme. As part of the development of that scheme, including the policy to provide EEA applicants with online evidence of immigration status instead of a physical document, consideration was given to the impact of the policy for those who may have limited digital skills or access to IT equipment. The Policy Equality Statement for the scheme can be found here: [Policy equality statement: EU Settlement Scheme \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). An updated Equality Impact Assessment on the move to digital more broadly will be published shortly and will continue to be updated as the policy is implemented. Since the launch of the scheme, we have continued to assess the needs of users, and to take steps to ensure those who may be less able to interact digitally are not disadvantaged.

Applicants will continue to receive written notice of the grant of immigration status and any of the conditions attached to that grant, which they can retain for their own records and for use when contacting the Home Office.

A person whose leave is cancelled must be notified of this decision and the move to digital status will not change this requirement. The notice must be sent to the person's correspondence address, where available, which at present may be an email or postal address depending on circumstances, and will explain the reasons for the decision.

The online service for updating details will make it easier for people to let the Home Office know if any of their contact details change, to ensure that such notices are sent to the correct address.

On receipt of any such notice, the individual can contact the Home Office if they believe an error has been made in their status. Individuals are also provided with details of the dedicated UKVI Resolution Centre, which they can contact if any of the details on their online immigration status appear to be incorrect. The Resolution Centre can investigate and resolve any technical or data issues, and where necessary, enable account holders' status to be verified through alternative means while any issues are resolved.

The Resolution Centre is also able to provide additional support to those who are less digitally confident or who may require further assistance. Call operators can support users through the online journey, help them to update their personal details and where necessary, share status on their behalf if they are unable to do so themselves. The Resolution Centre can also help them to access or recover their online account, including where a third party has access to a person's account and the user needs to regain control of it. Trained call handlers will complete the necessary security authentication steps over the phone in order to be certain that the person they are speaking to is who they say they are. This process does not require the caller to have access to particular documents. Once authentication is complete, the call handler will arrange for the log in details to be manually reset with the new credentials provided by the caller. This is in contrast to the current position for physical documents, where if a document needs to be updated or replaced, including where it has been retained by a third party, the individual must make an application, pay a fee and then wait for a replacement document to be issued.

Support and guidance are also available to third parties, such as employers and landlords when conducting online checks, and feedback during the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that checking organisations welcome the ability to check immigration status remotely, without physical documents needing to change hands.

We are also taking steps to reduce the number of circumstances where individuals need to provide evidence of their immigration status. This includes the development of services to make the relevant immigration status information available automatically through system to system checks with other Government departments and the NHS. This will mean that at the point at which a person seeks to access public services such as NHS healthcare and DWP benefits, that service provider will check status directly with the Home Office, removing the need for the individual to prove their status. Currently, this includes services with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and NHS England and Wales.

Immigration decisions - and the rights and conditions that flow from those decisions - have been recorded digitally by the Home Office since the turn of the century, and maintaining digital records of immigration status is not a new concept.

The following safeguards are in place to protect Home Office data from accidental or deliberate loss:

- the data in the central repository for immigration data is copied across three different data centres, which prevents any loss of data in the event of a catastrophic failure to one of those data centres. As a further precaution, the data is also copied across the Home Office cloud service provider's regions which prevents any loss of data in the event of a catastrophic failure to an entire region
- data is modelled in such a way that allows accidental deletions to be undone and a full audit maintained to allow a rollback due to accidental corruption
- frequent backups of immigration data are carried out to act as a point in time snapshot, if there is ever a need to refer back in time
- robust security controls are in place to protect migrant data against unauthorised access and only those that need access to perform their job are granted such access. Security and background checks are performed on all staff in these roles to further mitigate the risk that there may be a deliberate attempt to corrupt or delete the data.

We have designed our digital services to be highly resilient, with rigorous testing to build assurance, and deployed across multiple data centres. This ensures customer data is backed up across those data centres, meaning that if one fails, another will take over, maintaining continuity of service. Services and their constituent parts are also proactively monitored for failures, which will highlight any potential problems to allow support teams to triage and resolve as quickly as possible. Service outages and disruptions are rare, and when they do occur teams work to resolve them as quickly as possible. However, the Resolution Centre is also available to assist users who do experience any issues when using the online services.

Unlike the Windrush generation, whose immigration status was automatically conferred on them by an Act of Parliament, but with no record made or taken of it, successful applicants under the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) have secure online evidence of their status which cannot be lost or stolen, and written notification setting out their immigration status, which is able to be retained for their own records. We believe that the safeguards and support we have put in place ensure that individuals are not disadvantaged by the move to a system that is digital by default, and instead provide greater control and transparency on the data relating to an individual's immigration status.

I hope you will be reassured that the Government is committed to delivering a digital service which is safe and secure and allows everyone to use it effectively.

Yours sincerely

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