

A Guide to UK Business and Work Visas



UK Visas
& Immigration



Department for
International Trade



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BRITAIN & NORTHERN IRELAND

A Guide to UK Business and Work Visas

This guidance provides an overview of the UK visa service and the different visa categories available to enter the UK for nationals requiring a visa for business and work purposes. This includes visit visas, visas for representatives of an overseas company and visas under the points based system for highly skilled workers, intra-company transfers, investors, entrepreneurs, graduate entrepreneurs and those with exceptional talent.

Detailed guidance on each visa route is available at:

gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-visas-and-immigration

You should read this before making an application.



Foreword

The UK visa offer is designed to ensure that the very brightest and the best workers, international students, academics, entrepreneurs and investors are welcome to come to the UK and that the visa process is clear, straightforward and timely. The vast majority of visitors do not require a visa to come to the UK, but for those nationals that do, this guide sets out the various work related visa categories, the eligibility requirements for each as well as the premium services available as part of the UK visa offer.

UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) are responsible for the operation of the UK's visa service, managing around 3 million applications a year.

UKVI is constantly looking at service improvements based on customer feedback and how we can increase our performance on visa processing.

Improvements include:

- allowing skilled worker visas to be granted for up to 5 years rather than three;
- making it easier to apply for a visa online;
- providing a business helpdesk to offer a single point of contact for employers' queries in the UK, and an international enquiry service for customers overseas, available in 8 languages;
- expanding and improving the network of Visa Application Centres; we now have over 200 around the world, with 16 in India and 15 in China.; and
- offering a priority visa service in over 100 countries (including Brazil, China, India and parts of the Middle East).

UKVI aims to provide a first class visa service for customers, offering a wide range of premium services across the world to support the application process. Through our commercial partners, UKVI operates a network of over 300 Visa Application Centres globally, allowing customers to submit their application with greater convenience, closer to where they work and live.



Standard Visitor Visas

The Immigration Rules and accompanying guidance have been simplified to help customers better understand what is required when applying for a visit visa. Visitors now have greater flexibility over what they can do when they are in the UK. For example, a standard visitor, can come for a holiday, attend business meetings and take part in a sporting event on the same visa.

Any national requiring a visa, wishing to visit the UK for a short period of time including a business trip must obtain a standard visit visa prior to travel. They will need to prove that they:

- have enough money to support themselves while they are in the UK;
- intend to leave the UK at the end of their visit; and
- can meet the cost of their return or onward journey.



