



FRAGOMEN

Attracting Talent to the Space Sector: Navigating the UK Immigration System

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Introduction

The UK's space sector is a thriving and significant contributor to the national economy, experiencing substantial growth and investment. After the US, it is the most attractive destination for space investment globally. The global space sector is expected to grow by up to 11% annually over the next decade. This presents significant opportunities for growth, investment, and innovation for the UK's space organizations, particularly in areas such as Earth observation, manufacturing, and satellite connectivity.

There is, therefore, a clear imperative to attract and ensure a future pipeline of space talent in the UK. With the post-Brexit immigration system, there are now multiple visa options open to employers in this sector as well as to the overseas employees they wish to recruit across the panoply of skill, divided between 'sponsored' and 'unsponsored' routes.

Put simply, 'sponsored' routes are those where government-licensed employers can recruit overseas workers by offering them sponsorship. This route is only open to workers who meet certain personal and employment requirements. In contrast, 'unsponsored' routes are those allowing overseas workers to come to the UK to work without the need for sponsorship by any specific employer, instead by reference only to their own attributes such as education attainment.

This guide will assist in navigating the different requirements of the various visa options employers in the space sector could explore under the two categories.

The guide serves as a resource for individuals and organizations in the UK space sector, helping them navigate the various visa options available and their specific requirements. It provides a high-level overview of key considerations to assist in choosing the most suitable solution for businesses or employees.

This resource was initially prepared in collaboration with the [Space Skills Alliance](#) following the [Space Sector Skills Survey 2023](#). The survey was commissioned by the UK Space Agency (UKSA) and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) to be the main source of evidence to support the UK Government's understanding of skills gaps and workforce challenges in the space sector. It was conducted by Space Skills Alliance, supported by [know.space](#).

The 2023 survey revealed that nearly every (95%) business in the space sector has experienced skills-related challenges, a significant increase from 67% in 2020. More than a third of the sector (36%) tried to recruit from outside the UK. Within this group, 83% faced challenges including high costs and the complexity of the visa process, leading to 21% being unsuccessful in their endeavours to recruit overseas.

Following the sweeping immigration reforms brought in by the government in April 2024 (which included substantial increases to salary thresholds and visa costs), and the most significant UK general election in a generation, Fragomen stands ready and resourced to help your business weather these changes and secure the talent you need to thrive in an increasingly and uncertain global landscape.

About Fragomen

Launching global talent beyond limits, Fragomen is the go-to partner for immigration and mobility solutions in the fast-evolving space industry. With deep sector expertise, strategic government relations acumen and a global network of nearly 6,000 professionals across 66 offices worldwide, we power seamless mobility in 170+ countries – ensuring space innovators move at speed. Our cutting-edge technology, sustainability insights and customised solutions fuel the talent behind every mission. From Houston to Scotland, we help space pioneers break barriers—because in space, every moment counts, and so does every move.

A member of the Am Law 100 and Am Law Global 100, Fragomen's professionals are respected leaders in the immigration field, and the firm is regularly recognised as a leading firm for its percentage of minority and female attorneys.

We support all aspects of global immigration for both corporate and private clients, including strategic planning, quality management, reporting, case management and processing, compliance program counselling, representation in government investigations, government relations, complex matter solutions, and litigation.

We know that companies in the space sector have demanding business needs, ranging from project schedules to competing for talent that require thoughtful and timely immigration advice. We also understand the current skills shortage is key for the industry, as well as the increasing focus on sustainability and green skills.

Clients value Fragomen for our:

Deep experience - As a firm, we focus exclusively on immigration and have provided immigration services for over 70 years, giving us profound insight into immigration matters. We think strategically about visa options and handle the immigration logistics, so we can get people where they need to be, when they need to be there.

Global reach - Our firm has 66 offices worldwide and offers support in more than 170 countries, including Frankfurt, Houston and the UK (including a separate Scottish Practice) – three strategic locations for the space sector. We know that the space industry often has a highly mobile workforce with hubs in different countries and can help to determine the best location for people depending on their immigration status.

Government relations - We have worked to build strategic connections across the space sector and government in recent years. For example, we regularly partner with the Space Skills Alliance and have an active role on the Scottish Parliament's cross-party group on space. We can advise on strategies and best practices to engage government to ensure the voice of clients in the space sector are held by policymakers.

Consular support - Our consular practice teams around the world liaise directly with consulates to support space sector clients, who may require expedited visa appointments or advice about applications at consular posts abroad.

Unparalleled knowledge - Thanks to our wide reach and representation of space sector clients, we can benchmark industry trends around the world, and keep our clients updated on regulatory changes.

Innovative technology - With our worldwide immigration case management portal, our space sector clients will always have 24/7 access to key information and analytics.

Green Skills - As governments and employers alike navigate the green transition, securing talent with green skills will be essential. Our Space Industry Team is mindful of green skills and the place of immigration in helping address talent shortages in this space. Our team is ready to discuss the challenges as well as the actions employers can take to secure talent with green skills and ready their workforce for the skills needed for the green transition.

Our dedicated Space Sector team members, whose details are included below, will be pleased to speak to you. To learn more about our work with the space sector: www.fragomen.com/services/industries/space-andaerospace



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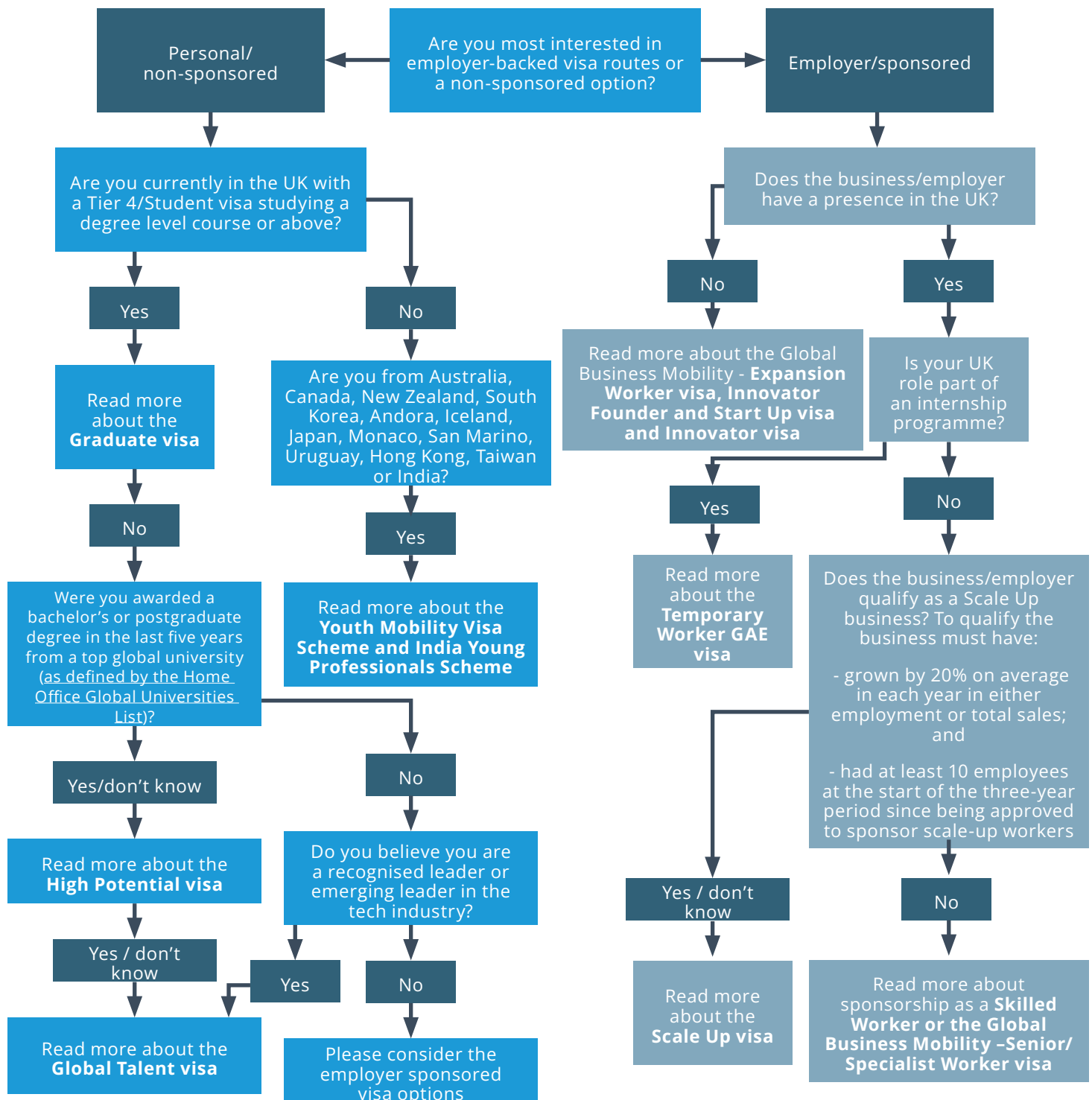


