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Dear Mr Maxwell

Thank you for your enquiry of 13 November 2020 in which you requested information on visa applications. Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. I apologise for the delay in replying.

Information Requested

In August 2020, the Home Office discontinued its use of a system for streaming visa applications and assigning them to decision-makers (the Streaming Tool). Various information about the Streaming Tool is contained in the documents here:

<https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.foxglove.org.uk%2Fnews%2F6tv7i7om2jze5pxs409k3oo3dyel0&data=04%7C01%7CCTFOI%40homeoffice.gov.uk%7C1293e273348a4ccf2b2808d887d5b1a0%7Cf24d93ecb2914192a08af182245945c2%7C0%7C0%7C637408699154536321%7CUnknown%7CTWFPbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C1000&data=Ay4F1Oy5vnDnrmhUo%2F4BwwwLvH EXguMZxwzTg%2B7fJ9M%3D&reserved=0>

In relation to the Streaming Tool, please provide the following information:

(1) A copy of the Equality Act Nationality Risk Assessment dated October 2019, referred to in para 12 of the grounds of challenge at the above link.

(2) A copy of the UK Visas and Immigration document entitled 'Standardisation: Streaming, Enrichment & Operational Review Meetings (ORMs)', dated October 2017, referred to in footnote 4 of the grounds of challenge at the above link.

(3) A copy of the UK Visas and Immigration document entitled 'Streaming App v3.0, User Guide', dated October 2017, referred to in footnote 6 of the grounds of challenge at the above link.

(4) A copy of the UK Visas and Immigration document entitled 'Standard Operating Procedures: AO Grade Decision Makers', dated November 2017, referred to in footnote 11 of the grounds of challenge at the above link.

(5) A copy of the Review to Risk Matrix referred to in para 25 of the grounds of challenge at the above link.

(6) A full list of the factors or criteria that were relied on by the Streaming Tool in making allocation decisions.

(7) Any policies, guidance or other documentation dealing with the manner in which such factors or criteria were selected or updated.

(8) Any other policies, guidance or other documentation which deal with the process of streaming visa applications and the use of the Streaming Tool.

(9) Any internal evaluations or assessments of the Streaming Tool.

Response

Please see below and attached the responses to your questions. Answers to your questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 & 9 can be found in annexes A-H & K.

New guidance was published on 7 August 2020 here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/workflow-routing-visitor-short-term-student-and-overseas-domestic-worker>

This guidance removed reliance on Global Visa Risk Data and the Streaming Tool when routing and assessing applications from customers applying from overseas as a visitor, short-term student or overseas domestic worker. The attached documents therefore do not represent the current operating model. Information has been redacted from the attached documents under sections 27(1)(a) (Section 27(1) relates to potential harm to International Relations) or section 40(2) of the FOIA 2000 because of the condition at section 40(3A)(a). Section 40(2) exempts personal data if disclosure would contravene any of the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation and section 34(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018.

Regarding your first question, we do hold information of interest to you but have decided to exempt this information under sections 27(1)(a) and 31(1)(e) (relating to the operation of immigration controls) of the FOIA 2000. Arguments for and against disclosure in terms of the public interest are set out in the Annex below.

Regarding question 6 UKVI have organised applications based on risk for many years. The streaming tool was an automated continuation of manual operation processes that took place prior to the introduction of the tool. The streaming tool was

initially introduced in 2015 to create a standardised, evidence based, and auditable basis for streaming. The purpose of the streaming tool was to direct workflow.

The streaming tool attributes a risk rating to an application based on a combination of:

- the Equality Act, Nationality Risk Assessment Ministerial Authorisation list which sets out a list of nationalities to which extra scrutiny can be lawfully applied;
- Global Visa Risk Streaming data which gives applications a risk score based on the previous compliance with immigration rules of applicants of that nationality applying in that location for that purpose;
- Other, case specific, applied attributes identified in conjunction with Immigration Intelligence. These attributes are specific to each application and relate to elements of the applicant's personal history and current circumstances.

