Title of the OPI

OPI 593 – Overseas Customer Service Standards (this OPI replaces OPI 503)

Summary of the OPI

Overseas Customer Service Standards and instructions on how non-straightforward ('complex') cases should be identified and recorded on Proviso.

- Clarification of terminology to be used – cases are either non-straightforward or straightforward.

- Updated instructions on how to identify non-straightforward cases, to ensure that they can be recognised separately when central statistics are compiled.

- Examples of non-straightforward cases and how these should be recorded in Proviso to support the reporting process.

Main text of the OPI

In late 2013, UK Visas and Immigration developed new customer service standards (CSS). The CSS that relate to the Entry Clearance operation are below. The requirement is to process 100% of applications within these target times or to inform the applicant that it is unlikely that the service standard will be met because their application is non-straightforward and requires additional activity (such as certain types of enrichment or referral).

Customer service standard 1	
Overseas customers applying to come to the UK on a temporary basis including visitors, T1 HSM, T2 skilled workers, T5 temporary workers and T4 students.	15 working days
Customer service standard 2	
Overseas customers applying to enter the UK as the dependent of someone settled here.	60 working days

The service standards were published in January 2014. UKVI International Decision Making Centres (DMCs) must aim to deal with 100% of all applications in line with the service standard times for standards 1 and 2 above.

- <Redacted>

Straightforward applications, even where routine enrichment is required <Redacted> will be expected to meet service standards. Internal workflow and processes must be managed to ensure that any additional activity is completed in time to allow the application to be decided (including printing and despatch) and available for collection within service standard.

Non-straightforward applications – where it is likely that a decision cannot be made within service standards because of certain enrichment activities (<Redacted>) or referral - must be recorded as 'complex' in Proviso. Complex cases must still be decided and despatched as soon as possible. Complex cases should normally be decided within 120 working days.

An application can be defined as non-straightforward and should be marked as 'complex' when:

- **The required enrichment activity cannot be completed** within CSS timelines. This will normally be where information is required from third parties, and so the timescale for a response is not under the DMC's control. Such checks must be essential to the decision. This includes:

  - ➢ <Redacted>

  - NHS support unit – e.g. concerns that applicant / sponsor may have accessed NHS care to which they were not entitled or have links to known NHS abuse.

  - Safeguarding contact – e.g. concerns for a child applicant's welfare under Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009.

  - Forced Marriages Unit – e.g. information received that applicant or sponsor is a victim of forced marriage.

  - <Redacted>

  - Where current policy is unclear, and referral is required to the relevant policy unit to clarify policy to enable the application to be properly considered.

- **The ECO is awaiting information/documentation from the customer** that was not supplied with the initial application and the delay in receiving the information or making the decision is out of the DMC's control – for example known disruption to local postal services, local natural disaster etc (i.e. not where the request for the information had been left too late).

- **It is "blocked"** – this will always be for reasons outside the control of the DMC. This should be for a legitimate and recognisable reason, for example awaiting the outcome of litigation, or an intelligence-led operation etc – and so typically affects a cohort of cases.

What action to take when an application is non-straightforward ('complex')

- When it becomes clear that service standards will be breached for one of the reasons above, DMCs must mark the case as 'complex' on Proviso and contact the customer (see below).

- Applications may sometimes be designated as complex at a later point in the process, for example where the ECO deciding the application requests further information from the applicant where denunciatory information has been received and the ECO decides to interview the applicant. However, once an application has been designated as complex it cannot be subsequently re-designated as straightforward.

- DMCs must also write to the customer to advise that their case is not straightforward and it is likely that it will not be decided within the relevant customer service standard. Suggested text for an email/letter to applicants is attached at Annex A. This can be tailored by regions. The communication lead or other appropriate colleagues in region should review the templates to ensure that they are accurate and tone is appropriate. The template may be included as a template on Proviso2 for ease of generation.

Actions on Proviso2

- The 'Defer – Complex Case' event must be used.

- Any application that is deferred but not recorded as Complex should be resolved within service standards and will be included in the calculation of performance against the relevant standard (15 days or 60 days).

- Once a case has been marked as 'complex', it cannot become 'straightforward' again – even if the 'block' on the case has been resolved. So it is possible that a case that has been classified as complex may still sometimes be determined within standard (eg if the response to a referral happened to come back quicker than expected).

An application must not be defined as non-straightforward and must not be marked as 'complex' when:

- **<Redacted>**

- **Logistical delays** (e.g. IT failure, avoidable courier delays) mean that service standards will not be met. In these circumstances, DMCs need to manage the expectations of the customer and advise them that there are delays affecting processing. DMCs should give an indication of when the customer is likely to receive a decision and ensure that there is awareness across the immigration platform (the commercial partner, contact centre etc.) of the problems.

- The **department has control over the delay** - <Redacted>

(Further examples of the types of scenarios where a case should / should not be considered "complex" for reporting purposes are detailed in Annex B.)

Monitoring and deciding cases marked as 'complex'

ECMs must monitor progress on all cases marked 'complex' to ensure that enrichment / referral responses are being chased. Numbers and types of complex applications at each DMC are reported as part of the performance pack. This is reviewed to ensure that the right cases are being recorded as 'complex'. A case must not be marked as 'complex' simply because it was not processed within service standards.

'Complex' cases must still be decided and despatched as soon as possible. They should normally be decided within 120 working days.

Contact for this OPI: <Redacted>

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