

# **EU Settlement Scheme – Private Beta Testing Phase 1 Report**

## **Summary and Key Findings**

Private beta phase 1 (PB1) has been successful, with over 1,000 cases proving key elements of the functionality of the online application process and providing valuable insights as to the experience of applicants in using the system.

This phase of testing was deliberately designed to be relatively modest in scale and applicants are participating in the test phases on a purely voluntary basis. However, the volume of cases has provided sufficient scale of insight to inform the next phase of private beta testing (PB2) to be commenced from 1 November 2018.

Feedback from applicants on the speed and ease of the application process has been very positive. So far, all applicants have been granted the leave that they expected, with no cases refused. The technology has performed well and the caseworking experience has also been positive.

## **Lessons learned**

In light of the PB1 experience we have made a number of changes to the application process and the information that we provide. These include

- minor changes to the application process to help improve the overall customer experience.
- improvements to our ability to automatically match applicants to HMRC data as evidence of residence.
- simplifying some of the terminology used to aid understanding.
- improving the process for verifying the applicant's email address.
- developing communications material to help applicants prepare for and complete the application, both in terms of the material that is provided to participating organisations and published online. The information that is published and provided within the application process will remain under review as we move in to future phases of testing, but the findings were very positive.

## **Introduction**

EU citizens<sup>1</sup> working at 12 NHS Trusts, and students and staff from three Liverpool universities<sup>2</sup>, took part in a managed live trial, or first Private Beta (PB1), of the new application process for the EU Settlement Scheme from 28

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<sup>1</sup> And non-EU citizen family members of EU citizens, where the family member was working or studying at a relevant institution and held a biometric residence card.

<sup>2</sup> NHS Liverpool Women's, NHS Walton, NHS Aintree, NHS Liverpool Heart & Chest, NHS Southport & Ormskirk, NHS Warrington & Halton, NHS Countess of Chester, NHS East Lancashire, NHS Wirral, NHS Lancashire, NHS Blackpool, NHS Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen, Liverpool Hope University, University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University.

August to 17 October 2018. This was the first phase of the implementation of the scheme, which will be fully open by 30 March 2019.

A toolkit containing information on the EU Settlement Scheme and the application process and scheme was provided to all the participating organisations to circulate to eligible applicants. This was supplemented by 27 engagement events, held across the 15 pilot sites, to explain how the pilot would work and what applicants could expect if they participated in the pilot and to answer any specific questions.

NHS workers, university staff and students then booked appointments to make live online applications at 'pop-up' application centres at their place of work or study. They were supported on-site by staff from UK Visas & Immigration (UKVI), who observed how applicants interacted with the application process and sought feedback to inform future releases of the system.

**1053** applications were made during PB1, which proved key elements of the EU Settlement Scheme application process. This report sets out the main findings and lessons learned from those cases and is being published as we move into the second phase of private beta testing (PB2) from 1 November 2018.

The EU Settlement Scheme provides the basis for resident EU citizens and their family members to obtain the UK immigration status they will require to remain here after the end of the planned implementation period on 31 December 2020\*

\*Further information on the scheme can be found on GOV.UK<sup>3</sup> and in the Statement of Intent<sup>4</sup>, published on 21 June 2018.

Findings in this phase cannot be extrapolated to identify the likely customer experience for all 3.5 million resident EU citizens and their family members. This test cohort is not reflective of all individuals who will be eligible to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme, since the PB1 cohort was selected in part to support the testing of specific aspects of the system, for example the automated checks of HMRC data.

Information is not broken down any further (by demographic information such as age, gender and nationality) due to cohort size and composition. This report sets out the high-level lessons learned prior to the next phase of testing. Not all of the data collected in PB1 will be available in later phases of testing due to changes in the methodology and the systems being used.

### PB1 objectives

The primary objectives of PB1 were to test the following elements of the application process in a live environment:

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-statement-of-intent>

- application front end – what users see;
- simplicity and ease of the application process for users, including the clarity of guidance and communications material;
- applicants' experience and behaviours during the application process;
- the experience of UKVI caseworkers during the application process;
- how the technology performed;
- how straightforward it was for applicants to prove their continuous UK residence; including testing the automated checks with HMRC; and
- customer experience of the identity verification app.