Regarding question 8, in addition to the documents provided, please also find attached:

Annex I Decision of an appeal under Section 57 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on the subject of Section 27 Freedom of Information Act 2000; Prejudice to International Relations; Public Interest Balance.

Annex J Annex to the above (Open Judgement) of an appeal under Section 57 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on the subject of Section 27 Freedom of Information Act 2000; Prejudice to International Relations; Public Interest Balance.

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request an independent internal review of our handling of your request by submitting a complaint within two months to foirequests@homeoffice.gov.uk, quoting reference 61206. If you ask for an internal review, it would be helpful if you could say why you are dissatisfied with the response.

As part of any internal review the Department's handling of your information request will be reassessed by staff not involved in providing you with this response. If you remain dissatisfied after this internal review, you would have a right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act.

Yours sincerely

J Slater
Central Operations

We value your feedback, please use the link below to access a brief anonymous survey to help us improve our service to you:

<http://www.homeofficesurveys.homeoffice.gov.uk/s/108105TAZNG>

Public interest test

Some of the exemptions in the FOI Act, referred to as 'qualified exemptions', are subject to a public interest test (PIT). This test is used to balance the public interest in disclosure against the public interest in favour of withholding the information, or the considerations for and against the requirement to say whether the information requested is held or not. We must carry out a PIT where we are considering using any of the qualified exemptions in response to a request for information.

The 'public interest' is not the same as what interests the public. In carrying out a PIT we consider the greater good or benefit to the community if the information is released or not. The 'right to know' must be balanced against the need to enable effective government and to serve the best interests of the public.

The FOI Act is 'applicant blind'. This means that we cannot, and do not, ask about the motives of anyone who asks for information. In providing a response to one person, we are expressing a willingness to provide the same response to anyone, including those who might represent a threat to the UK.

Considerations in favour of disclosing the information

The Home Office recognises that there is a general public interest in openness and transparency in all aspects of government. The release of information would help raise public awareness and aid the debate about the resources in place to safeguard the UK border at regional ports. There is also a public interest in ensuring confidence in the United Kingdom's border control. This would help build greater public confidence in the operational procedures in place in UK ports.

Considerations in favour withholding the information

The effective conduct of international relations depends heavily upon the UK being able to reach agreements and maintain cooperation with other countries. The Home Office invests a considerable amount of time and effort in maintaining these relations. Such relationships are often fragile, and the release of the information requested could be viewed adversely by overseas governments, leading to a severe detrimental impact. This could undermine the UK government's ability to protect and promote UK interests through its international relations with countries named on the list.

For the Home Office, this could mean that sensitive and complex relationships being substantially undermined. Existing negotiations with these countries could cease. This could damage visa and other travel arrangements (for UK nationals seeking to travel), and efficient and cooperative returns and re-documentation agreements relating to those we wish to remove from the UK. There will also be damage done to other diplomatic / trade / security initiatives and arrangements beyond the Home Office's remit.

Section 31(1)(e) relates to the operation of immigration controls where disclosure would substantially prejudice the operation of border controls by providing information to potential offenders (including criminals and terrorists), which would make it easier for them to identify potential strengths or weaknesses at ports. This

could provide opportunities for them to circumvent current systems and procedures. We consider that providing the requested information would potentially enable individuals to build up a picture of which nationalities posed the most risk. This in turn would allow a picture to be built up of the effectiveness of resource allocations - the so-called mosaic effect. This insight could be used by individuals with criminal intent to assume on the reliability of checks in place, based on the breakdown of nationalities intercepted at each port received. Individuals wishing to abuse immigration control could use this information to assume on how UKVI / Border Force manage resources. Disclosure of these details would allow the public to assess the effectiveness of our risk assessment strategy and might assist potential immigration offenders to circumvent immigration controls. Individuals wishing to enter the UK illegally could use this information to assume which nationalities were more likely to be scrutinised when seeking entry to the UK. They could then alter their plans to circumvent border controls by building up a picture of operational priorities, activities seeking to avoid areas of highest risk to them.

We have therefore concluded that the balance of public interests identified lies in favour of maintaining the exemption.