



**Department
for Work &
Pensions**

Minister for Work and
Pensions (Lords)
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Caxton House
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LONDON
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Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
Chair
Work and Pensions Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

8 June 2021

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter dated 30th March. I apologise for the delay in responding. In your letter you raised concerns of EU/EEA nationals who have been unable to apply for a National Insurance Number (NINo) due the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. I am replying as the minister responsible for the NINo service.

Whilst access to the NINo service was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, we continued to allocate NINos to all individuals who required a NINo to access financial support through social security benefits such as Universal Credit.

Whilst a NINo is required to pay social security benefits, a NINo is not required to make an application. Once entitlement to a social security benefit is established, an internal process ensures that a NINo is allocated, without delay, to enable payments to be made.

HMRC confirmed that a NINo is not required for applicants to apply for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

In terms of accessibility to the NINo service I am pleased to advise that, in line with government guidelines, our NINo offices in England and Wales opened on 14th April, and in Scotland from 26th April 2021, which means the NINo service is now open to all applicants, including those who require a face-to-face identity check. Our digital service, *Apply for a NINo*, went live on GOV.UK on 28th April.

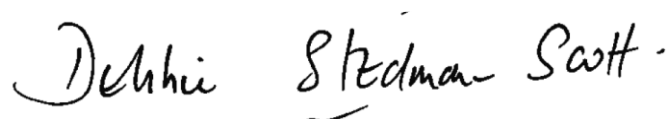
As part of our response to Covid-19, we explored ways in which to confirm the identity of applicants who have already had their identity verified by another government department e.g. the Home Office or the UK Passport Agency. As a result of this work DWP are now able to corroborate these checks against Home Office and Passport Agency data. This removed the need for a face-to-face identity appointment which enabled us to offer a service to a greater number of

applicants. This process was successfully implemented in January 2021 as part of our digital service.

To ensure the integrity of the NINo allocation process, the identity of all applicants needs to be validated. EU/EEA nationals, who have yet to make an application to the EUSS, will be required to attend a face-to-face appointment. EU/EEA nationals who arrived in the UK after the end of the transition period, and have been granted a work visa, are able to access the service without the need for a face-to-face identity check.

You asked why DWP did not use either *Verify or Confirm your Identity* as a means of verifying identity whilst the NINo service was disrupted. It was not possible to use either GOV.UK or *Verify or Confirm your Identity* for EU/EEA nationals. The majority of applicants are new arrivals to the UK and as a result are unlikely to have the required identity documentation and/or digital government footprint to enable this service to be used.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debbie Stedman Scott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**BARONESS STEDMAN-SCOTT
MINISTER FOR WORK AND PENSIONS (LORDS)**



Work and Pensions Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

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From the Chair

Guy Opperman MP
Minister for Pensions and Financial Inclusion
Department for Work and Pensions

30 March 2021

Dear Guy,

I am writing to you about concerns that, because it has not been possible to hold face-to-face verification appointments during the pandemic, many EU/EEA nationals in the UK have been unable to obtain a National Insurance Number (NINo). This means that they cannot apply for Universal Credit and other benefits, or be furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. As a result, these problems are having a significant impact on people's daily lives.

In response to a recent Parliamentary Question, you said that the Government's new digital solution, Apply for a National Insurance Number, should be available to all applicants who are not required to verify their identity face-to-face from the end of March. In a previous answer, you said that the Department was exploring alternative methods of identity verification for people who are normally required to attend a face-to-face appointment, such as EU/EEA nationals.¹

It would be helpful to have answers to the following questions:

- 1. Is it still your intention to make the digital Apply for a National Insurance Number service available to all by the end of March? If not, when do you expect it to be available?**
- 2. What alternatives to face-to-face verification have you identified, and have these been tested?**
 - a. Could you set out the Department's timeframe for implementing any of these solutions?**
 - b. Does the Department plan to offer alternative verification methods to all EU/EEA nationals, or will this option be available only to people with settled or pre-settled status?**

¹ PQ [130119](#) and PQ [155070](#)



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3. **Following the announcement of the Prime Minister's roadmap out of lockdown, does the Department have a timeframe for when it expects face-to-face verification appointments to resume?**
4. **The Department uses online services, such as Verify and Confirm Your Identity, to verify people's identity when they claim Universal Credit. Why has it not been possible to use these services to verify EU/EEA nationals' identities during the pandemic?**

We would be grateful for a response by Thursday 15 April.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Chair, Work and Pensions Committee