Long Term Visit Visas

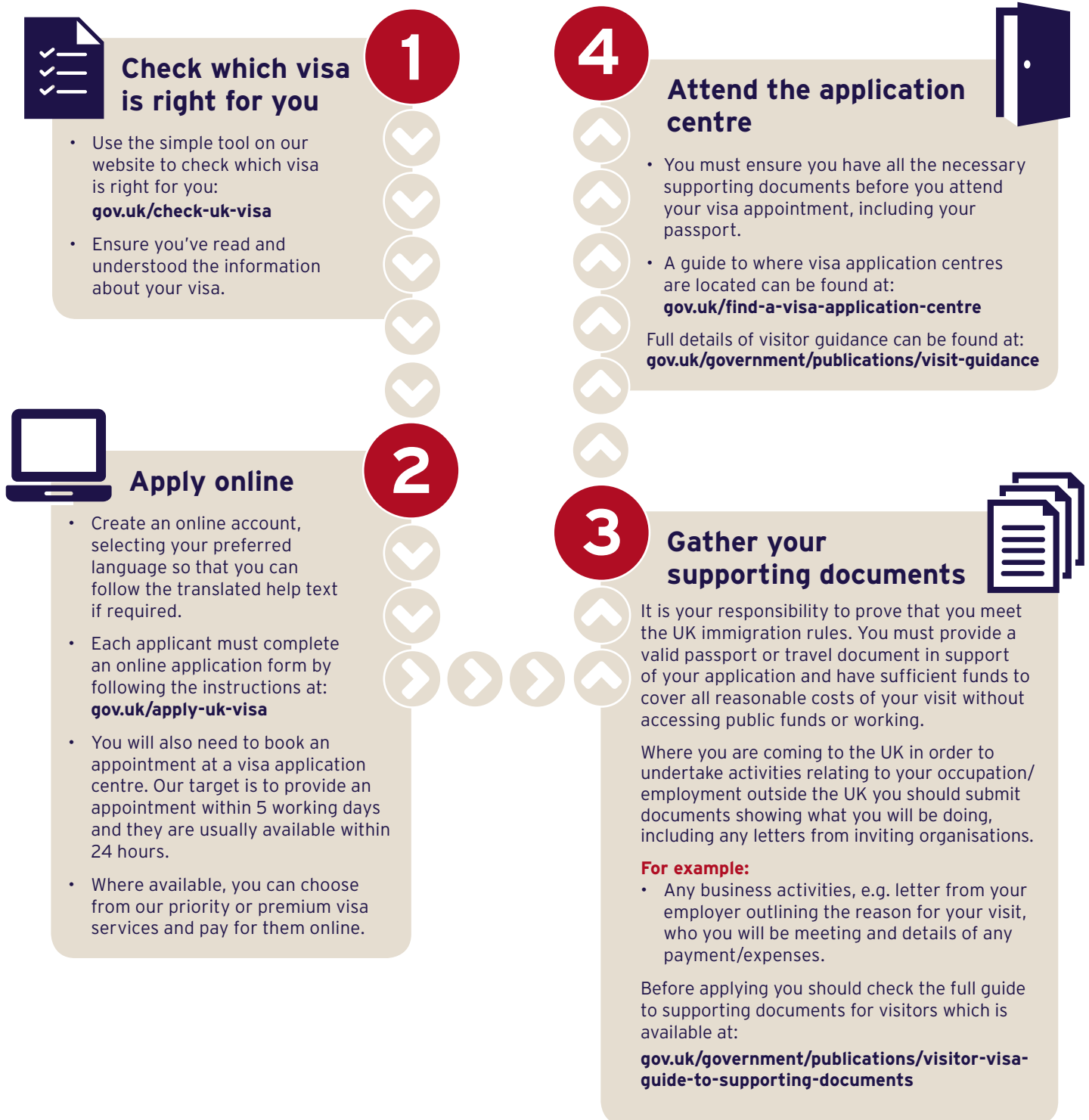
Regular business travellers and frequent visitors are encouraged to apply for a longer validity multiple entry visit visa. The long term visit visa has the same conditions and benefits as a 6 month visit visa, but is valid for a longer period of time (2, 5 or 10 years) to enable visitors to travel in and out of the UK. However, a visitor must satisfy the decision maker that they are a genuine visitor, will not live in the UK for extended periods through frequent or successive visits or make the UK their main home. The key benefit is that visitors will only need to make one application and provide biometrics once for the entire duration of the visa. It is possible to apply for a long term visit visa if the visitor can demonstrate that they need to make repeat visits to the UK over a continued period.

To apply for a long term visit visa the applicant needs to indicate on the front page of the visa application form what duration of visa is required and to pay the relevant fee. The standard service level agreement for processing a visit visa is 15 working days from submission of biometrics (fingerprints and photos) to a decision on your application.

UKVI also offers a range of priority and premium services for those who want a faster and more convenient service.



The visit visa application process



Representative of an Overseas Business Visa

This category of visa provides for the admission of a person who is being sent, as a sole representative, by an overseas business for the purpose of establishing a branch or subsidiary of that business in the UK. Anyone who wishes to enter the UK as the sole representative of an overseas company requires this visa prior to travel.

To qualify the applicant must:

- have been recruited and employed outside the UK by a company whose headquarters and principal place of business is outside the UK;
- not intend to take employment in the UK other than as a sole representative;
- be able to maintain him or herself and any dependants adequately without needing recourse to public funds;
- be a senior employee (but not a majority shareholder in that overseas business) who intends to establish a commercial presence for the company in the UK. This must be a registered branch or a wholly owned subsidiary concerned with the same type of business activity as the parent company. The company must have no active branch, subsidiary or other representative in the UK. If the company has a legal entity in the UK, but does not employ staff or transact business, the individual may still be able to enter the UK as its sole representative;
- have full authority to take operational decisions on the company's behalf; and
- demonstrate a minimum English language ability of A1 on the Common European Framework of Reference.