## **PB1 performance data**

### Application volumes / outcomes

- **1053** applications were received.
- **924** decisions have been made and sent out to applicants by 30 October (decisions are emailed, with a link to the online status service to enable the person to check their status)<sup>5</sup>. All cases were granted the leave that they expected to obtain, of these:
  - **591 (64%)** were granted settled status; **93** based on holding valid Permanent Residence (PR) documentation or Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR);
  - **333 (36%)** were granted pre-settled status; and
  - no cases were refused.
- **66%** of straightforward cases (with full residence proven using automated checks) were despatched within 7 days. Nearly all cases were completed within 2 weeks.
- The average time taken on all decisions was just under 9 calendar days, with the fastest application decision being made within 3 days.
- In PB1, caseworkers are required to manually upload scans of ID documents and route cases to different teams depending on the casework action required. In future phases the majority of ID documents will be captured automatically, and the routing of cases will also be automated. Alongside 100% quality assurance checks (which will not apply to all cases in future) this is estimated to have slowed down the decision-making process in PB1 compared to future phases by approximately 2-3 days. Overall processing times are also affected by the time taken for caseworkers to receive further evidence where necessary, such as supplementary evidence of residence.

### Three tests under the EU Settlement Scheme: identity, suitability, residence

- 1053 (100%) successfully proved their **identity**.

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<sup>5</sup> The remaining cases that are yet to be decided are awaiting responses from applicants where we have contacted them for further information to confirm the leave that they qualify for.

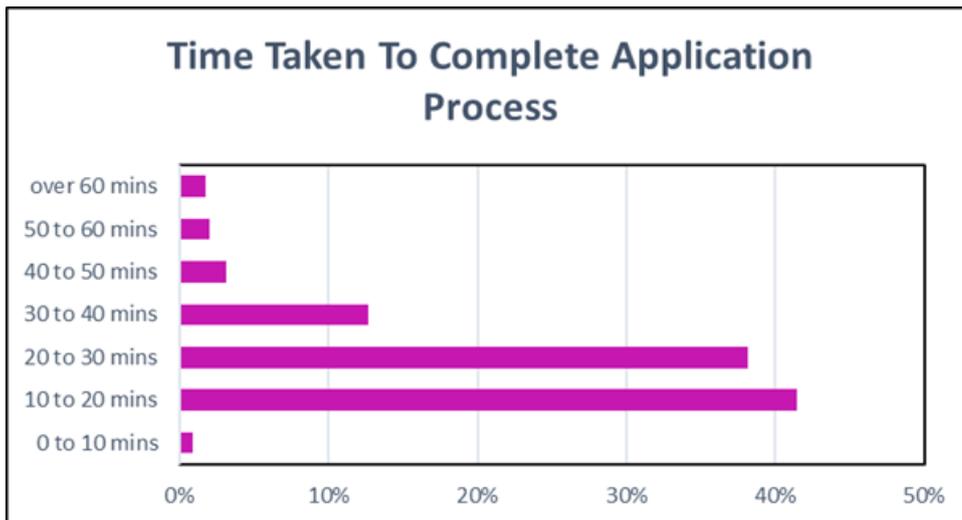
- Systems to check the applicant's **suitability** (criminal record) worked effectively. No cases were refused on the grounds of suitability.
- Of the **924** decisions made and despatched by 30 October:
  - **787 cases** (85%) did not have to provide any additional evidence. The decision was made solely on automated checks made against HMRC data, or the applicant already holding PR/ILR (**93 cases**).
  - **137 cases** (15%) provided additional evidence to demonstrate their residence. Of these, nearly two thirds only had to provide additional evidence for part of their residence, as the remainder of their residence was demonstrated through the automated checks. For example, this includes periods where the individual was not working and therefore chose needed to provide additional evidence to demonstrate residence.
- Of the **1053** applications, **30** cases didn't provide their National Insurance Number (NINo). All these cases were students who had been in the UK a matter of weeks. **1023** provided their NINo. Of these, **921** were checked for automated evidence of residence using HMRC data (the remaining **102** cases had valid documented PR / ILR: these cases are not subject to the automated checks as the requisite UK residence has been established in a previous application):
  - **883** (96%) were matched automatically to HMRC records<sup>6</sup>; and
  - **25** (3%) required some form of intervention to successfully match applicants to HMRC data. Automated matching was not possible primarily due to name matching issues (fixes have been identified and will be applied in a future release) or applicant error (e.g. they entered the NINo incorrectly). Changes to the matching process are being introduced in November to help resolve these issues for future cases.
  - **13** (1.4%) could not be matched to HMRC records, typically because of data errors, such as NINo and passport records not matching.

### Ease of application process

- Two thirds (690) of applicants voluntarily provided detailed customer feedback. Of these, **94% agreed (strongly or moderately) that the application process was easy to complete**. A further 3.5% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- The fastest application was made in 8 minutes and 23 seconds.
- Just under half of applicants took less than 20 minutes to complete the application process, over 85% of applicants took less than half an hour. It is expected that future application times for similar cases will be slightly quicker, both because of the improvements made to the application process and because applicants will be familiar with the device that they use to make their application, whereas those in PB1 were using a Home Office laptop.

