

## **Visa Preparation Assistance (VPA) Instruction pack**

### **For agents and international recruitment staff**

#### **What is a Visa Preparation Assistance (VPA) session?**

As part of the Tier 4 (General) visa process an applicant is likely to be asked to attend a 'credibility' interview to determine whether the applicant has a genuine intention to study in the UK. The interview is usually held over Skype and the applicant's English language is also assessed.

A VPA is an opportunity for agents and international recruitment staff to support the applicant to be 'CAS ready' and likely to satisfy a Home Office case worker based in Sheffield that they are a genuine student.

A VPA offers prospective applicants support to plan and prepare for the Tier 4 (General) visa credibility interview.

#### **University three stage process**

For applicant nationals who have been assessed as being at a high or medium risk of receiving a visa refusal a three stage applicant process will apply.

1. VPA carried out by the agent
2. VPA carried out by University international recruitment staff
3. Visa Preparation Test (VPT) carried out by the Admissions team

The international recruitment team will only refer the applicant to Admissions once they are satisfied that they will meet the requirements of a credibility interview and are effectively 'CAS ready'.

An applicant will only be subject to one VPT and the outcomes will either be;

1. Rejected- with the option to defer (feedback provided to international staff and agents)
2. Progress to the next stage in the CAS process.

#### **How will overseas teams manage the VPA process?**

1. Work with the applicant to think about their responses to the following questions at Appendix 1
2. Support the applicant to carry out detailed research into the University of Sunderland and the city of Sunderland so that they can articulate clearly reasons for choice.
3. Refer the applicant to the University webpages.

4. You can spend as much time as you think appropriate at the VPA stage. You may choose to talk to the applicant on a few occasions to make sure that they are clear on what is expected from them when they undertake the VPT.
5. Carry out mock interviews with the applicant using the templates at Appendix 2 and 3.

***Why did you choose the University of Sunderland?***

Think about why you chose the UK rather than your home country, other English-speaking country or country which other students of your nationality choose to study in.

Do you want to study at the University of Sunderland, Sunderland campus based in the North East of England or the University of Sunderland in London based at Canary Wharf - what attracts you to this specific city location? Do you know what the University of Sunderland has to offer over others? Have you applied to other Universities and what are the factors you are considering before you make your final choice? If you are choosing the University because it is affordable, which other universities have a similar price point and therefore why is Sunderland the preferred option?

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***Why did you choose your course?***

There may be many courses in the same subject area as the one you plan to study at the University of Sunderland. What is it specifically about the Sunderland course which you prefer and which suits you over other course choices? Think about your decision process. Did you apply for other courses - why did you choose Sunderland over them? Do you know what modules you are planning to study and how many students you will be expecting to study with? Do you know how long your course is likely to last and what qualification you will receive? How does your choice of course fit with your academic/ professional background?

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***How do your studies fit into your career plans?***

Think about what your plans are after you graduate - how will the knowledge and skills you gain from your course at Sunderland help you with the type of work you hope to do? Does your course lead to any professional exemptions or qualifications and are these recognised in your country? Do you know what others graduating from the course went on to do? (For example, what type or size of organisation did they go on to work for?) If the course you plan to study is at a similar academic level to previous studies, how does it represent progression and does it have a vocational focus? If this is the case, be prepared to explain this.

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***How are you funding your studies in the UK?***

The purpose of this question is to check that your funds are genuinely available to you for your studies. As part of your application you will have submitted proof of your finances - ensure that you are very clear about the source and availability of these funds, also how you plan to pay for subsequent years fees if your course is more than a year in duration

Do you have friends and family or have studied in the UK and is study abroad the expectation of your family? If your family is funding your studies how are they able to support you? If you are relying on an asset, such as land to sell, can you provide evidence that the costs are to be used to fund your studies? If you are relying on an education loan how are you able to manage the repayments? If you are a mature student and your family is funding your studies why are they prepared to do this at this time in your life? Can you provide evidence that your employer is sponsoring your education?

Think about the advantages that a degree from the UK might give you and why you and/or your family are prepared to make this investment. Have you made a realistic assessment of all the costs involved and how you plan to pay for them? These cost include accommodation and costs of living.

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***You have previously studied in the UK - why have you chosen to return?***

Think about how the new course relates to previous studies and how it might build on your previous learning.

