

# Global Immigration alert

May 2025

## United Kingdom

Key immigration changes being introduced by the UK government as part of their Plan for Change

### Executive summary

On 12 May 2025, the government published their much-awaited White Paper outlining proposed reforms to legal migration. The reforms aim to restore order, control and fairness to the immigration system by bringing down net migration and promoting economic growth. It is important to note that these are proposals only, and no immediate legal changes have taken effect. Any changes will require further legislative or policy updates, and timelines for implementation are yet to be confirmed.

### Key developments

#### Workforce reforms

- *Skill Level increased to Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) 6:* The level for skilled workers will be increased from RQF 3 (A-Level equivalent) to RQF 6 (Degree Level). This will result in salary thresholds rising. Existing Skilled Worker visa holders will continue to be able to renew their visa, change employment and take supplementary employment, in currently eligible occupations below RQF 6. However, applicants from overseas, or those applying to switch from other routes, will have to follow the new rules. The jobs below RQF 6 will include new restrictions on bringing dependents.
- *Increase Immigration Skills Charge (ISC):* The ISC will increase by 32% in line with inflation. This means that employers will pay £6600 for a five-year visa (up from £5000).
- *Immigration Salary List:* The Immigration Salary List, which gives people discounts from salary thresholds, will be abolished.
- *Temporary Shortage List:* A new Temporary Shortage List will be established to provide time limited access to the Points-Based immigration system. Occupations below RQF 6 will need to be listed on the Temporary Shortage List to gain access to the immigration system. Sectors will only

be potentially added to the Temporary Shortage list if they are key to the industrial strategy or delivering critical infrastructure and following advice from the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC). Requirements for being on the Temporary Shortage List will include having a proper workforce strategy which aims to maximize the use of the UK workforce and includes agreed training and broader plans with skills organizations, including Skills England and the Devolved Governments.

- *Sponsorship reforms:* The government is exploring introducing further reforms to the sponsorship system and putting more responsibility and accountability on effective and responsible sponsors.
- *Social Care visas:* There will be an end to overseas recruitment for social care visas. Social care visas will be closed to new applications from abroad. For a transition period until 2028, visa extensions and in-country switching for those already in the country with working rights will be permitted, but this will be kept under review.
- *Global talent:* The government will provide opportunities for highly skilled workers to have opportunities to come to the UK and access the targeted routes for the brightest and best global talent by:
  - Increasing the number of people arriving the high talent routes, alongside faster routes for bringing people to the UK who have the right skills and experience
  - Increasing places for research interns, including those working in the field of Artificial Intelligence
  - Making it simpler and easier for top scientific and design talent to use the Global Talent visa



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- Reviewing the Innovator Founder visa to ensure that it supports entrepreneurial talent
- Doubling the number of workers that an overseas business can send to the UK with the aim of establishing a presence in the UK
- Exploring a targeted and capped expansion of the High Potential Individual visa
- *Labour Market Evidence Group*: The government will establish the Labour Market Evidence Group to draw on the best data available in order to make informed decisions about the state of the labour market and the role that different policies should play, rather than always relying on migration.

## Digitization

The government will further its aim to digitize immigration processes by:

- Streamlining the process for employers and skilled workers to get visas, reducing bureaucracy and supporting growth
- Providing real-time digital access to give people more control over their documents and data, and in the future, eliminate the need for people to physically travel to a Visa Application Centre for a second time to collect their passport with a physical endorsement. This improvement will start from later this summer for main applicants on key routes such as study and skilled work, with other routes to follow.
- Later in 2025, piloting new intelligent technologies that facilitate contactless travel through eGates, removing the need for passengers to present their passport, and utilizing Facial Comparison technology. This state-of-the-art technology is significantly more efficient at identity verification and is expected to lead to shorter queues at the border and deliver a smoother customer experience.
- Continuing the roll out of digital identity checks for all overseas citizens through the implementation of eVisas and new systems for checking visa compliance
- Developing a new digital service to determine whether an individual has complied with the terms of their visa and is inside or outside the UK at any given time

## English language

The government will also:

