# Immigration Policy (Staff)

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This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure compliance with changes in UKVI regulations and guidelines, employment law and equality and diversity legislation. In the event that this policy or procedure is not compliant, the relevant legislation shall prevail.

**Changes to this policy will be subject to consultation with the University's recognised Trade Unions before implementation**

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## 1. PURPOSE

The Immigration Policy outlines the visa requirements and procedures for overseas workers who have been successful at recruitment stage and have received an employment offer from Brunel University of London. This policy also outlines the procedures for processing visa extensions, ensuring full compliance with UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) requirements.

The Skilled Worker Visa replaced in December 2020 the previous Tier 2 (General) work visa and allows skilled individuals from overseas to work legally in the UK. These individuals need visa sponsorship from a work sponsor to work in the UK. Brunel University holds a UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) sponsorship licence enabling the institution to sponsor foreign nationals in obtaining Skilled Worker Visas.

By facilitating the immigration process through sponsorship, Brunel University of London aims to attract and retain highly skilled professionals who can contribute to its academic and research excellence.

This policy provides comprehensive guidance on the appointment of overseas workers, and also explains Brunel's responsibilities as a UKVI sponsor, emphasising the need to adhere to all immigration rules for preventing illegal employment.

This policy is designed to ensure that all overseas staff who require a work visa are treated fairly, receive consistent and timely guidance, and are supported throughout the application process in compliance with UK immigration and employment laws. The policy aims to provide accurate and up-to-date information, ensure employees' rights are protected regardless of their origin, ethnicity, background and/or other protected characteristics. By doing so, the University seeks to create a welcoming and supportive environment that values the contributions of international staff.

Any updates or changes to this policy will be communicated to all relevant stakeholders. While the Global Mobility & Immigration Team is not authorised to give formal legal advice, they are available to provide support and guidance in accordance with current UKVI regulations to ensure compliance with relevant rules and help staff understand their visa and immigration requirements.

## 2. SCOPE

This policy applies to prospective non-UK and non-Irish employees seeking employment at Brunel University of London under the Skilled Worker Visa route as academic or research staff, or under other visa work routes, whether on a permanent or fixed-term contract. It also outlines the eligibility criteria, requirements and procedures for obtaining a Skilled Worker Visa prior to the commencement of employment, as well as for applying for an extension to continue employment.

Brunel University provides sponsorship for skilled occupations that align with its academic and research posts, as well as for Professional Services roles. For academic staff, the University typically sponsors eligible workers under the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes of 2311 (Lecturers) and 2119 (Researchers), in accordance with the UKVI requirements.

For new hires in permanent positions, the University, as the work sponsor, will issue a three-year Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS). For those on fixed-term contracts, the University will issue a CoS aligned with the duration of contract. Successful candidates for professional services roles will also be sponsored, provided these roles are classified as highly skilled occupations and meet the relevant salary criteria.

## 3. REQUIREMENTS FOR SKILLED WORKER VISAS

### 3.1.1 Main Criteria

The applicant must fulfil the UKVI requirements to qualify for the Skilled Worker visa. The following main criteria must be met:

- An employment offer,
- A 'Certificate of Sponsorship' (CoS) from the employer, providing details of the job,
- The job must be listed as eligible in the new Appendix of Skilled Occupations and meet the required skill level of RQF Level 6, i.e. highly skilled (equivalent to graduate level and above),
- A salary meeting the general salary threshold and going rate for the respective eligible occupation,
- Satisfying the English language requirement,
- An ATAS certificate (if applicable).

Individuals who apply for a Skilled Worker visa must score a minimum of 70 points; 50 mandatory and 20 tradeable points under the UK Points-Based System, for a successful application. The mandatory points relate to core requirements, including sponsorship, an eligible job offer in a skilled occupation, and evidence of English language proficiency. The tradeable points relate to factors such as meeting the general salary threshold and the occupation's going rate, holding a relevant PhD qualification, or being classified as a new entrant to the labour market: https://www.gov.uk/skilled-worker-visa/when-you-can-be-paid-less

### 3.1.2 Salary Thresholds

Employees who have been issued a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) prior to April 4, 2024, or have been granted a Skilled Worker visa before that date and have continually held one or more Skilled Worker visas since then, and are applying for an extension, will benefit from lower general salary threshold and occupational going rates.

From 22 July 2025, the general salary threshold for skilled workers is **£41,700** per year. The going rates for skilled occupations assigned with a CoS can be found in the government website for going rates for eligible occupations. Employees are required to meet both rates, with the higher rate being applicable. For academic roles the current going rates are: £41,500 for Research roles (SOC code 2119), and £52,600 for Lecturer positions (SOC code 2311).