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Decision Tree



Eligible Roles and SOC Codes

To sponsor an employee under the 'Skilled Worker' or 'Senior or Specialist Worker' category, the role that is being recruited for must be eligible by skill and salary level. All eligible roles are listed in the Immigration Rules Appendix Skilled Occupations. Each job role is given its own four-digit Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code.

The classifications are taken from the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\)](#) common classification of occupational information for the UK. The occupation codes are used to identify the relevant 'going rate' and salary threshold for each job and provides details such as example job titles associated with that specific occupation code. Roles (and their minimum salary requirements) that are currently eligible for sponsorship and commonly used for sponsorship in the space sector include:

SOC code	Minimum annual salary for Skilled Worker (based on a 37.5 hour working week), unless an exemption applies	Minimum hourly rates
2122 – Mechanical engineers	£42,500	£21.79
2124 – Electronics engineers	£49,900	£25.59
2126 – Aerospace engineers	£46,400	£23.79
2133 - IT business analysts, architects and systems designers	£51,700	£26.51
2134 - Programmers and software development professionals	£49,400	£25.33
3113 – Engineering technicians	£39,800	£20.41

What about the Shortage Occupation List?

The Immigration Salary List (ISL) has replaced the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) since April 2024, following advice from the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), the government's independent advisors, to cut down or abolish the SOL. Like the Shortage Occupation List (SOL), the main benefit of inclusion of a role on the ISL is a 20% reduction on the general salary threshold. In other words, if the role you are recruiting for is [on the list](#), then the minimum salary threshold will be reduced to 80% of the route's usual minimum rate.

However, this new list represents only 8% of the roles currently eligible for the Skilled Worker pathway, whereas the ISL's predecessor, the SOL, included 30 per cent of the jobs eligible. This means the ISL is more restrictive as fewer occupations now benefit from preferential treatment under the Skilled Worker route.

For the space sector, none of the most sponsored roles (as outlined above) are included on the ISL. This means the sector is generally unable to take advantage of the special concession offered to many other sectors to recruit hard-to fill roles. Fragomen continues to engage with government on the needs of our clients in the space sector and monitor the work of the MAC on the ISL closely to ensure that they are kept abreast of any proposed changes.

Employer-Sponsored Visas

Overview

The main employer-sponsored visa in the UK is the Skilled Worker visa (previously Tier 2 (General)). Employers with a sponsor licence may use the Skilled Worker category to recruit individuals to work in the UK in a specific job. Employers may also have the option of sponsoring under the Senior or Specialist Worker (Global Business Mobility) route which is specifically designed for existing employees coming to the UK on temporary assignments. The table below provides a quick comparison of the two routes:

Visa category	Skilled Worker	Senior or Specialist Worker
Target worker	Permanent hire/New Hire	Existing overseas Employee
Skill level	RQF3 (A-Level)	RQF Level 6 (Degree)
Salary threshold	£38,700 or the going rate – whichever is higher	£48,500 or the going rate – whichever is higher
Length of stay	Permanent	Up to five years, or nine if paid £73,900
Likely lead time	Six weeks (if priority services used)	Four to six weeks (if priority services used)
Government fees	Very high	Very high
Controls	English language requirement	Typically one year company experience
Dependants allowed?	Yes	Yes
Settlement route?	Yes	No

What does it mean to be a sponsor?

To sponsor someone in the UK, the employer must have a sponsor licence. This is issued by the Home Office and authorises the employer to sponsor individuals to work in the UK in a specified role within the business. The Home Office will award work visas to sponsored workers and in return the employer will be required to comply with sponsor obligations to maintain their sponsor licence.

Applying for a UK sponsor licence

To obtain a sponsor licence, a company must file an application with the Home Office. In applying the company undertakes record-keeping and reporting obligations in relation to sponsored workers and must have processes in place to meet those obligations.

The company must be operating lawfully in the UK and provide specified documents to evidence this. The Home Office will require the company to nominate suitable UK employees to be responsible for ensuring the licence is operated in a compliant way.

Applications generally take six to eight weeks to be decided but can be expedited for an additional fee.

Skilled Worker Visa

What does this visa allow you to do?

This visa allows the individual to **work in the specific role they have been sponsored to undertake and only for a specific employer.**

To qualify under the Skilled Worker category:

- The individual must be issued a **Certificate of Sponsorship** from the sponsor with information about the work they will do in the UK.
- The job must be on the list of **eligible occupations** for sponsorship.
- The salary must **meet the going rate for the role or the general salary threshold of £38,700**, whichever is higher, unless one of the exceptions apply.
- The individual **must speak English to the required standard** either by:
 - Being a national of a majority English-speaking country; or
 - Having a relevant qualification such as a degree taught in English; or
 - Passing an approved English language test.
- The individual must hold a **valid medical certificate** confirming they are free of tuberculosis (unless exempt).
- The individual must have **funds to evidence they can support themselves**, or the sponsor may certify this on their behalf.
- Applicants must gain **70 points** to be eligible for this visa.

50 points for main eligibility requirements:

Characteristic	Points
Employed by approved Sponsor	20
Skilled Job	20
English Language	10

All 50 points must be scored.

New applicants - options to score 20 points for salary

Characteristic	Points
The applicant's salary equals or exceeds both: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– £38,700 per year; and– the going rate for the SOC 2020 occupation code.	20

<p>The applicant is being sponsored for a job on the Immigration Salary List and their salary equals or exceeds both:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – £30,960 per year; and – the going rate for the SOC 2020 occupation code. 	20
<p>The applicant has a PhD in a subject relevant to the job and their salary equals or exceeds both:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – £34,830 per year; and – 90% of the going rate for the SOC 2020 occupation code. 	20
<p>The applicant has a PhD in a STEM subject relevant to the job and their salary equals or exceeds both:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – £30,960 per year; and – 80% of the going rate for the SOC 2020 occupation code. 	20

Must score 20 points

New Entrant Threshold: Graduates and those under the age of 26

New entrants are individuals who are usually in the early stages of their career and, if they can meet defined criteria, can be paid a **reduced salary for a maximum of four years** as a Skilled Worker.

The new entrant discount provides a **30% discount on the going rate and a 20% discount on the general salary threshold**, the higher of which must be paid. Therefore, the minimum salary threshold is £30,960 per year, or 70% of the going rate for the occupation code, whichever is higher, as listed in the table above.

