



AGCAS

The Association of Graduate
Careers Advisory Services

Working in the UK:

Answers to International Students' Frequently Asked Questions

Collated by the AGCAS Internationalisation task group (ITG). Thank you to solicitors Kingsley Napley for checking the information in this guide which is accurate as of April 2021 and may be subject to change. Kingsley Napley advise employers, universities and students on immigration and employment law. Contact partner Ilda de Sousa
Ildesousa@kingsleynapley.co.uk

What hours can I work during term time and vacations, as well as after graduation?

If you are on a full-time course at or above degree level you can work 20 hours a week during term time, and full-time during vacation periods and after your course has ended (for the duration of your student visa so long as you are not filling a permanent role). If you are a Master's student, find out from your university what is classed as term time and vacation time: summer holidays aren't usually classed as vacation time for example.

How can I improve my chances of getting a good job in the UK?

- a) Make sure your English is as fluent as possible. This is important as you will be competing against native English speakers. Look out for courses provided by the university and/or use this [British Council online course on English for the workplace](#)
- b) Develop your networks. Getting to know those working for an employer you are interested in can increase the likelihood of being considered as a strong candidate for a job, as you will be able to articulate the valuable insights you've gained from your conversations during the selection process. In some cases your relationship might result in a personal recommendation.
- c) Target employers where you bring added value. For example, any employer that wants your language skills or knowledge of your home culture or markets is more likely to want to hire you.
- d) Get work experience in the UK. Large graduate recruiters run summer internship schemes and often hire their graduates from their internship pool, so a summer internship can be very beneficial (although one-year Master's students will not be able to access full-time internships as the summer is not a vacation period for them). However, any kind of work experience will help with understanding UK working practises and you may be able to arrange a part-time work opportunity, particularly with smaller employers who don't run formal schemes.
- e) Develop your transferable skills. UK employers want to see evidence that you have a range of transferable skills developed outside of your degree as well as within it. You can develop these in a variety of ways, from part-time work to volunteering, to managing a student society or entrepreneurial activity.
- f) Be aware of graduate scheme deadlines. Large employers recruit the autumn before graduation, with most schemes closing by the end of November.

What are the main immigration routes available for international students looking to work in the UK?

The main routes are the Graduate route (from 1st July 2021) and the Skilled Worker route. The Graduate route allows you to stay and work or look for work in the UK for two years (three years if you have a PhD). You have to apply for it, but it is an unsponsored route so you don't need to have found a job to apply. Under the Skilled Worker route, you are sponsored by an employer to do a job that has to meet certain salary and skills requirements (**see Which employers are most likely to sponsor me?**), and after 5 years you can apply to settle in the UK. You can apply for a sponsored job from within the UK - "switching" from your student visa or from the Graduate route - or you can apply from your home country.

Should I look for a sponsored job or just use the Graduate route?

It depends on your goals. If you want to work in the UK for a relatively short period, to gain valuable experience before returning to your home country or moving to a third country, you may not need to look at sponsored jobs as the Graduate route would give you enough time. Simply apply to the Graduate route and explain to employers that you are eligible to work in the UK for the relevant period.

You can also apply for a job that an employer is offering sponsorship for, even if at this stage you are not intending to stay in the UK long term, as your plans may evolve. It is always prudent however to emphasise to employers your commitment to a role so that you "leave the door open" for longer-term opportunities.

If you want to work in the UK for longer than the Graduate route allows for, you should look at sponsored jobs under the Skilled Worker route. If you aren't successful initially, you can always consider applying to the Graduate route to give you more time to continue your search. Starting under the Graduate route may be particularly useful if you are wanting to work in the non-profit, creative or heritage sector, as traditionally these sectors have rarely offered sponsorship (although this may start to change as sponsorship requirements under the new Skilled Worker route are more flexible). By giving the employer some time to get to know you and value your work over a couple of years, you may be more likely to persuade an employer to offer you progression into a job that meets the requirements for sponsorship.

How do I apply for the Graduate route?

The Graduate route visa is not granted automatically once you complete your degree, you need to apply for it. Applications will open on 1st July 2021 and you need to apply from the UK. There is an application fee of £700 and you need to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge of £624 for each year of permission you are applying for. [UKCISA's web pages](#) have more information and we advise you keep checking for updates as government releases more details of the process.

Can I work as self-employed / start a business under the Graduate route?

Yes, you can be self-employed under this route, however you cannot work as a professional sportsperson or coach. As your time under the Graduate route comes to an end, if you have an innovative, viable and scalable business idea, depending on the circumstances of your business and whether you have started trading you could apply to get endorsed for a [Start-up visa](#) or [Innovator visa](#).

My Student visa expires before the Graduate route is introduced, what are my options?