The going rates for SOC codes can be adjusted based on the weekly working hours specified on the CoS, typically, for Brunel University, a 35-hour working week for a full-time position. A lower salary threshold is applicable in situations where applicants hold a PhD in a relevant subject and/or in a STEM field related to the job. Additionally, a lower threshold applies to new entrants, when switching from a student or graduate visa, or individuals under 26 years of age.

The Global Mobility & Immigration team will conduct an assessment whether the role and salary grade meet the eligibility criteria for sponsorship under the Skilled Worker visa route, taking into account any applicable exemptions or reduced salary thresholds as defined by UKVI guidance.

### 3.1.3 Skill Level for Eligible Occupations

Effective 22 July 2025, roles eligible for sponsorship must be classified as highly skilled on the list of eligible occupations, typically corresponding to RQF Level 6 (graduate level and above). Roles classified as medium-skilled may also be eligible for sponsorship if they are included on the Immigration Salary List or the Temporary Shortage List.

Transitional arrangements may apply to employees who were sponsored for medium-skilled jobs before 22 July 2025 and provided they have been continuously sponsored with a Skilled Worker visa since their first Certificate of Sponsorship. In addition, individuals whose first CoS was assigned before 4 April 2024 may continue to qualify under the lower salary thresholds. These transitional measures are designed to support continuity of employment and ensure that existing sponsored workers are not disadvantaged by changes to the eligibility criteria.

### 3.1.4 English Language Proficiency

Applicants must demonstrate their English language proficiency when applying, unless they have done so in a prior successful visa application. Applicants can establish their English language proficiency by:

- Passing a Secure English Language Test (SELT) from an approved provider demonstrating English proficiency to at least level B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale. Effective 8 January 2026, the minimum English language requirement for first-time Skilled Worker visa applicants will be raised: applicants must now demonstrate English proficiency in **B2 level**, at least.
- Hold a degree level qualification that was taught in English. If, they studied outside of the UK, they will need to apply through ECCTIS to demonstrate their qualification and English proficiency for a skilled worker visa application. Similarly, individuals can use this service for their PhD to qualify for tradeable points.

Nationals from specific countries, typically when the native language is English, are exempt from proving their English proficiency: https://www.gov.uk/english-language/exemptions

### 3.1.5 ATAS Certificate

Obtaining an ATAS (Academic Technology Approval Scheme) certificate is mandatory to engage academic researchers, in specific sensitive technology-related fields in the UK, unless they are from exempt nationalities.

The hiring manager should complete the relevant section in the CoS form, should an ATAS be required for the researcher appointed for the post. The ATAS application involves a research statement by the hiring manager providing detailed information about the proposed research. A sponsor note will be added to the CoS with the ATAS certificate details. Without an ATAS certificate, the University cannot allocate a CoS for research positions. Processing time (normally 30 working days) should be considered for the start date of a new appointment. The ATAS certificate is valid for 6 months therefore the visa application should be submitted during this time.

Employees must apply for a new ATAS certificate if they are extending their skilled worker visa, there are changes to the content or scope of their research project. A new ATAS is also required if there is a change in job title, even if the individual remains within the same SOC code. Furthermore, if there are changes to the employee's financial sponsor or the conditions of their financial sponsorship, a new ATAS must also be obtained. Brunel University will not explore supporting a visa application through different immigration categories that are not subject to ATAS just to circumvent the ATAS requirement.

## 4. PROCEDURE FOR SKILLED WORKER VISAS

The start and end dates of the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) for a Skilled Worker visa must be aligned in principle with the start and end dates of the employment contract. More specifically, for permanent roles, the initial Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) will be issued for a period of three years. This will be followed by an extension of up to two additional years, where appropriate. For fixed-term contracts, the Skilled Worker Visa will correspond to the length of the contract.

Where possible, the Global Mobility & Immigration team will conduct a pre-assessment of job adverts to determine whether the advertised role is eligible for sponsorship under the Skilled Worker visa route. As part of this process, a note in the job advert regarding sponsorship eligibility will be considered to help confirm whether the role meets the necessary criteria. This ensures that eligibility is assessed consistently before the recruitment process proceeds, reducing delays or complications in the subsequent visa application process.