A Skilled Worker applicant can be a new entrant if they meet one of the below options:

- The applicant is **under the age of 26** on the date of application;
- The applicant is sponsored for a **postdoctoral position** for specified roles in natural and social sciences;
- The applicant is working towards a **recognised professional qualification** in a UK-regulated profession;
- The applicant is working towards **full registration or chartered status** with a relevant professional body for the job for which they are sponsored;
- The applicant's **most recent permission was as a Student**; that visa expired less than two years ago; they were previously studying in the UK at degree level or above; and have either been awarded the degree, or are applying no more than three months before they are expected to complete their course, or have completed at least 12 months study in the UK towards a PhD;

- The applicant's **most recent permission was a Graduate visa** and that permission has expired less than two years ago.

The applicant's combined permission as a Skilled Worker, Graduate and/or Tier 2 Migrant cannot be more than four years in total (whether or not continuous). This means that an individual who switches to Skilled Worker at the end of a two-year Graduate visa can only be sponsored for two years initially if relying on the new entrant provision.

They can extend beyond the initial four years, but at the point of extension, they will no longer be able to utilise the new entrant rates.

Family members

Skilled Workers may sponsor their dependent **partner** (husband, wife, civil partner, or unmarried partner cohabiting for at least two years) and any dependent children (under the age of 18). Family members will receive the same length of visa as the main applicant and may live work and study in the UK without restriction. For some courses of study, they'll need an Academic Technology Approval Scheme certificate.

'Partner' Definition:

You must be able to prove one of the following:

- You're in a **civil partnership or marriage** that's recognised in the UK;
- You've been **living together** in a relationship for at least two years when you apply; or
- You've been in **a relationship for at least two years** when you apply but you cannot live together, for example because you're working or studying in different places, or it's not accepted in your culture.

If you're not living together, you'll need to prove that you have an ongoing commitment to each other by providing evidence that you, for example:

- Communicate regularly with each other;
- Support each other financially;
- Care for any children you have together; or
- Spend time together as a couple, for example on holiday or at events.

How long you can stay?

It is initially granted for a period **of up to five years**, after which it **can be extended**, or if the visa holder is eligible, they may apply for settlement.

Changing employers will require a new visa application, known as a Change of Employment application. In some cases, changing role, even if still working for the same employer, will also require a new visa to be obtained in instances where the role is significantly different.

Does this visa lead to settlement?

Skilled Worker visa holders **may be eligible to apply for settlement** (also known as permanent residence or ILR – indefinite leave to remain) after **five years** if they meet the following criteria:

- They are paid **£38,700 or the going rate for the role**, whichever is higher, and are still required for their role for the foreseeable future;
- They have **no criminal record**;
- They have passed the **Life in the UK Test**; and
- They have not been absent from the UK for more than **180 days during any 12-month period in the five- year period** preceding their settlement application (this also applies to dependent partners).

Approximate Costs

Outlined below are the government fees for a single applicant applying for a Skilled Worker visa outside of the UK. Fees listed are accurate as of March 2025 (all government fees are subject to change).

	Small or Charitable Sponsors	Medium to Large Sponsors
Certificate of Sponsorship	£239	£239* Expected to increase to £525 on 09 April 2025
Immigration Skills Charge	£364 per year	£1,000 per year

	Up to 3 Years	Over 3 Years
Immigration Salary List	£551* Expected to increase to £590 on 09 April 2025	£1,084* Expected to increase to £1,160 on 09 April 2025
Outside of the UK	£719 * Expected to increase to £769 on 09 April 2025	£1,420 * Expected to increase to £1,519 on 09 April 2025
Inside of the UK	£827 *Expected to increase to £885 on 09 April 2025	£1,636 * Expected to increase to £1,751 on 09 April 2025

	Under 18	Over 18
Immigration Health Surcharge	£776 per year	£1,035 per year

Approximate Timeframes

The individual can apply for a visa **up to three months** before the day they are due to start work in the UK.

On average, processing times are **three weeks in most overseas jurisdictions and eight weeks for in country applications** from the date of submission.

Priority services are available widely and can reduce processing times to five working days after the individual has attended their biometric appointment.

Senior or Specialist Worker Visa (Global Business Mobility)

What does the visa allow you to do?

The 'Senior or Specialist Worker' visa is a sub-category of the Global Business Mobility route and replaced the 'Intra Company Transfer' category in 2022. This route enables an overseas business to temporarily send employees to their organisation's UK branch to undertake a specific role that cannot be performed by a resident worker.

The salary requirements are higher than the Skilled Worker category and the 'Senior or Specialist Worker' visa does not lead to settlement in the UK. However, the category is still useful for some sponsors. This route does not require evidence of English language which can make it faster and easier to obtain a visa. This can be helpful if there is an urgent need to have the employee in the UK.

Eligibility/Requirements

To qualify for a 'Senior or Specialist Worker' visa, you must:

- Be an existing employee of an organisation that's been approved by the Home Office as a sponsor. If you will be earning less than £73,900 per year in the UK, you must have been employed by your organisation's linked entity outside of the UK for at least 12 months;
- Have a Certificate of Sponsorship from your sponsor with information about the work you will do in the UK;
- Perform a role that's on the list of eligible occupations for sponsorship;
- Be paid at least £48,500 per year, or the going rate for your job – whichever is higher; and
- Have funds to evidence you can support yourself, otherwise your sponsor may certify this on your behalf.

Can you bring family members?

Yes, a 'Senior or Specialist Worker' visa holder can bring a dependent partner (husband, wife, civil partner, or unmarried partner cohabiting for at least two years) and any dependent children (under the age of 18). Family members will receive the same period of leave as the main individual. Please see Partner definition above.

How long you can stay?

The total visa length in this category cannot exceed five years in a six-year period (or nine years in a ten-year period if the visa holder is earning £73,900 per year or above).

Once this limit is reached, the individual would either need to leave the UK for at least 12 months before returning as a Senior or Specialist Worker (known as "cooling off") or switch into an alternative visa category such as Skilled Worker.

Changing employers will require a new visa application and switch into the Skilled Worker route. In some cases, changing role, even if still working for the same employer will also require a new visa to be obtained where the new role is significantly different to the one listed in the worker's Certificate of Sponsorship (e.g., if the SOC code is changing).

Does this visa lead to settlement?

The 'Senior' or 'Specialist Worker' visa does not lead to settlement and time spent in this route does not count towards settlement. However, the visa holder may be eligible to switch into the Skilled Worker category, which leads to settlement after five years in the route living and working in the UK. Switching into Skilled Worker visa is permitted in-country.

Approximate Costs

Outlined below are the estimated government fees for a single applicant applying for a Senior or Specialist Worker Visa. Fees listed are accurate as of March 2025 (all government fees are subject to change).

	Small or Charitable Sponsors	Medium to Large Sponsors
Certificate of Sponsorship	£239	£239* Expected to increase to 525 on 09 April 2025
Immigration Skills Charge	£364 per year	£1,000 per year

	Up to 3 Years	Over 3 Years
Outside of the UK	£719 * Expected to increase to £769 on 09 April 2025	£1,519* Expected to increase to £1,519 on 09 April 2025
Inside of the UK	£827* Expected to increase to £885 on 09 April 2025	£1,636 * Expected to increase to £1,751 on 09 April 2025

	Under 18	Over 18
Immigration Health Surcharge	£776 per year	£1,035 per year

Approximate Timeframes

The applicant can apply for a visa **up to three months before** the day they are due to start work in the UK.

On average, processing times are **three weeks in most overseas jurisdictions** and **eight weeks for in country applications** from the date of submission.

Priority services are available widely and can reduce processing times to five to seven working days.