If the company has previously employed a sole representative in the UK, and that person left the UK at an early stage before the UK branch or subsidiary found premises or started to trade, the applicant may be allowed to enter the UK as a replacement sole representative.

Tiers 1, 2, and 5 of the Points Based System (PBS)

Tiers 1, 2 and 5 PBS visa routes allow those who wish to train or work in the UK to apply for leave to enter for periods of up to 5 years, depending on the application route.

These PBS visas allow individuals to undertake paid work within the UK where otherwise restricted or not possible under the visitor visa routes.



Tier 1 Points Based System - Entrepreneur, Graduate Entrepreneur, Investor and Exceptional Talent

The Tier 1 routes are for high value applicants who wish to come to the UK without a sponsoring employer.

Tier 1 (Entrepreneur) Visa

Those who wish to apply under Tier 1 (Entrepreneur) are required to demonstrate they are a genuine entrepreneur and score a minimum of 95 points, as outlined below:

| Criteria | Points |
|---|-----------|
| Access to at least £200,000 OR access to £50,000 which has been funded from a regulated source (Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)-regulated venture capital firms, UK or Devolved Government departments or endorsed seed competitions) | 25 points |
| The money is held in one or more regulated financial institutions | 25 points |
| The money is disposable in the United Kingdom | 25 points |
| English Language Skills (minimum Common European Framework of Reference level B1 (e.g. passing the International English Language Test System exam at a minimum level 4.0 in reading, writing, Speaking and listening)) | 10 points |
| Maintenance £3310 held for 90 days | 10 points |

- Pairs of entrepreneurs can come to the UK as a team if they have equal access to the funds set out above.
- Entrepreneurs must set up, join or take over an existing business in the UK and become actively engaged in that business after entering the UK.
- Entrepreneurs must provide a credible business plan, and UKVI must be satisfied that they are a genuine entrepreneur.
- To extend their stay beyond 3 years, entrepreneurs must register their businesses, invest their funds and create at least the equivalent of two full-time jobs for resident workers.
- Entrepreneurs may apply for accelerated settlement in the UK within three years of entering the route, if they can demonstrate they have created at least 10 jobs or have a business with a turnover of at least £5 million.

Entrepreneurs can also spend up to 180 days a year out of the UK in a 12 month period, without affecting their ability to apply for indefinite leave to remain (settlement in the UK).

Further details on criteria and how to make an application under the entrepreneur route can be found at:

gov.uk/government/publications/points-based-system-tier-1-entrepreneur

Tier 1 (Investor) Visa

Those applying under the Tier 1 (Investor) category require a minimum of 75 points as outlined below:

| Criteria | Points |
|---|-----------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicant has money of their own, under their control, held in a regulated financial institution and disposable in the UK, amounting to not less than £2 million Applicant has opened an account with a UK regulated bank for the purposes of investing not less than £2 million in the UK | 75 points |

- There is no English language or maintenance requirement.
- Accelerated settlement is available for the largest investors – 3 years for a £5 million investment and 2 years for a £10 million investment.
- Investors can spend up to 180 days a year out of the UK in a 12 month period.

Further details on criteria and how to make an application under the investor route can be found at:

gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-application-for-uk-visa-as-tier-1-investor

Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent) Visa

This route is for the most exceptionally talented people, in the fields of science, humanities, engineering, digital technology and the arts, who wish to work in the UK. This route is open to those who are internationally recognised as world leaders in their field and also to those who show exceptional promise and are likely to become internationally recognised world leaders in their field.

Every application must be endorsed by one of the following designated competent bodies:

- The Royal Society
- Arts Council England
- British Academy
- Royal Academy of Engineering
- Tech City UK

Those applying under the Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent) category require a minimum of 75 points earned by endorsement from one of the above bodies. An application is a two stage process and you must obtain your endorsement (stage 1) in order to qualify for entry clearance (stage 2).