- Increase language requirements for Skilled Workers and workers where a language requirement already applies from B1 to B2 (Independent User) levels, in accordance with the Common European Framework for Reference for Languages (CEFR)
- Introduce a new English language requirement for all adult dependents of workers and students at level A1 (Basic User) to align to spousal and partner routes and will work towards increasing this requirement over time
- Introduce requirements to demonstrate progression to level A2 (Basic User) for any visa extension, and B2 (Independent User) for settlement
- Increase existing requirements for settlement across the majority of immigration routes from B1 to B2 (Independent User)

## Settlement

Further, the government will:

- Increase the standard qualifying period for settlement to ten years. It hasn't been confirmed if this applies to individuals already in the UK
- Offer a shorter pathway to settlement for non-UK dependents of British citizens to five years, provided they have remained compliant with their requirements
- Provide individuals the opportunity to reduce the qualifying period based on Points-Based contributions to the UK economy and society. The government will consult on these changes later this year

## British citizenship

The government will:

- Increase the standard qualifying period and expand the Points-Based System to allow those with greater contributions to qualify sooner
- Conduct a refresh of the "Life in the UK" test and how it operates

## Student reforms

The government is also pursuing the following measures:

- *Graduate route*: The purpose of the route is for international student graduates to work, or look for work, following the successful completion of an eligible course. The government expects to reduce the ability for Graduates to remain in the UK after their studies to a period of 18 months (down from two years).
- *Levy introduction*: The government will explore introducing a levy on higher education provider income from international students to be reinvested into the higher education and skills system. Further details will be set out in the Autumn Budget.
- *Short-Term Student Route*: The Short-Term Student (English Language) Route (STS) is for a person aged 16 or over who wishes to study an English language course in the UK for six to 11 months at an accredited institution. The route is unsponsored and solely confined to studying English. Institutions providing English language courses in the UK must be formally approved to do so by a recognized accreditation body. The government will conduct a review of the accreditation bodies to ensure that their processes are robust and consider what further checks need to be put in place to ensure the right level of scrutiny is being applied both before an organization is accredited, and when that accreditation is renewed.
- *Prevention of misuse of student visas*: To prevent the misuse of student visas, the government will strengthen the requirements that all sponsoring institutions must meet in order to recruit international students. It will raise the minimum pass requirement of each Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA) metric by five percentage points. For example, a sponsor will be required to maintain a course enrolment rate of at least 95% and a course completion rate of 90% in order to pass the compliance threshold.
- *Agent Quality Framework*: The government will require all sponsors wishing to use recruitment agents for overseas students to sign up to the Agent Quality Framework, designed to maintain the highest standards of agent management.

## Family migration

The government also announced the following measures:

- **New family policy:** Before the end of this calendar year, the government will set out a new family policy that will:
  - Cover all UK residents including those who are British, settled, on work routes or refugees seeking to bring family members to the UK
  - Have clear relationship requirements, including financial and English requirements
  - Explore tightening the Suitability Rules for the family routes, to ensure people are of "good character"
- **Exceptional circumstances:** The government will set out a clear framework to be endorsed by Parliament for those seeking to enter or stay in the UK - including based on exceptional circumstances - who do not fall within the family policies. The government will also bring forward legislation that will clarify Article 8 rules regarding family life.

## Consideration for employers

- Employers may look at their sponsored population to see if any extensions can be brought forward to get ahead of the increased Immigration Skills Charge. They may also look at their recruitment pipeline to ensure all individuals will meet the required skill level.
- Employers may also conduct a budget review as the salaries and costs to recruit from abroad are only going to increase.
- There will be even more focus on employers being compliant with regulations and policies. Employers may ensure their HR systems are robust to keep them compliant against any unlawful working.
- Employers will be expected to boost domestic talent and skills if they want to recruit from abroad. Employers may review their intern policies for nurturing talent.

## Consideration for individuals

- Individuals in the UK on course to get settlement may ensure they stay updated with the changes, so they meet the correct qualifying period at the time of application.
- With the English language level increasing, individuals may ensure that they have completed the required test at the appropriate level. They may also ensure that their dependents complete the necessary English language tests. There is an increase in cost and processing times for the Qualification and Language service so applicants may ensure that they apply well in advance.

## Key steps

EY will continue to monitor these developments. Should you have any questions, we encourage you to contact one of our immigration professionals.

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