UK Expansion Worker Visa (Global Business Mobility)

Overview

The UK Expansion Worker visa allows an employee of an overseas business to come to the UK to **set up a branch of an overseas business that has not started trading in the UK yet**. For an individual to utilise this route, they must have a UK sponsor. Therefore, the business will need to obtain a UK sponsor licence before establishing a trading presence in the UK.

What does it allow you to do?

The UK Expansion Worker visa allows an individual to work for an employer so that they can set up a branch of the business in the UK. An individual who obtains an Expansion Worker visa may also study and do voluntary work. For some courses they'll need an Academic Technology Approval Scheme certificate.

Eligibility/Requirements

Before a visa application can be submitted, the overseas business must establish a branch or wholly-owned subsidiary in the UK which must not have started trading. The branch/subsidiary must apply for and obtain a sponsor licence from the Home Office before the individual can be sponsored.

Applicants must:

- Be **employed by the overseas business as either a senior manager or specialist** employee, usually for a minimum period of 12 months, unless -
 - They will earn above £73,900 per year in the UK;
 - Are a Japanese national doing work for a Japanese company that is expanding to the UK; or
 - Are a national or permanent resident of Australia doing work for an Australian company that is expanding to the UK.
- Do a job that is on the list of eligible occupations for sponsorship. The job on offer must be at the required skill level – **RQF 6 or above (degree level and equivalent)**.
- Have a valid **Certificate of Sponsorship** from their employer.
- Be paid the **going rate for the job, or £48,500 per year** – whichever is higher.
- Have **enough money to support themselves** in the UK – they'll usually need to have at least £1,270 available (unless an exemption applies).
- If switching from a different visa category the individual may need to leave the UK and make a UK Expansion worker visa from abroad.

Can you bring family members?

Yes, the applicant can bring a dependent partner (husband, wife, civil partner or unmarried partner cohabiting for at least two years) and any dependent children (under the age of 18). Family members will receive the same period of leave as the main applicant.

How long you can stay?

The individual can stay in the UK for a **maximum of two years** under the UK Expansion Worker visa.

Does it lead to settlement?

The route **does not lead to settlement and time spent in this route does not count towards settlement**. Once the UK entity has begun trading and obtained a sponsor licence, the individual **may be eligible to switch into the Skilled Worker category, which leads to settlement** after five years in the route living and working in the UK. Switching into Skilled Worker visa is **permitted in-country**.

Approximate Costs

The current application fee is £298 (* this is expected to rise to £319 on 09 April 2025), and the Certificate of Sponsorship fee is **£25**. The applicant will also be subject to the Immigration Health Surcharge which is **£1,035 per year** for most individuals.

Approximate Timeframes

The applicant can apply for a visa **up to three months before** the day they are due to start work in the UK.

On average, processing times are **three weeks in most overseas jurisdictions** and eight weeks for in country applications from the date of submission.

Priority services are available widely and can reduce processing times to five to seven working days.

Other Considerations

Individuals cannot:

- Work for themselves or any other business, unless they are eligible and update their visa;
- Stay in the UK after the assignment is ended by the employer;
- Access public funds (benefits); or
- Apply for settlement in the UK.

Temporary Worker (Government Authorised Exchange) Visa

Overview:

The Temporary Worker (TW) Government Authorised Exchange (GAE) route allows individuals to come to the UK for a temporary period on an approved scheme. There are four types of programmes: work experience; training; research or fellowship; or taking part in an Overseas Government Language Programme.

The impact of increasing costs and salary requirements for sponsorship has made it more difficult for entrepreneurs, startups and even large companies to sponsor overseas workers given the significant financial outlay that employers must cover at the outset of offering employment. However, internships can play a key part in a company's annual recruitment strategy by reducing the initial immigration costs required to hire someone. In addition, an internship scheme can be used to attract emerging talent across the globe, build the company's brand globally and create a pipeline for future talent within the business.

The GAE route can be used to sponsor individuals to undertake an internship or work experience within a UK company. The role must be skilled to RQF Level 3 or above and must be supernumerary (in addition to normal staffing requirements). Sponsorship is usually limited to 12 months, but there is an overall maximum of 24 months. The UK company will require a GAE sponsor to act as an 'overarching body' to sponsor the intern on behalf of the company, and the GAE sponsor's specific scheme's requirements must also be met.

Fragomen LLP is an approved TW GAE sponsor under the sub-category 'work experience' and can sponsor supernumerary internships which last up to 12 months or 24 months.

For more information on the Fragomen scheme, please contact Fragomen LLP's GAE team at ukinternships@fragomen.com.

What does this visa allow you to do?

You can:

- Study (for some courses you'll need an Academic Technology Approval Scheme certificate);
- Work in the job described in your Certificate of Sponsorship i.e., undertake the internship;
- Work in a second job for up to 20 hours per week (in the same profession and at the same professional level); and
- Work in a job on the Skilled Worker Immigration Salary List for up to 20 hours per week in addition to your main job.

You cannot:

- Take a permanent job; or
- Access public funds/benefits.

Eligibility / Requirements

The applicant must:

- Have a Certificate of Sponsorship from their UK sponsor;
- Have enough money to support themselves in the UK – they'll usually need to have at least £1,270 available (unless an exemption applies); and
- Unlike many employment categories in the UK, there is no English language requirement or minimum salary requirement for a GAE worker visa.

In addition, the sponsor will stipulate the specific eligibility criteria the individual must meet based on the scheme they are running. For example, this may require the individual to have a certain level of education, or for an internship to be part of a structured programme with confirmation from the employer that the role is supernumerary in nature, (i.e. that the internship is not filling an open permanent position within the UK company).

Can you bring family members?

Yes, the individual can bring a dependent partner (husband, wife, civil partner, or unmarried partner cohabiting for at least two years) and any dependent children (under the age of 18). Family members will receive the same period of leave as the main applicant.

How long you can stay?

Up to 12 months duration permitted – extensions are permitted up to the maximum 24 months.

Does this route lead to settlement?

The route does not lead to settlement and time spent in this route does not count towards settlement. Once the UK entity has begun trading and obtained a sponsor licence, the individual may be eligible to switch into the Skilled Worker category, which leads to settlement after five years in the route living and working in the UK. Switching into Skilled Worker visa is permitted in-country.

Approximate Costs

The application fee is £298 (* this is expected to rise to £319 on 09 April 2025), and is the same whether you're applying from inside or outside the UK. The applicant will also be subject to the Immigration Health Surcharge which is £1,035 per year for most individuals.

Approximate Timeframes

The applicant can apply for a visa up to three months before the day they are due to start work in the UK. On average, processing times are three weeks in most overseas jurisdictions and eight weeks for in country applications from the date of submission. Priority services are available widely and can reduce processing times to five to seven working days.

Benefits of the Temporary Work (GAE) Scheme

- No minimum salary requirement; unpaid internships are possible under this route.
- Dependants permitted to join main applicant.
- No English language requirement.

Scale-up Visa

Overview

The Scale-Up visa was launched in 2022. The intention of the government in introducing this route was to allow entrepreneurs and fast-growing start-ups to attract highly skilled workers to the UK. Those with this visa are afforded a great deal of flexibility making the UK a more attractive option globally.

Sponsored Route

The visa encompasses a sponsored route and an unsponsored route. Under the sponsored route the visa is employer-sponsored initially as with a Skilled Worker visa. Criteria must be met with regards to the skill level of the role, the minimum salary and sponsorship must be offered for at least six months.

The sponsor must also qualify as a “scale-up” business (see below). However, in contrast to the Skilled Worker, Scale-Up visa holders are free to leave their employers after six months and their visa will not be cancelled. This leaves them able to work for an alternative employer, including those that may not have a sponsor licence.

