

Global Immigration alert

October 2025

United Kingdom

Statement of Changes to the Immigration Rules - October 2025

Executive summary

On 14 October 2025, the UK government published a Statement of Changes to the Immigration Rules, implementing further measures outlined in the [May 2025 Immigration White Paper](#). The upcoming changes impact several visa routes, including for sponsored workers.

Key developments

The recent Statement introduces the following changes:

- **New visa requirement for nationals of Botswana:** Effective 14 October 2025, nationals of Botswana are required to obtain a visa prior to entering the UK. A Direct Airside Transit Visa is also required for transit. Nationals of Botswana are no longer eligible to apply for an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA). However, individuals holding an ETA issued before the deadline and arriving on or before 25 November 2025 will benefit from a six-week visa-free period.
- **New visa requirement for Palestinian nationals:** Starting 11 November 2025, Palestinian nationals will be required to obtain a visa prior to traveling to the UK, including for visits.
- **Immigration Skills Charge (ISC):** Effective 16 December 2025, the ISC will increase by 32%, raising the fee from GBP 1,000 per year to GBP 1,320 per year.
- **English language requirement:** From 8 January 2026, applicants under the Skilled Worker, High Potential Individual (HPI), and Scale-up routes will be required to meet the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Level B2 (upper-intermediate), replacing the current B1 requirement. Individuals who already hold a permit under these routes and meet the

B1 requirement will be able to continue to apply for extensions on the same route using the B1 level. The new B2 requirement is expected to apply only to new applications submitted on or after 8 January 2026. Individuals who already hold permits under the route based on B1-level English will remain subject to that requirement when applying for an extension. Changes to the English language requirements for dependents in the work and study routes are expected in the coming months, with the effective date yet to be confirmed.

- **Graduate route duration:** Effective 1 January 2027, the duration of the Graduate Route visa will be reduced to 18 months (down from two years) for most international students graduating with bachelor's or master's degrees. PhD graduates will continue to receive visas with a validity of three years under the Graduate Route.
- **High potential individual route expansion:** The High Potential Individual route is expected to expand by doubling the number of eligible institutions listed in the Global Universities List. The expansion is subject to exclusions based on national security or foreign policy concerns. Additionally, an annual cap of 8,000 applications will also be established. The effective date of these changes is yet to be confirmed.
- **Innovator founder route:** Student visa holders who have completed a higher education degree (i.e., who have finished their course) may switch to the Innovator Founder route and establish a business, as per the statement provided by the government. This replaces the now-closed start-up route.



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- *Appendix Temporary Work - Seasonal Worker*: Seasonal workers may now work for no more than six months in the UK during any rolling 10-month period, replacing the previous 12-month period. The implementation date for this change has not yet been confirmed.
- *Ukraine permission extension scheme (UPE)*: The UPE was launched on 4 February 2025. It provides a route for Ukrainians (and their eligible family members) who have already been living in the UK with Ukraine Scheme permission to make a further application to extend their temporary sanctuary in the UK while the conflict in Ukraine remains ongoing. As part of ongoing safeguarding measures, the UK authorities identified a need to allow for a child's permission to be aligned to that of their legal guardian. As such, they are updating the UPE eligibility requirements to ensure children can be granted permission in line with their legal guardian. As an additional safeguarding measure, in the eligibility requirements they have specified that the adult (parent or legal guardian) must be in the UK for a child's permission to be aligned. The UK authorities are also amending the residence requirement to allow an application to be refused where a child born in the UK or Islands (Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man) to a Ukrainian national parent who holds, or is eligible for, Ukraine scheme permission, has been outside the UK or Islands since birth.

Impact on employers

Employers may assess the impact of these measures on their talent strategy and consider reviewing and updating their internal policies and processes, in light of upcoming changes such as the anticipated English language requirements, the reduced duration of the Graduate Route visa, and the increased Immigration Skills Charge. These changes are expected to impact employers' recruitment timelines, workforce planning, and associated costs.

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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