Unfortunately you will not be eligible to apply to the Graduate Route. Your options depend on your situation however one option, if there is time, is securing a sponsorable job offer and applying for your Skilled Worker visa before your current permission expires. If you are not able to do this and need to return to your home country, remember you can still apply for sponsored

jobs under the Skilled Worker route from outside the UK and in certain circumstances you may still be eligible for the new entrant discount ([see UKCISA's Eligible jobs and salaries, "new entrants"](#)).

Another option may be applying for a [Temporary Worker - Government Authorised Exchange visa \(T5\)](#), which allows you to carry out work experience in the UK for 12 months (sometimes extendable to 24 months). You will need to find an employer willing to offer you a suitable supernumerary role before you can apply for a certificate of sponsorship from one of the [overarching bodies](#) that have been licensed to run these schemes – with this type of visa, it is the overarching body and not the employer who sponsors you. AIESEC's [Access Tier 5](#) and GTI's [Tier 5 Intern](#) are two of the better known schemes.

How do I apply for sponsorship under the Skilled Worker route?

You need to apply for a job with an employer that holds a licence to sponsor and that meets the necessary skill level and salary requirements. The job must be minimum skill level RQF3, which is roughly equivalent to A level. In terms of salary, most students will be applying within the UK as a "new entrant" which means employers can pay you 70% of the "going rate" (this is an experienced worker rate) for the type of job you have applied for. A minimum threshold of £20,480 and £10.10 per hour must also always be met. The salary level should still be attractive for you as a recent graduate, whilst being more affordable for the employer. You can look up the going rates and the new entrant discounts for the types of jobs you are applying for at [Immigration Rules Appendix Skilled Occupations](#). Note that recent graduates applying from outside the UK may also be eligible for the new entrant rate, [see UKCISA's information on new entrants](#).

Which employers are most likely to sponsor me?

Traditionally, employers from large global companies, such as law firms, banks, consulting and engineering firms, have been more likely to sponsor. However, following Brexit and with the new immigration system now in place, we expect to see both smaller employers and employer from a wider range of sectors apply to take out a licence to sponsor under the Skilled Worker route. This is for two reasons. First, employers who have hired large numbers of EU workers in the past, now need a licence to do so (unless the EU worker has applied for settled or pre-settled status). Second, the rules under the Skilled Worker route are more flexible than those under the former Tier 2 visa.

You can find the list of employers who have a licence to sponsor on the [.gov website](#). However just because an organisation is on the list, this does not necessarily mean that they are sponsoring graduates, as they may only utilise their sponsorship license for experienced hires. You will still need to check that the job you are applying for meets the requirements, like minimum salary, that it needs for an employer to be able to sponsor it.

Some universities subscribe to [Student Circus](#), a job portal advertising roles which employers have confirmed they will sponsor. If your university does not subscribe you can still sign up to receive a free trial for 30 days.

You can also identify employers with a track record of sponsoring by using LinkedIn or your university's alumni networks to see where previous international students have been employed in the UK. Get in touch with these graduates and ask for their insights on their employer's current hiring needs and advice on how you can stand out.

The application form asks me if I have the right to work in the UK, how should I answer?

Select 'Yes', as selecting 'No' often means your application will not go any further. Then add a supporting statement like the one below, in any notes/further information box:

"I am eligible to work in the UK for a two-year period (insert three years if you are a PhD student) once my studies end if I apply to the Graduate visa, which does not require employer sponsorship. I am also eligible to apply for permission to work under the Skilled Worker visa upon receipt of a qualifying job offer from a sponsoring employer. You can access government guidance on these routes [here](#). [Recruiting International Graduates: A Guide for Employers](#), endorsed by the Institute of Student Employers and the CBI, is also useful".

Note that this employer guide, which AGCAS wrote in conjunction with the ISE, CBI and others, advises employers:

It is illegal for employers to discriminate against international students: whilst the law requires employers to only employ individuals with a right to work in the UK it is unlawful not to accept applications from or employ someone on the basis of their nationality. Some exemptions apply (for example roles relating to national security), but in general employers that refuse to accept applications from people just because they may need a visa could be open to claims of discrimination (which is what happened in the case of [Osborne Clarke Services v Purohit](#)).

Avoid possible claims of indirect race discrimination by

- *accepting and considering applications from any candidates with suitable skills and experience, irrespective of their nationality*
- *using statements such as: "the successful candidate must by the start of their employment have permission to work in the UK"*
- *only seeking evidence that someone has the right to work in the final stages of the recruitment process, rather than at the initial application stage.*

I am an EU citizen, do the same rules apply to me?

Yes, unless you were in the UK by 31 December 2020 in which case you can [apply for settled or pre-settled status](#) by 30 June 2021.

Where can I get more detailed information and advice on visas?

We recommend always checking you have the latest information and that you fully understand how the rules apply to your own situation. Ask your university's Student Visa Services team or check [UKCISA's website](#).