What is a Scale-up business?

To be deemed a scale-up business, the business must have in the three years before gaining approval from the Home Office to sponsor scale-up workers:

- Grown by 20% on average in each year in either employment or total sales (turnover).
- Had at least 10 employees at the start of the three-year period.

Employers that wish to sponsor scale-up workers will be required to obtain a sponsor licence that permits them to do so. Employers that already hold a sponsor licence but not specifically to sponsor scale-up workers will need to apply to add this option to their licence.

What does the visa allow you to do?

For the initial grant under the sponsored route, the applicant must have a job offer to perform a suitably skilled and remunerated role from a scale-up business that must act as their sponsor for at least six months.

After this period, the visa holder can work for any employer. However, salary requirements will still need to be met in order for the visa to be extended (including having spent at least half of the time being paid through PAYE (Pay As You Earn), meaning self-employed earnings will not count). If the visa holder wishes to change employer within the first six months, their visa must be updated.

In addition to work, a Scale-up visa holder may also study or take on additional work including being self-employed or carrying out voluntary work. For some courses they'll need an Academic Technology Approval Scheme certificate.

Eligibility/Requirements

To qualify for a Scale-up visa under the sponsored route, the applicant must:

- Have a confirmed job offer to work for an approved scale-up business for at least six months in a genuine role;
- Have a Certificate of Sponsorship from their employer;
- Have a job offer to do a job that is on the list of eligible occupations and deemed to be at least RQF level 6 (equivalent to a degree level role). As with the Skilled Worker category, the Home Office stipulates specific SOC codes that can be used for sponsorship under this visa category;
- Be paid at least: £36,300 per year, or the minimum required for their role as stipulated by their SOC code, whichever is higher;
- Meet an English language requirement; and
- Have enough money to support themselves in the UK – they'll usually need to have at least £1,270 available (unless an exemption applies).

Can you bring family members?

Yes, the applicant can bring a dependent partner (husband, wife, civil partner or unmarried partner cohabiting for at least two years) and any dependent children (under the age of 18). Family members will receive the same period of leave as the main applicant.

How long you can stay?

The initial visa will be granted for two years, and the visa can then be extended for an additional three years.

Does the visa lead to settlement?

Yes. Scale-up visa holders may be eligible to apply for settlement after five years in the UK. The initial visa will be granted for two years, and the visa can then be extended for an additional three years.

Approximate Costs

It costs £822 (* this is expected to rise to £880 on 09 April 2025) to apply for the visa, along with a £25 fee for the Certificate of Sponsorship. In addition, the applicant will usually need to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge of £1,035 per year.

Approximate Timeframes

The applicant can apply for a visa up to three months before the day they are due to start work in the UK.

On average, processing times are three weeks in most overseas jurisdictions and eight weeks for in country applications from the date of submission.

Priority services are available widely and can reduce processing times to five to seven working days.

Advantages of the Scale-up Visa compared to the Skilled Worker visa

- The minimum salary requirement for a Skilled Worker visa is relatively higher at £38,700 per year (or the SOC code minimum, whichever is higher), whereas for the scale-up route, the minimum salary requirement is lower at £36,300 per year (or the SOC code minimum, whichever is higher).
- Those with a Scale-Up visa are permitted to change employer or change job after six months and do not require ongoing sponsorship. This should make the UK a more attractive option for highly skilled workers as it means the individual has a great deal of flexibility to work for any employer including those that do not have a sponsor licence, which many businesses but particularly start-ups may not have. This also means that after six months, the sponsor no longer has any administrative compliance obligations that accompany sponsorship.
- It allows greater flexibility as the individual may change role without having to apply for a new visa. In addition, the individual could choose to become self-employed. In contrast, those with a Skilled Worker visa must remain sponsored by their employer to perform a specific job throughout their time with that visa and changing employer would require them to obtain a new visa.
- There is no Immigration Skills Charge applicable, saving sponsors up to £1,000 per year.

Disadvantages compared to the Skilled Worker visa

- The sponsoring company will likely need to apply for a new limb to their licence to allow for sponsorship under the Scale-up route.
- The skill level requirement for sponsorship is relatively high at RQF level 6 (deemed to be equivalent to degree level roles).
- Self-employed earnings will not count towards the minimum salary requirements for a visa extension. At least half of the time spent as a Scale-Up visa holder must be spent in employment where pay is paid through PAYE (Pay as You Earn).
- As the employee need only work for the sponsor for the initial six months of holding the visa, there is greater risk to the employer that the employee may leave for alternative employment.

Personal/Non-sponsored Visas

Global Talent Visa

Overview

The Global Talent visa (formerly Tier 1 Exceptional Talent) is a flexible UK visa route aimed at individuals who can show that they have **exceptional talent or promise in science, engineering, humanities, medicine, digital technology or arts and culture**.

All applicants must obtain endorsement from [one of six approved endorsing bodies](#) recognised by the Home Office. Each endorsing body follows their own endorsement criteria, but they share two sets of common criteria when assessing an applicant:

- **Exceptional Talent** for applicants who have already demonstrated that they have made a significant contribution as a leader to their field; and
- **Exceptional Promise** for applicants at an early stage in their careers and have already shown the potential to make significant contributions as a future leader in their field.

[Tech Nation](#) is the body capable of endorsing digital technology individuals working in AI, software development, cybersecurity, robotics, and other related fields to work in the UK via the Global Talent route.

Fragomen is proud to be Tech Nation's exclusive immigration provider.

Academic scholars and researchers working can seek endorsement from the [Royal Academy of Engineering](#). Their remit includes satellite systems, aerospace manufacturing and materials. Alternatively, the [Royal Society](#) provides endorsement in the field of space technology.

Individuals for endorsement must provide evidence of:

- if technical applicants, proven technical expertise with the latest technologies in building, using, deploying, or exploiting a technology stack and building technical infrastructure; or
- if business applicants, proven commercial investment or product expertise in building digital products or leading investments in significant digital product businesses.

What does the visa allow you to do?

The Global Talent visa allows the holder to live and work in the UK without restriction. It is not contingent on working for a specific business, though the holder must work in a job within their endorsement category.

Eligibility / Requirements

- Tech applicants must obtain endorsement from Tech Nation.
 - Exceptional Talent applicants must show that they have been recognised as a leading talent in the digital technology sector in the last five years.
 - Exceptional Promise applicants must show they have been recognised as having potential to be a leading talent in the digital technology field in the last five years.

There is an exception for those who hold certain eligible prestigious prizes for achievements in their field, who can bypass the endorsement stage and apply for a visa directly.

- Applicants do not need a job offer to apply for this visa.
- Applicants must also demonstrate at least two of the following:
 - A proven track record of innovation (or for Promise – at least one example) as a founder, senior executive or employee working on a new digital field or concept;
 - Proof of recognition for work beyond their occupation that contributes to the advancement of the field;
 - Significant technical, commercial or entrepreneurial contributions as a founder, senior executive, board member or employee of a product-led digital technology company (or for Promise – at least one example); and
 - Demonstration of exceptional ability in the field by making academic contributions through research published or endorsed by an expert (or for Promise – at least one example).

The following specialisms are not considered suitable:

- Corporate roles or experience of managing large corporate teams;
- Junior investors / analysts. Such specialisms must be supported by an investment track record made at a senior level and are not suitable for Exceptional Promise; and
- Service Delivery, Process Delivery, Outsourcing, Consultancy (technical or management), ERP Consultancy, Systems Admin and all related fields.

Can you bring family members?

Yes, the applicant can bring a dependant partner (husband, wife, civil partner or unmarried partner cohabiting for at least two years) and any dependent children (under the age of 18). Family members will receive the same period of leave as the main applicant.