### 4.1.1 Determining a Start Date

Following the REAP approval, the hiring manager must liaise with HR Operations on the anticipated work start date for the purpose of issuing the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS). Where possible, the CoS assignment should be processed up to three months from the anticipated work start date stated in the employment contract in order to allow sufficient time for the visa application processing.

The hiring manager and the sponsored worker should consider the following factors that can affect the start date of work and visa processing times:

- Location of the visa application: in-country or out-of-country,
- UKVI application process: standard or priority,
- English language requirements,
- ECCTIS certificate (for English proficiency and/or PhD verification for tradeable points),
- ATAS certificate, if applicable (normal processing times up to 6 weeks),

- Tuberculosis (TB) tests (if required, depending on the country coming from)
- Contractual notice period to other employer,
- Relocation arrangements

### 4.1.2 CoS Forms

The Global Mobility & Immigration team will provide the hiring manager and the successful candidate requiring sponsorship with the CoS Forms once the employment offer has been issued and accepted. The hiring manager must duly complete the CoS form, which encompasses work details that align with the Job Description and Job Advert; job title, salary grade, work description and location, start and end dates, and other relevant information specific to the role, for instance, PhD degree and/or ATAS certificate if required. Additionally, candidates are required to complete the applicant CoS form, ensuring accurate provision of all personal details necessary for the CoS assignment.

### 4.1.3 CoS Assignment

The Global Mobility & Immigration team will review all details provided for accuracy and verify the individual's eligibility for sponsorship. Once eligibility is confirmed, they will assign the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) through the UKVI Sponsorship Management System and issue the assigned CoS to the sponsored worker via email, along with the supporting documentation required for the visa application process.

The earliest a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) can be assigned is three months prior to the individual's start date. The timing of the CoS assignment should take into account standard processing timelines. Where feasible the CoS will be assigned at the earliest appropriate time for both in-country and overseas applications, ensuring the candidate has adequate time to complete and submit their visa application using the standard service.

### 4.1.4 Visa Application Process

Once the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) has been assigned and issued to the individual, they may proceed with the online submission of their visa application.

The sponsored workers will be required to attend an appointment to provide their biometric details, unless they can use the UK Immigration: ID Check app, allowing them to verify their identity through the ID check app. Application processing times vary based on the location, whether within the UK or outside, and the selected visa route; standard or priority service. Priority service results in the visa issuance within one week, whereas the standard service may take up to 8 weeks for in-country applications and 3 weeks for applications submitted outside the UK.

### 4.1.5 Right to Work Check

Once the sponsored worker is notified of the successful outcome of their application, they should provide the HR Operations team with their share code to carry out a Right to Work check, using the Home Office online checking service. For more information, please visit the Right to Work Policy.

The individual's actual start date must not be delayed by more than 28 days from the later of the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) start date or the date of e-visa issuance. This ensures compliance with sponsorship obligations and facilitates timely commencement of employment. If

the delay exceeds 28 days, Brunel University must provide an SMS update to inform the Home Office of the change in the start date, providing a valid reason accepted by the Home Office. Typically, this reason includes a contractual notice period from the employee's previous employer.

In cases where a visa extension is in progress and the new visa is not expected to be issued before the current visa expires, the HR Operations team must still request a share code from the individual in order to carry out a Right to Work check. This is necessary to verify that the individual retains the right to work in the UK while their visa application is pending, and to establish a statutory excuse for a period of six months.

If obtaining a share code is not possible, the HR Operations team should instead use Employer Checking Service to verify the individual's immigration status and obtain a statutory excuse against a civil penalty.

### 4.1.6 Check-List

The HR Operations team will complete the Skilled Worker visa checklist to ensure compliance with the UKVI Immigration Regulations. This will ensure that the University practices align with the Sponsor requirements as defined in Guidance Appendix D. Once completed the check-list will be saved on the employee's file and CoS folder.

The use of the checklist will also involve the Government Authorised Exchange visa scheme (Temporary Work). This process is aligned with the University's compliance with regulatory requirements and ensure that all necessary procedures are rigorously implemented, as part of University's obligations as a licensed work sponsor.

## 4.2 Transitioning from a Student or Graduate Visa to a Skilled Worker Visa

**Student visa** holders who have completed their studies (UG or PG), and have been successful at recruitment stage can be appointed to job vacancies and start full-time permanent work, provided they have (i) received and accepted a formal offer of employment; (ii) been issued a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) with a start date after their course has finished; and (iii) submitted an application for a Skilled Worker visa.

