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20 December 2021

Dear Ms Hawkins,

Thank you for your letter of 28 October about how individuals are identified across digital immigration applications and across Government departments. I am replying as the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration. I am sorry for the delay in responding to your letter.

A person who makes an EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) application was not previously asked for the unique application number (UAN) of any previous EUSS application they may have made.

With regard to the production of data on the number of applicants under the EUSS, there has been significant interest in better understanding the number of individuals who have applied to the scheme; therefore data matching techniques were developed and externally peer reviewed for statistical reporting purposes. This means we can now report on the number of individuals who have applied, those making repeat applications and those moving from pre-settled to settled Status in the coming years. The data is routinely published in the quarterly EU Settlement Scheme statistics¹. We are considering how we can further improve our data matching in future, and this may involve the use of UANs.

You asked 5 specific questions about UANs and I will address each in turn.

Q1. Can you confirm whether there are any plans to update the EUSS application process so that in future the user is asked to provide the reference number(s) of any previous applications?

Yes, we made a change on 16 November and, from this date, where a user states on an application they have pre-settled status we will ask them to provide their UAN from their previous application.

Previously, where a person submitted an application under the EUSS and said they had pre-settled status they were not issued with a digital certificate of application (COA), as they would retain their current valid status until their latest application was concluded.

¹ [EU Settlement Scheme statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/eu-settlement-scheme-statistics)

We have found some applicants who submitted an application to the EUSS were incorrectly stating they had pre-settled status, and consequently were not issued with a digital COA, so they were left without any proof of their pending application.

Requesting a UAN will better enable the Home Office to link a current application to any previous application(s) the person may have made, which will ultimately help us to ensure the correct status applies (through issuing a COA or retaining existing valid status) while their application is under consideration.

Q2. Can you confirm whether the lack of such data linking on the application is a cause of the problem reported by us and in the media where *“if an individual holds pre-settled status and has since applied for settled status, the certificate of application for settled status will show in their account. They can ring the settlement resolution centre to request their account shows their pre-settled status if they would prefer this.”*?

We have addressed this issue without the need to request a UAN as there are other methods of linking current and previous applications to an individual. Anyone with pre-settled status who applied for settled status on or after 15 July 2021 will continue to see a pre-settled status profile in their account (eVisa).

For pre-settled status holders who applied for settled status before 15 July 2021 and whose eVisa was updated to show a COA for the settled application, work is underway to change their eVisas back to a pre-settled status profile automatically.

In the meantime, anyone in this position who would like their eVisa changed back to pre-settled status can contact the UKVI Resolution Centre, who can arrange to manually update their eVisa.

Asking people to provide UANs for their previous application will help link the application to their new application. However, it was not a failure to link previous applications to new ones which caused people to see their COA for a new application instead of the pre-settled status for the former application, or a refusal for an old application after they had submitted a new application.

This issue was caused by the logic by which our Status services react to casework events such as applications or grants of status. When the problem was occurring, it was because our service's logic was to overwrite old statuses with a new one, because we believed this would be the most relevant one to display. We have changed the logic in response to feedback, so a person with pre-settled status continues to see this status when they make a fresh application.

Since we have started asking for a person's previous UAN when they apply, we can use this to help link the applications to the individual, but use of a UAN is not the only way in which applications can be linked to an individual.

Q3. Can you confirm whether the lack of such linking data on the application is a cause of the problem reported by us where those who were refused (pre-)settled status but later applied for, or were granted, (pre-)settled status still see a refusal when logging into View & Prove?

A person may still see a refusal in the View & Prove service if they submitted the second application using a different identity document and log into View & Prove using their previous document. If this is the case, it is caused by the lack of linking of identities, but the UAN is not directly related to this.

Having the UAN helps the caseworker to spot the two applications should be linked (although this is already possible without it), but a UAN in itself will not allow the two applications to link automatically.

Anyone in this position can contact the UKVI Resolution Centre, who can arrange to manually update their eVisa or address the fact there are duplicate accounts.

Q4. Would you agree a lack of such data linking on the application might cause a problem where HMRC or DWP will not recognise a future upgrade from pre-settled to settled status, and will potentially terminate benefits for those they believe to have expired pre-settled status?

Before HMRC and/or DWP take any action on a person's claim they make enquiries with the person and give them the opportunity to demonstrate they are eligible to be in receipt of them (this includes, but is not limited to, using the View & Prove platform for the person to share their status). There are also processes in place whereby HMRC and DWP can contact the Home Office and confirm a person's status where appropriate.

Q5. Why are DWP and HMRC not able to see that someone with a national insurance number that led to settled status by automated check has status under the EU Settlement Scheme?

The Home Office, DWP and HMRC have done everything possible to ensure only those who appear to be EU, EEA or Swiss citizens living in the UK, who may not have a valid UK immigration status, and have not applied to the EUSS, are contacted to invite them to apply to the EUSS.

DWP and HRMC shared information with the Home Office of those they believed to be EU, EEA or Swiss citizens, to ensure as many people as possible were reached and given the opportunity to apply to the EUSS.

The Home Office updated the relevant list of those who needed to be contacted about applying to the EUSS to remove those identified (based on the information being utilised in the data matching exercise) as having already applied to the EUSS, those who had another form of valid immigration status, and those who are British citizens.

To ensure as many people were contacted as possible, letters were sent to those people who were unmatched following the data matching exercise, which included a small proportion of individuals who in fact already held valid UK immigration status or are British citizens.

There are multiple reasons why a person who had status may have fallen into the 'unmatched' cohort and subsequently been contacted, including but not limited to:

- submitting their EUSS application after the data matching exercise had been run, but before the letters were sent out;
- their personal details held by the Home Office (and provided by the person in their application) differing from those held by DWP and/or HMRC.

To address the risk of people being concerned they had been written to incorrectly, the letters sent in August 2021 asked individuals who believed they should not have been contacted to contact the Home Office and gave a specific contact point – via a dedicated phone line – for them to do so, and they were removed from the mailing list if they made contact prior to the 28-day deadline, and so would not have been contacted again by DWP or HMRC.

With my very best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Foster", with a large, sweeping flourish above the name.

Kevin Foster MP
Minister for Safe and Legal Migration