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Mr Luke Piper
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Dear Mr Piper,

Thank you for your letters of 9 October to the Prime Minister and 13 November to the Minister for Future Borders and Immigration, Kevin Foster, regarding your concerns about the Government's decision not to provide physical proof for EEA citizens under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). They have been passed to me for a reply.

I understand the Future Borders and Immigration Minister wrote to you about the EU Settlement Scheme on the 19 November and you also had an opportunity on 1 September to discuss a range of issues concerned with the EU Settlement Scheme with Baroness Williams of Trafford which I hope you found useful.

The Government has always stated that EEA citizens are our friends, family and neighbours, and we would like them to stay. The EUSS makes it easy for EEA citizens and their family members to obtain the UK immigration status they need in order to remain here permanently, with the same rights to work, study and access benefits and services as they have now. The latest published statistics, to 31 October 2020, show more than 4.2 million applications have been received and over 4 million applications have been concluded.

The Government is developing a border and immigration system which will provide evidence of immigration status online by default for all migrants, not just EEA citizens, which over time means we will increasingly replace physical and paper-based products and services for all routes with accessible, easy to use online and digital services. It will not just apply to those with status under the EUSS as it is our intention to include digital status as part of the settlement route being created for British National (Overseas) resident in Hong Kong which is due to be launched in January 2021. Over the coming months and

years we also intend to provide other cohorts of migrants with evidence of their immigration status online.

We acknowledge the move away from physical documents to an online status represents a change which individuals and service providers may take time to get used to. That is why it is being rolled out incrementally and with plenty of support available to help holders use their new status. As a transition measure, EEA citizens can continue to use their passport or national identity card for this purpose until 30 June 2021.

To allow the nearly 4 million EEA citizens who have been granted status under the EUSS to apply for a physical document would incur significant up-front and potentially unrecoverable costs. We estimate the cost of issuing every EEA citizen who is granted leave under the scheme to be in excess of £270m. These costs would include setting up and designing the application process to issue a secure biometric document, some caseworking resource and significant communications costs; much of this cost would be incurred regardless of how many people applied for a physical document. If we were to invest in issuing physical documents to EEA citizens, we would have to divert funds away from developing the new digitised immigration system. Parliament did not support proposals to issue physical documents to EEA citizens granted leave under the scheme.

Migrants and third-party checkers, such as employers are already becoming used to checking and sharing immigration status digitally. In the last reporting period from April up to June this year, there have been over 400k views on the 'view and prove' service by migrants. In the same period, there have been over 100k views of EU Settlement status by organisations checking status. The average user satisfaction score across migrant and checker sides of the online service for same period was a positive 88%. As users become more familiar with the technology and it becomes the norm, physical documents will be seen as outdated and open to abuse.

EEA citizens who are granted settled or pre-settled status will continue to receive a document which is formal written notification of their leave. This is in the form of a letter sent by post or a PDF document sent by email, which sets out their immigration status in the UK. They can retain the letter sent by post or print or electronically store the PDF document and keep it as confirmation of their status for their own personal records and for use when contacting the Home Office about their status. Furthermore, EEA citizens can show third parties their written confirmation of status as it includes details of the view and prove service so the person checking their status can see there is an online service where they can check the individual's status.

We do recognise there are people who cannot access online services and will need additional support. We are committed to delivering a service that reflects the diverse needs of all users. Help on how to use the online service and share status information is available through our telephone contact centre and we provide a free to use Assisted Digital service where applicants to the EUSS, or others making online applications in the UK, are able to get support. This assistance is tailored to an individual's circumstances. We also provide a telephone helpline for landlords and employers to provide guidance on conducting right to work and right to rent checks and we are exploring additional support options for those who have limited digital skills or may experience difficulty using our online services to ensure they are fully able to demonstrate their rights in the UK.

We are taking steps to ensure the elderly and the vulnerable are not disadvantaged by the move to digital services. This includes the development of services to make the relevant immigration status information available automatically through system to system checks, with other Government departments and the NHS. This will mean that at the point at which

the person seeks to access public services such as NHS healthcare and DWP benefits, that service provider will check status directly with the Home Office thereby reducing the number of occasions where individuals need to prove their status or need a document to do so.

Our online system invites users to comment and offer suggestions to improve the service and we would welcome working with you to ensure we deliver an effective service which gives all migrants the confidence to access and use it.

Yours sincerely,

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