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***You have had a long break in your studies, why are you returning to study now?***

Think about how you explain your decision in the context of your long-term career plans. Why is now the right time in your life to return to study? If you are already progressing well in your career you need to be really clear about how an additional qualification will support your career plans?

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***Do you plan to work in the UK?***

You cannot rely on funds from working to pay your course fees and living costs so you need to be aware of this. The maximum number of hours a student can work whilst studying is between 10 and 20 hours depending on the type of course. (If you are part time you cannot work at all) The main purpose for being in the UK is your studies so, if you do hope to work, think about how this would enhance your academic studies. You also need to demonstrate an understanding of the hours you are allowed to work and typical rates of pay. The amount of hours you can work will be clearly stated on your biometrics card.

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**VISA PREPARATION ASSISTANCE (VPA)**  
**Interview Template- Direct from Study**

	Topic	Areas to discuss	Risk Flags	Applicant responses
1.	<b>Study in the UK?</b>	Can the applicant advise on why they choose the UK over other countries, including their own? Have other family members or friends studied in the UK? Does study abroad meet family expectations? If English is not their first language why choose an English speaking country as a choice of study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of clarity over choice of country</li> </ul>	
2.	<b>The University of Sunderland?</b>	Has the applicant considered/ applied to other Universities? If not, why not? If the applicant chooses Sunderland because of affordability why is it preferred to other affordable Universities, such as Coventry? If the applicant is choosing Sunderland because they meets its lower academic requirements (as compared to say Newcastle), why Sunderland over similarly ranked institutions? If the applicant is choosing Sunderland because an agent or friend has recommended what research has the applicant undertaken to satisfy themselves it is the right decision? If Sunderland is not yet their final choice, why not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failing to demonstrate any research into the University or facilities.</li> <li>Failing to describe how they actively chose Sunderland over other Universities</li> <li>Stating that the University is affordable / in line academically but failing to describe how they have that knowledge and how other Universities compare.</li> <li>If they have only applied to the University failing to describe why they have not submitted offers to others of similar ranking/ affordability</li> </ul>	
3.	<b>Course detail</b>	Why has the applicant chosen the specific course and does it map to previous academic attainment? Which modules is the applicant most excited about studying? Has the applicant considered how the course will be	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failing to demonstrate any research into the course/ module content.</li> <li>Failing to describe why they have chosen this particular</li> </ul>	

		assessed? Have they researched any lecturers who will be teaching them? Why do they prefer this specific course over other similar ones taught at a different institution?	course over others studied at another institution (responses linked to topic 2)	
4.	<b>The city of Sunderland or campus in London?</b>	Do they know where Sunderland is in the UK? What attracts them to the city (e.g. the beach, its safety record, history of other family members? What evidence is there that the applicant has researched the city or alternatively the campus in London? If the applicant chooses the London campus, why the campus rather than a different London institution?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failing to describe where Sunderland is in the UK and failing to demonstrate any evidence into what the city has to offer and why they prefer Sunderland over other similar cities.</li> <li>Failing to describe the location and facilities that the University of Sunderland in London has to offer.</li> </ul>	
5.	<b>Funding and finances</b>	Who is funding study and living costs in the UK? Has any other family member studied in the UK? If not why has the family decided to fund for the first time? Does the applicant understand how much living costs are expected to meet the maintenance requirements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vague responses or lack of clarity over family member funding studies.</li> </ul>	
6.	<b>Work</b>	Do they intend to work whilst in the UK? Do they understand the rules surrounding work? Are they currently working part time overseas? If yes, why would they not seek similar type employment in the UK?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applicant emphasis on requirement to work or vague responses to questions asked.</li> </ul>	
7.	<b>Post study plans</b>	How will the programme support future career aspirations?  Is it not possible to achieve these goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of clarity over future career plans. It is not required that the applicant has a detailed career</li> </ul>	

		<p>without study in the UK but study in their home country?</p> <p>Do they intend to further post graduate study after completing their programme? If so, do they have specific plans about how they will achieve this goal?</p>	<p>path but they must be able to describe their intended plans.</p>	
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**VISA PREPARATION ASSISTANCE (VPA)****Interview Template- Gap in Study (a gap of more than 6 months)**