How long you can stay?

The visa can be granted for up to five years and can be extended.

Does the visa lead to settlement?

Yes. If endorsed by Tech Nation under the Exceptional Talent criteria, the applicant may qualify for settlement after three years' residence in the UK. If endorsed under the Exceptional Promise criteria, then the qualifying period for settlement is five years.

Approximate Costs

It costs £716 (* this is expected to rise to £766 on 09 April 2025) to apply for the visa. The applicant will also be subject to the Immigration Health Surcharge which is £1,035 per year for most applicants.

Approximate Timeframes

Applications for endorsement typically take five to eight weeks to be decided and can be "fast-tracked" to three weeks.

Once the applicant has received their endorsement and is ready to submit the visa application itself, processing times are three weeks in most overseas jurisdictions and eight weeks for in country applications from the date of submission.

Priority services are available widely and can reduce processing times to five to seven working days.

We suggest allowing approximately four to six months in total to obtain a Global Talent visa, including preparing all the supporting documents.

Advantages

- Lower visa fees – £716 (*expected to rise to £766 on 09 April 2025) for a five-year visa under this route, compared to £1,420 (*expected to rise to £1,519 on 09 April 2025) for the Skilled Worker visa.
- No sponsorship required – no cost to the employer and no Immigration Skills Charge.
- Unrivalled flexibility – the visa holder can be an employee of a tech firm or establish their own start-up.
- Leads to settlement in the UK after three years (Talent) or five years (Promise) – you can also combine time spent in the UK in certain other categories, such as Skilled Worker and Innovator.

Disadvantages

- Subjective and challenging endorsement criteria – this visa is for those who are leading talents or have shown potential to one day be a leading talent in tech. It is therefore not a suitable route for everyone.

High Potential Visa

Overview

The High Potential visa allows individuals to come to the UK without needing a job offer. Aimed at attracting top international talent to the UK, the route is open to those who have graduated from a top global university.

This visa is particularly appealing to employers, as it is not a sponsored route (i.e., the employer will not have to cover the costs of sponsorship, as they would in the Skilled Worker category, for example).

What does this visa allow you to do?

Successful applicants will be issued with a two-year work visa, or three years for those that hold a Ph.D.

Eligibility/Requirements

- Applicants must be over the age of 18 and have enough money to support themselves without relying on public funds, they'll usually need to have at least £1,270 available (unless an exemption applies).
- Applicants must have graduated from an [eligible university](#) in the last five years. The list of eligible universities is updated annually. The applicant will need to refer to the list from the year they graduated.
- The applicant's academic qualification is required to have been verified by UK Ecctis (UK Visas and Nationality degree verification service).

Can you bring family members?

Yes, the High Potential visa holder can bring a dependent partner (husband, wife, civil partner or unmarried partner cohabiting for at least two years) and any dependent children (under the age of 18). Family members will receive the same period of leave as the main applicant.

Does this route lead to settlement?

The High Potential visa does not lead directly to settlement; however, it is possible to switch into another visa category if the eligibility requirements are met.

Approximate Costs

The current application fee is £822 (*expected to rise to £880 on 09 April 2025). The applicant will also be subject to the Immigration Health Surcharge which is £1,035 per year for most applicants.

Approximate Timeframes

On average, processing times are three weeks in most overseas jurisdictions and eight weeks for in country applications from the date of submission.

Priority services are available widely and can reduce processing times to five to seven working days.

Start-up and Founder Visas

Overview

The Innovator and Start-up visa routes replaced the Tier 1 Entrepreneur and Graduate Entrepreneur routes. Entry to either scheme rests on the applicant obtaining endorsement from a Home Office authorised endorsing non-governmental body – typically UK universities, accelerators and investors (a full list of endorsing bodies is [published on the Home Office website](#)).

Start-up Visa

The Start-up visa was for applicants with little to no business experience who want to set up a new business in the UK. Under this route there was no need to evidence available investment funds, but the business must be innovative, viable and scalable, and different from anything else on the market.

Individuals can no longer apply under this route.

Should individuals wish to set up a business in the UK, they may be able to apply for an Innovator Founder visa instead. Those in the UK who wish to remain in the UK can switch to an “Innovator Founder” visa if their visa is ending and want to stay in the UK for business.

Innovator Founder Visa

The Innovator Founder route is for a person seeking to establish a business in the UK based on an innovative, viable and scalable business idea they have generated, or to which they have significantly contributed. The application must be supported by an endorsing body and the applicant must have a key role in the day-to-day management and development of the business.

Overview

The applicant can apply for an Innovator Founder visa (previously known as an Innovator visa) if:

- They want to set up and run an innovative business in the UK - it must be something that's different from anything else on the market;
- Their business or business idea has been endorsed by an approved body, also known as an endorsing body; and
- They meet the other eligibility requirements

Eligibility Requirements

Applicants must:

- Meet the English language requirement;
- Be at least 18 years old; and
- Be able to prove that they have enough personal savings to support themselves whilst in the UK
- Applicants must also be able to show that their business idea is:

- New – cannot join a business that is already trading;
- Innovative – must have an original business idea which is different from anything else on the market;
- Viable - with potential for growth; and
- Scalable – must give evidence of planning that includes creating jobs and growing into national and international markets.

Applicants are required to enlist an endorsing body to assess that their business plan meets the requirements.

Endorsing Bodies

The organisations listed in this section can issue endorsements for new Innovator Founder Visas and for Scale-up licenses.

[UK Endorsing Services](#)

[Innovator International](#)

[Investors Limited](#)

[The Global Entrepreneurs Programme \(GEP\)](#)

The application must be supported by an endorsement letter from an endorsing body or legacy endorsing body which must contain the following information:

- The name of the endorsing body or legacy endorsing body;
- Their endorsement reference number;
- The date of issue, which must be no earlier than three months before the date of application;
- The applicant's name, date of birth, nationality and passport number; and
- The name and contact details (telephone number, email and workplace address) of an individual at the endorsing body or legacy endorsing body who will verify the contents of the letter to the Home Office if requested.

An endorsement cannot be accepted if:

- It has been used in an application made after more than three months after date of issue;
- It has been withdrawn by the endorsing body; and
- The endorsing body has lost its status as an endorsing body at the date of decision.

Points Overview for Innovator Founder Applicants

An applicant for entry clearance or permission to stay must be awarded 70 points from the categories below, of which 50 must either be under the 'New Business' or 'Same Business' criteria, but not both.

New Business	Points	Same Business	Points
Business plan	30	Applicant's previous permission was in the Innovator Founder (including Innovator under Appendix Innovator of the rules before 13 April 2023), Start-up or Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) route and they are pursuing a business assessed by a Home Office approved endorsing body either for the previous endorsement or at a contact point during their last grant of leave	10
Business venture is innovative, viable and scalable	20	Business is active, trading and sustainable and demonstrates significant achievements against the business plan	20
English Language requirement at level B2	10	Applicant is active in day-to-day management and development of business	20
Financial requirement	10	English Language requirement at level B2	10
		Financial requirement	10

Can you bring family members?

Yes, the applicant can bring a dependent partner (husband, wife, civil partner or unmarried partner cohabiting for at least two years) and any dependent children (under the age of 18). Family members will receive the same period of leave as the main applicant.

How long you can stay?

The initial visa will be granted for three years and can be extended.

Does this visa lead to settlement?

