12 June 2009

Dear Sponsor,

Phase 3 of Tier 4 of the Points Based System: IT Support - Bulk Data Transfer (BDT)

In October 2008, the UK Border Agency published the Implementation Plan for Tier 4 of the Points Based System. This document detailed our phased approach to the implementation of Tier 4, and outlined our intention to roll out the Sponsorship Management System (SMS) to Tier 4 sponsors in Autumn 2009.

One element of the SMS for Tier 4 will be a facility to enable you to transfer large amounts of data to and from your local student records system using bulk data transfer (BDT). I am writing to you to inform you of how this facility may benefit your organisation and to make you aware of the action you may need to take now in preparation for its release in the Autumn.

The Sponsorship Management System (SMS) and Confirmations of Acceptance for Studies (CAS)

The Sponsorship Management System (SMS) is an online system that, amongst other things, will enable you to issue Confirmations of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) for prospective and continuing non-EEA students. A CAS is a unique reference number (URN) and not a paper document.

As a Tier 4 sponsor, you currently issue Visa Letters to potential students to confirm your willingness to act as their sponsor. From autumn this year, when the SMS is introduced, you will begin to issue CAS to certain groups of students; initially those switching to Tier 4 from another Tier or predecessor route. CAS will be gradually rolled out to include all students extending their leave to remain in the UK, and finally to all student applications made in the UK or overseas in February 2010.

We are aware that your needs may be different to those of sponsors in other Tiers, and have worked closely with representatives from across the education sector to develop specific functions for the Tier 4 part of the SMS. One of the key elements of this is bulk data transfer.

Bulk Data Transfer

Bulk data transfer will enable sponsors to transfer large amounts of data from their own student record systems to the SMS.

Specifically bulk data transfer will allow sponsors to:

- upload the data needed to create a CAS into the SMS, removing the need to manually enter data on an individual basis;
- export CAS data from the SMS to allow upload into local student systems so that;
- report non-enrolment of students of students issued with a CAS.

There is no requirement for sponsors to use the bulk data transfer facility. It is anticipated that it will be of benefit to Tier 4 sponsors, especially to larger users of the SMS, but it will be possible to undertake all necessary actions in the SMS on an individual basis.

Please note that if you are already a user of the SMS in your capacity as a sponsor under Tier 2 or Tier 5, the introduction of the SMS for Tier 4 and the accompanying functionality will have no impact on your current use of the system.

Preparation for Bulk Data Transfer

If you plan to use the bulk data transfer facility, you will need to ensure that your own student records system will generate the right data in the right format. To assist you in doing so, we have provided a Bulk Data Transfer Implementation Toolkit on the UK Border Agency website at: http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/pointsbasedsystem/bulk-data-transfer/

The toolkit is intended for your IT technicians and suppliers, managers of information services and/or System Developers, and provides the technical specification needed to enable them to prepare your systems in advance of Autumn 2009. Please refer your technical staff to this information to assess whether your current student records systems are compatible with the bulk data transfer specifications.

We have worked with UCISA to provide suppliers of student records systems with information regarding the bulk data transfer formats and will also notify them of this toolkit.

Further communication of the Sponsorship Management System

Over the next few months we will undertake a programme of testing for the SMS and we aim to offer institutions the opportunity to test the system in advance of its introduction. In addition, we are looking at plans to provide more information about the SMS, including a User Manual and an e-learning CD, closer to its introduction in Autumn 2009.

If you have any questions about bulk data transfer or this letter please refer to the attached FAQs in the first instance. If you are unable to find the information you need, you can e-mail us with your query at: Tier4Enquiries@HomeOffice.gsi.gov.uk

Yours faithfully,

Neil Hughes
PBS Programme
Points Based System Programme