Further details on criteria and how to make an application under the exceptional talent route can be found at:

gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-policy-for-uk-visas-under-tier-1-exceptional-talent



Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) Visa

This route is for graduates whom either the Department for International Trade (DIT) or UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have identified as having developed genuine and credible business ideas and entrepreneurial skills to go on to establish one or more businesses in the UK.

A full list of Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) authorised endorsing bodies can be found at:

gov.uk/government/publications/endorsing-bodies-tier-1-graduate-entrepreneur¹

Those applying under the Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) category require a minimum of 95 points as outlined below:

| Criteria | Points |
|---|-----------|
| <p>Applicants must provide a letter of endorsement from an endorsing body which can award them a maximum of 75 points for attributes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant has been endorsed by a UK Higher Education Institution which holds the relevant sponsor status or been endorsed by the Department for International Trade (DIT) (25 points) • The applicant has been awarded a degree qualification which meets or exceeds the recognised standard of a bachelor's degree in the UK. For overseas qualifications, the standard must be confirmed by UK NARIC. (25 points) • The endorsing body considers the applicant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) has a genuine and credible business idea (ii) will spend the majority of their working time on developing business ventures (iii) has made satisfactory progress in developing their business since leave was granted (if applying for an extension). (25 points) | 75 points |
| Evidence to prove the applicant speaks English to the required standard and meets the requirements. | 10 points |
| For entry clearance or leave to remain in the UK, the applicant must have specified funds for maintenance | 10 points |

Applicants are only allowed a maximum of 2 years under this route, with an initial grant of 1 year, followed by an extension if the endorsing body continues to sponsor them.²

The route itself does not lead directly to settlement, but applicants who successfully develop their entrepreneurial business ideas during their leave as Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) may switch to the Tier 1 (Entrepreneur) route, which can lead to settlement.

The Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) category is limited to 2000 places each year (from 6 April to 5 April). These are allocated as follows:

- 1900 - Qualifying UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for them to endorse graduates in any subject
- 100 - The Department for International Trade for the purpose of endorsing overseas graduates.

Further details on criteria and how to make an application under the Graduate Entrepreneur route can be found at:

gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-applications-under-tier-1-graduate-entrepreneur

¹ Authorised endorsing bodies includes the Department for International Trade.

² An extension of leave may be granted, if individuals wish to switch endorsing body for their second year of leave and they have provided an endorsement letter from their new endorsing body - applicants can still only be granted a maximum of 2 years in total

Tier 2 - Points Based System - Skilled Workers General and Intra-Company Transfers

Tier 2 of the PBS is for skilled workers coming to the UK with a skilled job offer from a sponsoring employer.

- Tier 2 (General) is a route for workers coming to the UK to fill a skilled vacancy that cannot be filled by a UK resident worker. It can lead to settlement in the UK.
- Tier 2 (Intra-company transfer (ICT)) is a route for existing company employees transferring to the UK branch of the business. It does not lead to settlement in the UK.

To be eligible for a Tier 2 visa, skilled workers must pass a points-based assessment as well as meeting other requirements set out in the Tier 2 guidance. Further details on criteria and how to make an application for the Tier 2 visa route can be found at:

gov.uk/browse/visas-immigration/work-visas

Tier 2 (General) Visa

An annual limit of 20,700 places applies to this category. UK employers have to apply for a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) from UKVI for a specific job if they wish to bring someone to the UK³. Once the employer has been allocated a CoS they must assign it to a prospective employee within 3 months.



³ Exceptions are CoS for the following 'unrestricted' categories which sponsors can issue without first applying to the Home Office: Tier 2 (General) applicants already in the UK; Tier (General) applicants filling a vacancy with a salary of £159,600 or more or which is connected to a high value inward investment project; Tier 2 Intra-Company Transfers; Tier 2 Sports people and Ministers of Religion.