The applicant may qualify for settlement after a minimum of three years of residence if all eligibility criteria are met:

1. Confirmation that the applicant has shown significant achievements, judged against the business plan assessed in their previous endorsement;
2. Confirmation that the applicant's business is registered with Companies House and the applicant is listed as a director or member of that business;
3. Confirmation the business is active and trading;

4. Confirmation that the business appears to be sustainable for at least the following 12 months, based on its assets and expected income, weighed against its current and planned expenses;
5. Confirmation the applicant has demonstrated an active key role in the day-to-day management and development of the business; and
6. Confirmation the applicant's business venture has met at least two of the following requirements:
 - A. At least £50,000 has been invested into the business and actively spent furthering the business;
 - B. The number of the business's customers has at least doubled within the most recent three years and is currently higher than the mean number of customers for other UK businesses offering comparable main products or services;
 - C. The business has engaged in significant research and development activity and has applied for intellectual property protection in the UK;
 - D. The business has generated a minimum annual gross revenue of £1million in the last full year covered by its accounts;
 - E. The business is generating a minimum annual gross revenue of £500,000 in the last full year covered by its accounts, with at least £100,000 from exporting overseas;
 - F. The business has created the equivalent of at least ten full-time jobs for settled workers; or
 - G. The business has created the equivalent of at least five full-time jobs for settled workers, each of which has a mean salary of at least £25,000 per year (gross pay, excluding any allowances).

An applicant cannot meet the above requirements by relying on the same criterion twice (for example, an applicant who has invested £100,000 (2 x £50,000) in their business venture will be considered to have met one criterion, not two).

Approximate Costs

The current application fee is £1,191 (*expected to rise to £1,274 on 09 April 2025) for applications filed from outside the UK, or £1,486 (*expected to rise to £1,590 on 09 April 2025) to extend or switch in-country into the visa category. The applicant will also be subject to the Immigration Health Surcharge which is £1,035 per year for most applicants.

Approximate Timeframes

On average, processing times are three weeks in most overseas jurisdictions and eight weeks for in country applications from the date of submission.

Priority services are available widely and can reduce processing times to five to seven working days.

Other Considerations

Applicants do not need to be the sole founder of the business and may be a member of an entrepreneurial team and share the same business idea and plan as another Innovator Founder team member. However, each member of the Innovator Founder team must be issued their own individual endorsement and meet all the requirements of the route individually.

Graduate Visa

Overview

The Graduate visa allows international students who have successfully completed a course at a UK education provider to further extend their stay to work or look for work, at any skill level.

What does this visa allow you to do?

The Graduate route is an unsponsored route, meaning the applicant does not need a job offer to apply for the visa. The applicant can work, switch jobs and develop their career without the need of sponsorship. In addition, study is permitted, provided the study is not eligible for sponsorship via the 'Student visa' route. If it is eligible, then an extension of the Student visa would be required. For some courses they'll need an Academic Technology Approval Scheme certificate.

Eligibility/Requirements

The following must be true for an individual to apply for a Graduate visa:

- The individual must be based in the UK;
- The individual must currently be on a Student visa or Tier 4 (General) student visa which is still valid;
- Must have studied for a UK bachelor's degree, postgraduate degree or other eligible course for a minimum period of time with their Student visa or Tier 4 (General) student visa; and
- Their education provider (such as their university or college) has told the Home Office that they've successfully completed their course.

The entirety of the course must have been studied in the UK (Study abroad programs and COVID remote study concessions are permitted). The applicant can apply once the education provider has published their final course results or provided a letter to that effect. There is no need to wait for graduation or to receive a final certificate.

Can you bring family members?

The applicant's partner and children who were previously dependants of on their Student or Tier 4 visa can apply to stay as dependants on their Graduate visa. Family members' visas will expire at the same time of the expiry of the Graduate visa. New dependants cannot apply to join the applicant. However, if a child is born in the UK, they may apply for a dependant visa.

How long you can stay?

The Graduate visa is granted for a period of up to two years following the successful completion of their course (three years if graduating with a Ph.D. or other doctoral qualification). After this period, the individual must either switch to another visa category or leave the UK.

Does this visa lead to settlement?

The Graduate visa does not lead to settlement and time spent in this route does not count towards settlement. However, the visa holder may be eligible to switch into the Skilled Worker category, which leads to settlement after five years in the route living and working in the UK. Switching into Skilled Worker visa is permitted in-country.

Approximate Costs:

It costs £822 (*expected to rise to £880 on 09 April 2025) to apply for the visa, in addition the individual will usually need to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge of £1,035 per year.

Approximate Timeframes

Once all documentation and information is submitted, it is anticipated that applications will take approximately eight weeks to be processed. Applicants can remain in the UK while they wait for a decision.

Graduate vs Skilled Worker visas

There are several considerations for employers to factor in when deciding if the Graduate route or the Skilled Worker route is the most appropriate for your hire:

- Cost - hiring under the Graduate route enables you to defer the often-high costs of sponsorship under the Skilled Worker route for two to three years. Whilst this may be attractive for some employers, this approach may ultimately lead to the costs of two application processes being incurred.
- Settlement – time spent under the Graduate route will not count towards settlement in the UK. Hiring on the Skilled worker route will enable the individual to amass time towards a five-year qualifying period to settlement.
- Family members – whilst dependant family members present in the UK (including children born in the UK) can apply with the main applicant as part of the initial Graduate route application, family members who are currently overseas cannot be added at a later date. Family circumstances and long-term intentions may therefore dictate if an applicant is happy to use the Graduate route or would prefer sponsorship under Skilled Worker.

The Youth Mobility Scheme visa

Overview

The Youth Mobility Scheme visa allows the visa holder to live and work in the UK for a period of up to two years.

What does it allow you to do?

The Youth Mobility Visa allows the applicant to work in most jobs or be self-employed and set up a company - as long as the premises are rented, their equipment is not worth more than £5,000 and they do not have any employees.

An individual who obtains a Youth Mobility Visa may also study - for some courses they'll need an Academic Technology Approval Scheme certificate.

Eligibility/Requirements

Individuals from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Korea can apply for the visa if they're between the ages of 18 and 35 and from:

- Australia
- Canada
- New Zealand
- South Korea

The individual must be aged over the age of 18 when the visa starts, or 35 or under when they apply for it. They can apply for the visa before they turn 18 and can be over 35 when it starts.

Individuals can apply for the visa if they are between the ages of 18 and 30 and from:

- Andorra
- Iceland
- Japan
- Monaco
- San Marino
- Uruguay

Note: At the time of update in March 2025, there are reports that the UK government is considering an extension of the Youth Mobility Scheme to the EU to re-establish relations following Brexit trading blocs – this could potentially result in up to 70,000 places annually for EU nationals to be eligible for the scheme.

Before they can apply for the visa applicants must be selected in the Youth Mobility Scheme ballot if they are from:

- Hong Kong, if they have an SAR passport;
- Taiwan.

Individuals can also apply if they are between the ages of 18 and 30 a:

- British overseas citizen;
- British overseas territories citizen; or
- British national (overseas).

The individual must be over the age of 18 when the visa starts, or 30 or under when they apply for it. They can apply for the visa before they turn 18 and can be over 30 when it starts.

When you cannot apply

Individuals cannot apply if they have:

- Children under the age of 18 who live with them;
- Children they're financially responsible for; or
- Already been in the UK under the scheme.

Financial requirement

The applicant must have at least £2,530 in their bank account to show they can support themselves in the UK. They will need to have had the money available for at least 28 days in a row. Day 28 must be within 31 days of applying for this visa.

Can applicants bring family members?

Applicants cannot bring family members as their dependants - they must apply separately.

How long you can stay?

A visa allows the holder to be in the UK for up to 24 months.

Individuals from Australia, Canada or New Zealand, are able to extend their visa by one year after the two-year period ends.

The applicant can enter the UK at any time while their visa is valid and leave and come back at any time during their visa validity.

If they turn 31 after their visa is issued, they can stay in the UK for as long as their visa is valid.