	Topic	Areas to Investigate	Risk Flags	Applicant response
1.	<b>Study in the UK?</b>	Can the applicant advise on why they choose the UK over other countries, including their own? Have other family members or friends studied in the UK? Does study abroad meet family expectations? If English is not their first language why choose an English speaking country as a choice of study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of clarity over choice of country</li> </ul>	
2.	<b>Gap in Study</b>	Why has the applicant decided that now is the right time to return to studies? If the applicant is already employed in a responsible/ esteemed role, how will further study improve his employment prospects? Has the applicant being given a break in their employment and can they prove this upon request? How does the applicant view the risk of leaving their current employment to seek study, particularly if they are responsible for family?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The longer the gap the greater clarity the applicant must have over why now is a good time to study.</li> <li>If an applicant is leaving current employment the reasons for doing so must be robust.</li> </ul>	
3.	<b>Family</b>	Will they be bring dependants to the UK and if so what are the practical arrangements for doing this? Will their dependant be seeking or has already obtained full time work? Will they be leaving their family at home and if so is the applicant the main salary within the household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of clarity around family plans, for example if they have children have they considered schools?</li> </ul>	
4.	<b>The University of Sunderland?</b>	Has the applicant considered/ applied to other Universities? If not, why not? If the applicant chooses Sunderland because of affordability why is it preferred to other affordable Universities, such as Coventry? If the applicant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failing to demonstrate any research into the University or facilities.</li> <li>Failing to describe how they actively chose</li> </ul>	



		is choosing Sunderland because they meets its lower academic requirements (as compared to say Newcastle), why Sunderland over similarly ranked institutions? If the applicant is choosing Sunderland because an agent or friend has recommended what research has the applicant undertaken to satisfy themselves it is the right decision? If Sunderland is not yet their final choice, why not?	<p>Sunderland over other Universities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stating that the University is affordable / in line academically but failing to describe how they have that knowledge and how other Universities compare.</li> <li>• If they have only applied to the University failing to describe why they have not submitted offers to others of similar ranking/ affordability</li> </ul>	
5.	<b>Course detail</b>	Why has the applicant chosen the specific course and does it map to previous employment? Why do they prefer this specific course over other similar ones taught at a different institution?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failing to demonstrate any research into the course/ module content.</li> <li>• Failing to demonstrate how planned study maps to current or previous employment?</li> </ul>	
6.	<b>The city of Sunderland or campus in London?</b>	Do they know where Sunderland is in the UK? What attracts them to the city (e.g. the beach, its safety record, history of other family members? What evidence is there that the applicant has researched the city or alternatively the campus in London? If the applicant chooses the London campus, why the campus rather than a different London institution?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failing to describe where Sunderland is in the UK and failing to demonstrate any evidence into what the city has to offer and why they prefer Sunderland over other similar cities.</li> <li>• Failing to describe the location and facilities that the University of</li> </ul>	

			Sunderland in London has to offer.	
7.	<b>Funding and finances</b>	Who is funding study and living costs in the UK? If the applicant is mature why would a family member choose to fund studies? Are they able to provide details around their financial sponsor? If they are borrowing money, who are they borrowing it from, what are the terms of the loan and how do they intend to make the repayments? If they are selling land can they provide evidence of the land in their name? Have previous family members studied in the UK? What is their family's financial background?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current employment not likely to be able to fund study even if states relies on savings.</li> <li>• Lack of clarity over financial sponsor</li> <li>• States that a family member is funding and will put monies into bank account but cannot explain why the family member will choose the fund?</li> <li>• Insufficient information around bank loan</li> <li>• Insufficient information about land/ asset to be sold.</li> </ul>	
8.	<b>Work</b>	Do they intend to work whilst in the UK? If they have dependants overseas how will they be funded during the applicants time away?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicant emphasis on requirement to work or vague responses to questions asked.</li> <li>• Unclear how family will be funded whilst applicant is in the UK.</li> </ul>	
9.	<b>Post study plans</b>	Will the applicant return to current employment? If so how will further study enhance career prospects? If the purpose of study is to improve esteem within the work place how will this be evident on a day to day basis? If the applicant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fails to have clear mapped out career plans</li> <li>• Evidently does not require qualification to progress in current employment</li> </ul>	

		does not have a job to return to how will this study improve their position?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Further study will not improve role</li></ul>	
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