Tier 2 General applicants require 70 points across the criteria below to qualify for a visa. These are awarded as follows:

| Criteria | Points |
|---|--------|
| Certificate of Sponsorship | 30 |
| Appropriate salary level (at least £30,000 ⁴ or the appropriate rate for the job in question, whichever is higher) | 20 |
| Maintenance (£945 held for 90 days or an A rated sponsor vouching for maintenance on COS) | 10 |
| English Language Skills (Minimum B1 level on Common European Framework of Reference, equivalent to International English Language Test System 4.0 in each discipline) | 10 |

The minimum skill level for an eligible job is graduate level. A list of eligible graduate level (RQF level 6) occupations is set out in **Appendix J of the Immigration Rules**

Further details on criteria and how to make an application under the Tier 2 (General) visa route can be found at:

gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-application-for-uk-visa-as-tier-2-worker

Tier 2 (Intra-Company Transfer) Visa

A company wishing to transfer employees under the Tier 2 (Intra-Company Transfer) route must have a UK presence and a Home Office sponsor licence which allows them to issue Certificates of Sponsorship (CoS) to employees. Certificates for Intra-Company Transfers (ICTs) are 'unrestricted', enabling sponsors to issue them without first applying to UKVI for permission.

Tier 2 (ICT) applicants require 60 points to qualify for a visa. These are awarded as follows:

| Criteria | Points |
|--|--------|
| Certificate of Sponsorship | 30 |
| Appropriate salary level (at least £41,500 or the appropriate rate for the job in question, whichever is higher) | 20 |
| Maintenance (£945 held for 90 days or an A rated sponsor vouching for maintenance on COS) | 10 |



⁴ A lower threshold of £20,800 applies to "new entrants", defined as graduate recruits and those under age 26, for their first three years in Tier 2 (General).

The following conditions also apply to ICT applications:

- The minimum skill level for an eligible job is graduate level⁵.
- Those paid £41,500 or more will be granted leave for up to five years, at which point they must leave the UK and will not be able to re-apply for 12 months.
- Those paid £120,000 or more can extend their stay in this category to up to 9 years in total.

Further details on criteria and how to make an application under the ICT route can be found at:

gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-application-for-uk-visa-as-tier-2-worker

Tier 2 (Intra Company Transfer - Graduate trainee) Visa

The Graduate trainee sub-category allows multinational organisations to transfer recent graduate recruits to a UK branch of their organisation for the purpose of training (this route must not be used to fill long-term posts.) Migrants in this sub-category must be coming to the UK as part of a structured graduate training programme, with a clearly defined progression towards a managerial or specialist role within the organisation.

This sub-category is open only to those who work in graduate occupations and who have been employed outside the UK by the sponsoring organisation for at least 3 months directly before they come to the UK.

Further details on criteria and how to make an application under the Graduate Trainee route can be found at:

gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-application-for-uk-visa-as-tier-2-worker

As this scheme is specifically targeted at the progression towards a managerial or specialist role, sponsors can transfer no more than 20 graduate employees per financial year in this sub-category.

Tier 5 - Points Based System - Temporary Workers

Tier 5 of the PBS makes provision for the admission of temporary workers, including those who qualify under Government Authorised Exchange (GAE) schemes and the UK's obligations under the General Agreement in Trade in Services relating to contractual service suppliers.

The Tier 5 GAE route is a temporary work route for individuals seeking to undertake work experience, work based training or research. Individuals must be sponsored to undertake any activity via an approved scheme. There are around 60 Government Authorised Exchange schemes which are administered on behalf of individual organisations wanting to recruit outside the UK.

A list of the schemes including contact details can be found at:

gov.uk/government/publications/tier-5-government-authorised-exchange-schemes



⁵ The graduate occupation list can be found at:

gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-appendix-j-codes-of-practice-for-skilled-work

The types of schemes available are:

Work experience schemes of up to 12 months, available in a range of sectors including banking, finance, business and education. An example is the Tier 5 intern programme which allows graduates and undergraduates from countries outside the European Economic Area to gain intern experience working within UK industry. This provides organisations with the opportunity to deploy the brightest and best talent on key initiatives and enables participants to learn skills that they can take back to their home country.