Does this route lead to settlement?

The Youth Mobility Scheme visa does not lead to settlement and time spent in this route does not count towards settlement. However, the visa holder may be eligible to switch into the Skilled Worker category, which leads to settlement after five years in the route living and working in the UK. Switching into Skilled Worker visa is permitted in-country.

Approximate Costs

The current application fee is £298 (*expected to rise to £319 on 09 April 2025). The individual will also be subject to the Immigration Health Surcharge which is currently £776 per year.

Approximate timeframes

The application can be filed no earlier than six months before the intended travel date.

A decision should be made within three weeks.

Other considerations

Youth Mobility visa holders cannot:

- Work as a professional sportsperson (for example as a coach);
- Extend their stay unless they are from Australia, Canada or New Zealand; and/or
- Access public funds.

Youth Mobility Scheme vs Skilled Worker visas

There are several considerations for employers to factor in when deciding if the Youth Mobility Scheme route or the Skilled Worker route is the most appropriate for your hire:

- Cost - hiring under the Graduate route enables you to defer the often-high costs of sponsorship under the Skilled Worker route for two to three years. Applications under Youth Mobility do not attract the Immigration Skills Levy and also benefit from a reduced Healthcare Surcharge. Whilst this may be attractive for some employers, use of the YMS scheme initially may ultimately lead to the costs of two application processes being incurred.
- Flexible work conditions - both the Youth Mobility and Skilled Worker visas permit work, but the Skilled Worker route restricts an individual to a particular role and requires their employer to hold a UK Sponsor Licence.
- Settlement – time spent under the Youth Mobility Scheme route will not count towards settlement in the UK. Hiring on the Skilled worker route will enable the individual to amass time towards a five-year qualifying period to settlement.
- Family members – family members cannot apply as dependants under the YMS, whereas family members can be added as dependants to a Skilled Worker visa. Family circumstances and long-term intentions may therefore dictate if a recruit is happy to use the YMS or would prefer sponsorship under Skilled Worker.

India Young Professionals Scheme visa

Similar to the Youth Mobility Scheme, the India Young Professionals Scheme allows Indian citizens between 18 and 30 years old to live and work in the UK for up to two years.

Applicants must be aged between 18 and 30 with £2,530 in savings.

They must first apply to and be selected in the India Young Professionals Scheme ballot before they can apply for their visa.

The applicant cannot apply if they've already been in the UK under the Youth Mobility Scheme.

Unlike the Youth Mobility Scheme, applicants under the IYPS must also hold a qualification at bachelor's degree level or above ([Regulated Qualifications Framework level 6, 7 or 8](#)).

It costs the same as the Youth Mobility Scheme visa.

International Armed Forces and International Civilian Employees

Overview

The International Armed Forces and International Civilian Employees route enables specific foreign armed forces and civilian personnel to work or train in the UK, typically under international agreements. This visa category supports collaboration with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) forces and the Australian Department of Defence.

International Armed Forces

This route is designated for applicants who are serving members of foreign armed forces and have been invited by either:

- HM Armed Forces to undergo training, provided by HM Armed Forces, which is to take place in the UK or;
- UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) to study or become familiar with military equipment being supplied by a firm based in the UK.

What does this visa allow you to do?

The route permits applicants to enter and remain in the UK for training, study, or official military assignments. Applicants can also access education, subject to Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) requirements outlined in Appendix ATAS. Applicants cannot work outside the exemption terms or access public funds (benefits).

Eligibility/Requirements

Some members of foreign armed forces are exempt from regular immigration control under UK law. Typically, this exemption arises from international agreements or reciprocal arrangements, particularly with allied nations. Any person exempt from immigration control does not require prior entry clearance. However, it is strongly advised that an exempt vignette is obtained before travelling to the UK to avoid unnecessary delays on arrival.

Any person who is not exempt is, therefore, subject to immigration control and must apply for entry clearance before arriving in the UK. This will typically be anyone not falling within the definition of 'a member of an International Armed Force' or whose force belongs to a country that is not exempt under the provisions.

Can you bring family members?

Yes, family members may be allowed to join under specific partner or child visa provisions.

Dependents of US military personnel may also be exempt from immigration control. Other family members will need to apply for visas.

The visas for family members will be granted for a period that is the shorter of four years or the length of the International Armed Forces member's posting or training. The processing time for dependant applications is three weeks if they are made outside the UK and six months if they are made from inside the UK.

How long can you stay?

The visa will be granted for up to four years or the length of the applicant's posting/training/study, whichever is shorter.

Does this route lead to settlement?

The International Armed Forces exemption route does not lead to settlement in the UK, and time spent in this route does not count towards settlement.

Approximate Costs

Applications for an exempt vignette for International Armed Forces personnel are free, and the Immigration Health Surcharge does not apply to exempt personnel.

Applications for members subject to immigration control have a fee of £637 per application (*expected to rise to £682 on 09 April 2025), and the Immigration Health Surcharge, which is currently £1,035 per year, will apply.

There is a fee for family members of £637 per application (*expected to rise to £682 on 09 April 2025), and the Immigration Health Surcharge will apply for non-exempt family members, which is currently £1,035 per year.

Approximate Timeframes

The processing time for this route is approximately three weeks from the point of submission, and applicants can apply up to three months before their travel date.

International Civilian Employees (ICE)

International civilian employees or their family members are not exempt from control. Employees of international organisations, such as NATO, or of Australian Department of Defence or of firms but are not enlisted in any armed force, can use this route. Employees of companies which are under contract to a NATO force to work in UK, can also use this route. Unfortunately, sub-contractors may not apply under this provision.

Eligibility/Requirements

The applicant must be a civilian employed to work in the UK by:

- a NATO force based in the UK;
- a company under contract to a NATO force;
- the Australian Department of Defence;
- the American National Red Cross to work with US Forces;

Can you bring family members?

Yes, family members can apply under specific partner or child provisions. The visas for family members will be granted for a period that is the shorter of four years or the length of the International Civilian Employee's posting or training. The processing time for dependant applications is three weeks if the application is made outside the UK and six months if the application is made from inside the UK, but again, generally, we have seen that applications have been approved within one to two months.

How long can you stay?

International Civilian Employees of NATO forces or Australian Department of Defence:

The visa duration is either five years where the duration of their period of employment in the UK exceeds six months, or six months if the duration of the employment period in the UK is not more than six months.

International Civilian Employees of a company under NATO contract:

The visa duration is up to four years or the length of the applicant's posting/training/study, whichever is shorter.

Does this route lead to settlement?

The International Civilian Employees route does not lead to settlement in the UK, and time spent in this route does not count towards settlement. However, the permit can be extended indefinitely.

Approximate Costs

Visa applications under this category are free and the Immigration Health Surcharge will not apply for International Civilian Employees of NATO forces or Australian Department of Defence or their family members. Other eligible family members will be required to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge, which is currently £1,035 per year.

Approximate Timeframes

The processing time for this visa route is approximately three weeks from the point of submission if the application is made outside the UK. Applicants can apply up to three months before their travel date. The standard processing time is six months if the application is made from inside the UK, but generally, we have seen that applications have been approved within one to two months.

Conclusion

Thank you for reading this immigration guide. We hope you found it useful. If you require further legal support or advice after reading the guide and are looking to hire a lawyer, please find our contact details below.

Fragomen professionals are available to advise on any of the options mentioned in this guide and more, tailoring our support to your business's unique circumstances and needs.

As the largest firm globally dedicated exclusively to providing immigration services, global mobility, and short-term business travel solutions, Fragomen has a strong track record of providing bespoke services to a wide range of sectors, including space.

Whether you're a local business, rapidly growing start-up or large multinational, we can support all your immigration needs, all over the world.

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