Students, whether UG or PG, must not undertake permanent full-time employment, except where a valid Skilled Worker or Graduate visa application has been submitted, and upon completing their CAS course. The employment offer must not extend beyond the expiry date of the Student visa or exceed a period of four months, whichever is shorter, when the individual has completed their studies, but has not submitted an application for a Skilled Worker or Graduate visa.

For **PhD** students, the UKVI regulations allow employment and the possibility of transitioning to a Skilled Worker visa after completing 24 months of the PhD study. However, Brunel University will permit the switch to a Skilled Worker visa and full-time employment upon full completion of the student's programme. This procedure reflects the primary purpose of the student visa, which is to enable and facilitate academic study, and aligns with the University's guidance that employment activities should not take precedence over academic commitments.

Consequently, the University expects the doctoral student to have been recommended for the award of their PhD before initiating the visa application process. Exceptions will be considered if the doctoral student is reaching the completion stage, for instance, when submitting their thesis, and in other exceptional circumstances, where the case is supported by a strong academic and financial rationale. Such requests will be reviewed by the Global Mobility & Immigration Manager and the Compliance Manager.

All students are eligible to apply for a **Graduate Visa** upon completing their studies and therefore, can apply for job vacancies and be appointed by the University if successful at recruitment stage. Graduate Visa holders are permitted to work for any employer of choice without restrictions on salary or job skill level. The University will consider sponsorship for graduate visa holders who will be appointed, and if they are eligible for sponsorship. When an immediate start is required, individuals can also apply for a sponsored work visa after they started, and a CoS can be assigned after the employment start date.

If the expiration date of the Graduate Visa is shorter than the contract end date, the University will proceed with transitioning the employee to a Skilled Worker and provided that the individual meets the eligibility requirements. This transition can be initiated during their employment, on a date agreed between the line manager and the applicant, and it must occur before the Graduate Visa expires.

If the candidate is not eligible for sponsorship under the Skilled Worker Visa route, the University will still offer the role, ensuring that no discrimination in employment takes place. The University will explore alternative visa routes to maintain the individual's Right to Work and must conduct a follow up Right to Work (RTW) check before the visa expiry date.

However, if no viable visa route exists, the University will be required to terminate employment in accordance with the relevant laws and policies and to prevent illegal employment. If the employee loses the right to work, their employment contract will be rendered void and unenforceable, and the University will no longer be able to continue employment. In such cases, the employee may be dismissed with immediate effect and without payment in lieu of notice (PILON). However, the University must ensure that a fair dismissal procedure is followed to accurately determine the right to work status. It is important to note that offering a fixed-term contract solely based on an employee's right to work status may amount to direct discrimination and should therefore be avoided.

### 4.3 Extending Visa

A visa extension will be required for permanent employees who were previously sponsored under a three-year Skilled Worker visa. A new Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) of two years will be issued to facilitate the visa extension. For fixed-term contract extensions, the end date specified in the new CoS will correspond with the revised expiration date of the extended contract.

The Global Mobility & Immigration team will initiate the visa extension process following the standard procedure, issuing the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) forms, and three months prior to the expiry of the employee's current visa where possible. The team will also be responsible for assigning the CoS as soon as the CoS Forms information received is complete and accurate to ensure sufficient time for an in-time application.

### 4.4 Updating Visa: transition to a different SOC code

If the new role of an existing sponsored worker corresponds to a different Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code, for instance a switch from 2119 (Researcher) to 2311 (Lecturer) or vice versa, a new visa application will be required to update the existing visa. This will be based on a new CoS, and provided that the eligibility criteria will still be met. This ensures full compliance with the UKVI requirements, and as the new CoS and visa must reflect the new job duties and responsibilities associated with the revised SOC code. The relevant recruitment process will be followed (i.e. a new REAP form) to facilitate the recruitment process for the new role. A check list in line with the Sponsor Guidance Appendix D must be carried out.

## 5. REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

### Change of Employment Circumstances

Brunel is required to formally notify the Home Office of any changes to employment circumstances within a period of 10 working days. The HR Operations team and the sponsored employee should inform the Global Mobility & Immigration team of any changes in the employment circumstances, as soon as the change has been confirmed. Thereafter, the Global Mobility & Immigration team will update the SMS.

Such changes typically include:

- A new job position or job title (provided that this falls within the same SOC code). If the new role corresponds to a different SOC code, a new visa application will be required.
- Adjustments in salary, such as promotions (not though the annual salary increments).
- Changes in working hours and work patterns, including maternity or paternity leave.
- Change of the work location.
- Switching to a different immigration category, such as to a Global Talent visa or ILR.
- Termination of sponsorship in the event of resignation or termination of the contract.

