

An international **students guide**  
to **working** in the **UK**  
after you **graduate**



After completing your studies, you may decide you want to return to your home country or work elsewhere in the world. If you wish to remain in the UK and work, there are a range of different options and opportunities for you.

The Graduate route and the Skilled Worker route are the most common visas for international graduates to use if working or seeking to work in the UK after their studies.

## The Graduate route<sup>1</sup>

The UK's Graduate visa (also known as the Graduate route visa) allows international students to apply to stay in the UK and work, or look for work, upon graduation.

International students who have successfully completed an undergraduate, master's degree or MBA can apply to stay in the UK for up to two years after their studies, or up to three years for PhD graduates.

## What do I need to know?

- **You can only apply in the UK.** There is no provision to apply in your home country or in any other country other than the UK.
- **No sponsorship required.** All the responsibility of the visa lies with you, the student. The application does not need sponsorship or any endorsement by an employer or by your institution.
- **Flexible working options.** The work can be in any sector and at any level. This provides more options for you to seek various opportunities such as short and fixed-term projects, work for smaller businesses and start-ups, or consultancy work.

- **More opportunities.** Unlike the Skilled Worker visa, the Graduate route is not tied to a specific job or employer. You can have multiple jobs at any skill level and can switch jobs during the course of the visa.
- **No minimum salary requirements.** There is no salary constraint for potential employers, but it is advised to ensure your employer pays you at least the National Living Wage<sup>2</sup>.
- **Know when to apply.** You can apply for the Graduate route from the day your institution confirms your final course transcript up until the end date of your current Student visa.
- **Plan your time.** On average visa processing times can be four to eight weeks but this can vary. Ensure you check the Home Office website as you prepare your application. Apply with plenty of time so you do not exceed your student visa expiry date, otherwise you will be ineligible for the Graduate visa. You must have your final course results in order to apply.
- **Budget for your application.** There is a one-off application fee of £715, whilst the immigration health surcharge is charged at £624 per year of leave granted.

**You will only be eligible for one Graduate visa. Once a student has been given a Graduate visa they cannot apply for an extension or apply for another one even if they do more eligible study. You also cannot switch from a Skilled Worker visa to a Graduate visa.**

## The Skilled Worker route<sup>3</sup>

A Skilled Worker visa allows you to stay in the UK with an approved employer and eligible job. You must fulfil certain requirements to apply for this type of visa – including having a job offer with a minimum salary.

### What do I need to know?

As an international student you are sponsored by your higher education institute. An individual on the Skilled Worker visa will be sponsored by their employer (e.g., a company or business).

- **Sponsorship required.** You will need to gain sponsorship by a licensed employer<sup>4</sup> to do a specific job.
- **You will likely be classed as a ‘New entrant’.** Graduates switching to the Skilled Worker route from either the Student route or the Graduate route are usually classed as ‘new entrants’.
- **Your job needs to meet the minimum levels of skill requirement.** The UK Government provides a list of eligible jobs on their website<sup>5</sup> that meet this requirement.
- **Your job needs to meet minimum salary requirements.** Depending on your circumstances, the salary that employers need to offer new entrants must be at least £20,960, at least £10.75 per hour, or the ‘going rate’ for the type of work you’ll be doing, whatever is higher.
- **Employers will incur costs when hiring a graduate on the Skilled Worker route.** Total costs will vary depending on where the graduate is applying from, the type of visa they are switching from, the size of the employer and whether the employer already has a sponsor licence.
- **Longer employment length opportunities.** Employers can hire graduates for up to five years, with the possibility of further extensions if you still meet the eligibility requirements. After five years the employee can apply to either extend or settle permanently in UK if eligible.
- **No evidence of maintenance (your money) is required.** This is the case if you are applying in the UK and you have been living here with a valid visa for at least 12 months, or if your sponsor certifies your maintenance in the application.
- **Opportunity to transfer from the Graduate route.** If you impress your employer while you are on the Graduate route visa, the employer can switch you to the Skilled Worker route, if requirements are met. Note, you cannot switch from a Skilled Worker to Graduate visa.

# ‘Do I have the right to work in the UK?’

Yes, you have a right to work up to 20 hours a week during term time and full time during vacations. Once you successfully complete your course, you will be eligible to apply for a Graduate route visa. This visa will give you the right to work in the UK for two years (or three years for PhD graduates). Potential employers do not have to pay any costs towards your graduate visa.

This will generally be the case for most international students studying a degree level course or higher.



## Top tip

To understand whether your specific job, salary and situation make you eligible for sponsorship as a Skilled Worker, you will need to discuss it directly with your employer, usually the Human Resources department.

To support your conversations with any potential employers, direct them to this useful [employers guide](#) about recruiting international graduates.

## Note

Except for some specific roles such as those relating to national security, 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 or employ someone on the basis of their nationality.

## Important information

The information provided is for guidance and to help international students understand the main elements of the Graduate route and Skilled Worker route.

For more detailed guidance see the links to the relevant Immigration Rules.

To help you to prepare for the global employment market, you can join Study UK's free online course '[preparing for work](#).' You will get advice on choosing the right job for you, and how to build relationships in a professional setting. You'll also learn to identify and communicate the skills you've gained from your UK education in cover letters, CVs and interviews. Also, if you are an international PhD student, there is also an immigration toolkit available to read on the [jobs.ac.uk](#) website.

For further advice on working in the UK after you complete your studies, visit [UKCISA's](#) website.

## Footnotes

1. Graduate route  
View the UK government's [Graduate route guide](#) for more information on how to apply.
2. [National Living Wage](#)
3. [Skilled Worker route](#)
4. [Register of licensed sponsors: workers](#)
5. [Eligible jobs and salaries for "new entrants"](#) The list of eligible jobs is in the Immigration Rules Appendix Skilled Occupations. Table 1 includes most of the eligible jobs, with separate tables for some jobs in health and education.