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<sup>6</sup> Note: These figures show how many cases matched to an HMRC record of the individual. Not all cases that match to a record return a full or partial record, for example, if the person was not working for all or some of the relevant period.



- 98% made their application in one appointment – those who required a second appointment did so due to not having their NINo details available at the first appointment or needing to provide further proof of residence.
- 690 applicants provided feedback on their experience. Of these:
  - 630 applicants identified areas where they sought some assistance to make their application. The main areas were:
    - lack of familiarity with the laptops that were used. In particular, applicants were frequently given assistance with using the camera and image upload functionality on Home Office laptops. This is expected to be much less of an issue when applicants apply to the scheme using their own devices.
    - 121 (19%) said they sought confirmation of some of the terminology used in the application to ensure they understood correctly. In light of the questions raised we have amended the application form and online guidance to provide further clarity on terminology.
    - 92 (15%) required assistance with the email verification process. To rectify this issue, we have amended and simplified this element of the application process.
    - 73 (12%) said they required assistance on what additional evidence was required to accompany their application. To address this issue we have revised the materials that are provided to applicants before they participate in the pilot and are making further amendments to the online material to help applicants understand the range of evidence that can be provided.
    - 54 (9%) stated that they required help inputting names correctly, e.g. aliases, special characters and naming conventions. To resolve this problem, changes have been made to the application form and further changes are being made to the data matching process in November to improve name matching capability due to variations in naming formats and conventions.

- 277 responded to the question about whether the official information provided could be improved. Of these:
  - 125 (45%) said that no improvements were needed.
  - 49 (18%) wanted more general information about the EU Settlement Scheme, such as information on the difference between settled and pre-settled status and on family member rights under the scheme.
  - 37 (13%) suggested that more information could have been provided about the pilot, mainly what information/evidence to have brought with them or more detail on the application process itself. As noted above, in light of this feedback we have made changes to the range of information that is provided regarding evidence of residence.
  - 23 (8%) had general concerns about the wider effects of Brexit, such as a no deal scenario.
  
- From the UKVI caseworker perspective, there are limited lessons that can be drawn from this first phase of testing due to further changes being made in the casework system used for handling EU Settlement Scheme applications. However, the direct contact with applicants has given caseworkers a good understanding of how applicants are engaging with the application process and caseworkers were content with the process and guidance. This will be tested further as more complex cases are processed.

In addition to the overall application experience and specific technical elements that were tested in PB1, we have also successfully tested the resumption of saved applications and the fee payment and exemption processes.

#### Official information and UKVI staff support

- Applicants responded positively when asked if the official information helped them to:
  - feel reassured about the application process - 92%
  - prepare for the application process - 97%; and
  - improve their understanding about the EU Settlement Scheme - 95%
- Applicants made their own applications but UKVI staff were present to observe and assist if requested. Over 91% of applicants responded positively about their experience (staff were friendly, helpful and polite; sessions were relaxed and well organised).

#### Online status record

- From 1 September to the end of 29 October, the online status service was accessed 414 times. In light of user feedback in PB1, and initial delays in users going on to access their online status, we have made minor changes to the decision letters to give the status service more prominence, resulting in an increase in traffic to the online status service.

## EU Exit: ID document check

The EU Exit: ID document check app allows applicants with a chipped identity document to confirm their identity and the validity of their identity document remotely. This will be integrated into the application process for the next phase of testing. In PB1 applicants were given the opportunity to use the app, but this was entirely voluntary. Not all applicants tried the app, e.g. because they applied using a non-chipped identity document or were unable to do so because of time pressures. However, it proved a useful test of the process. Of these:

- Approximately 650 used the app:
  - Of these, 70% successfully completed the chip read stage and all of these documents were verified as being valid.
- The majority of applicants who skipped the chip read stage did so because they applied using a non-chipped identity document (these documents will be usable as evidence of identity in PB2).
- The average time taken was under 5 minutes.
- We have used findings from the testing to improve the help and guidance available to users.

## **Next Steps**

The next phase of testing (PB2) starts on 1 November 2018. PB2 will test the integration of the various application components, for example the identity verification app will be integrated into the application process. It will also test additional elements of the full customer journey, including the Settlement Resolution Centre (which will provide support for applicants), the application experience for vulnerable applicants and the process for administrative review of decisions made under the scheme.

A full report on PB2 will be published once the pilot has been completed. This report will not contain the same classes of data collected during PB1, owing to changes in the system and the integration of various application components.

Home Office  
31 October 2018