Research and training schemes of up to 24 months offer practical work-based training in science, medicine and academia. An example is the sponsored research programme which enables higher education institutions to recruit individuals working on supernumerary research collaborations.

Overseas language programmes of up to 24 months. These are professional language training programmes that are fully or partially paid for by an overseas Government or organisation affiliated to an overseas government. An example is the Hanban-sponsored Mandarin teachers scheme which sponsors volunteer and professional Mandarin teachers to undertake placements at Confucius Institutes and classrooms in the UK, and at institutions in the UK which are covered by Hanban UK's teaching exchange programme.

40 points are required on the criteria below to make a successful application for a Tier 5 Visa:

| Criteria | Points |
|--|--------|
| Holder of a valid certificate of sponsorship (CoS) | 30 |
| Satisfies maintenance requirements (£945 held for 90 days or their A rated sponsor has certified maintenance on the CoS) | 10 |

In order to be sponsored the:

- Applicant must meet criteria of the specific scheme they want to participate in (which may include satisfying English language requirements).
- Activities need to be skilled to level 3 on the UK's Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF) - **Appendix J of the Immigration Rules** lists the skill level of job roles to consider whether the placement offered would meet this skills requirement. In general terms this is work that involves a variety of complex skills that would normally be done without supervision and/or work that involves the training and/or supervision of others.
- Placement needs to satisfy UK National Minimum Wage requirements.

Further information can be found at: gov.uk/tier-5-government-authorised-exchange

Tier 5 - International Agreement Visa

This sub-category includes provision for the admission of workers employed by an overseas business which does not have an existing presence in the UK. The applicants are being posted to the UK to supply a service to a UK client. Entry is limited to 6 months. A sponsor will be able to issue a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) only where the service being supplied is covered by the UK's commitments under the General Agreement on Trade in Services. Further information can be found at: gov.uk/tier-5-international-agreement/eligibility

Priority and Premium Visa Services

UKVI offer a range of premium and priority services for customers overseas⁶. These include;

24 hour Super Priority Visa Service

Super priority visa service applications are processed with the highest priority. In the majority of cases, a decision will be made within 24 hours of submitting the application at the Visa Application Centre (VAC). An applicant will need to attend a VAC and pay an additional fee.

Priority Visa Service

Applicants wanting to take advantage of the priority service will have to attend a VAC and pay an additional fee. The visa will then be processed with a target of 5 to 7 working days, rather than within UKVI's target of 15 working days (3 weeks) for a standard visit visa.

Keep My Passport When Applying

This service allows you to retain your passport whilst your visa application is being assessed. This service is ideal if you need to apply for a visa to another country or travel whilst your UK visa is being processed.

On Demand Mobile Visa Service

The On Demand Mobile Visa Service allows you to apply for a UK visa without the need to visit a VAC. This gives customers the convenience of providing their biometric data at an office location of their choice rather than being required to travel to a VAC.

Additional Services

Other services are offered that are specific to the country of application. Please visit UKVI's commercial partner websites appropriate to your country of application.

TLS Contact: **uk.tlscontact.com** for applications in Africa and Europe.

VFS Global: **vfsglobal.com** for applications in Asia and the Americas.

Commercial Partner services in the Middle East vary from country to country; applicants will need to visit both VFS global and TLS contact websites to identify their local provider.



⁶ All services may be subject to variation dependent on location.

More Information

More detail on each visa category can be found at:

[gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-visas-and-immigration](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-visas-and-immigration)

It is important to check the most up to date guidance before making a visa application.

Information about whether you need a visa or how to make a visa application can be found at:

[gov.uk/check-uk-visa](https://www.gov.uk/check-uk-visa) and **[gov.uk/apply-uk-visa](https://www.gov.uk/apply-uk-visa)**

Applications can be made online at: **visas-immigration.service.gov.uk/product/uk-visit-visa** for a standard visitor visa or **visa4uk.fco.gov.uk/home/welcome** for all other non-settlement routes.