Failing to notify the Home Office within the required time framework can lead to the visa being revoked and may entail severe penalties for the work sponsor, including the potential revocation of the sponsor licence.

HR Operations must promptly inform the Global Mobility & Immigration team of any employee leaving the University and in order to terminate sponsorship. Furthermore, if an employee has changed their immigration status by applying for another visa type that is not necessarily tied to their employment, the HR Operations should follow up and carry out a new RTW check and notify immediately the GM & Immigration team for the SMS update (i.e. termination of visa sponsorship).

While UKVI may not legally require a new RTW check for settled workers who have applied for and obtained naturalisation status and British citizenship, conducting a RTW check is considered best practice to ensure maintain accurate records.

## 6. OTHER VISA CATEGORIES

### 6.1 Global Talent Visa

To support the University's commitment to attracting global talent, Brunel University will support applications under the Global Talent visa routes. Requests for these routes will be considered where the relevant UKVI eligibility requirements can be met. The University will issue a Statement of Guarantee Letter to support the endorsement application for the Academic Appointment or Endorsed Funders route.

The Global Mobility & Immigration team can also provide expert advice and guidance on other Global Talent visa routes, such as the Individual Fellowship and Peer Review, which are not linked to the employer. The criteria and terms for a Global Talent visa are specified in the Appendix Global Talent of the Immigration Rules.

The Global Talent visa involves two separate stages. **Stage 1** is the endorsement application, during which applicants must obtain endorsement from an approved endorsing body. **Stage 2** is the visa application, which can be submitted once the endorsement has been approved. An option to submit the endorsement and visa application simultaneously should be considered if this is

necessary to ensure an in-time visa application (i.e. a visa application prior to the expiry date of an existing visa). At Stage 1, the Global Mobility & Immigration team will provide guidance and support in preparing and issuing the required supporting documents (i.e. Statement of Guarantee Letter). At Stage 2, applicants are responsible for submitting the visa application in line with UKVI requirements, while the University may assist with further guidance if necessary.

The University will be considering requests from eligible employees who wish to switch from a Skilled Worker visa to the Global Talent visa route. The University will assess requests typically six months prior to the expiry of the employee's existing Skilled Worker visa (if sponsored) and provided the individual meets the relevant eligibility criteria for the Global Talent visa. Where the endorsed funders route is being pursued and therefore a minimum of one year remaining on the employment contract is a requirement, the review will be conducted regardless of the expiry date of the Skilled Worker visa, to allow for an endorsement application to be submitted twelve months in advance of the contract end date.

### 6.1.1 Academic and Research Appointments Route

Endorsement support for academic appointments under the Global Talent visa route is subject to specific eligibility criteria. This typically applies to senior-level roles where the employee is responsible for leading or directing a research or innovation project or programme, and where such responsibilities constitute a significant part of the role.

This route requires the submission of a Statement of Guarantee Letter, prepared by the Global Mobility & Immigration team in accordance with the approved template by the endorsing organisations and signed off by the Chief People and Culture Officer, as well as a copy of the applicant's job description.

### 6.1.2 Endorsed Funders Route

For applications under the Global Talent visa route via the endorsed funders, the supporting research grant must meet specific eligibility requirements. The research grant must be awarded, by an approved UKRI organisation, exceed £30,000 in value, and be of a minimum duration of two years. Additionally, the applicant must have at least one year remaining on their employment contract at the time of application. The post must be attributable to the qualifying grant, with the majority of the individual's responsibilities aligned with the funded research.

A Statement of Guarantee Letter, prepared by the Global Mobility & Immigration team using the approved template, is required for applications submitted through the Endorsed Funders route, along with a copy of the grant award.

## 6.2 Government Authorised Exchange visa (Temporary Work) – International Researchers

This section outlines the University's policy on sponsoring and managing temporary work visas for International Researchers. The policy ensures compliance with UKVI regulations under the Temporary Work – Government Authorised Exchange (GAE) scheme and applies to international researchers who come to the UK to undertake collaborative research with Brunel, join a research fellowship, participate in a work exchange programme, an internship or placement. The post must be supernumerary and should not be filling a vacancy and performing tasks that would ordinarily be carried out by an employee.

To be eligible for Temporary Work visa sponsorship, applicants must:

- Hold a formal invitation from the University, outlining the purpose of visit, description of the research project, and the duration of their visit;
- The position should be designated as International Researcher;
- Demonstrate academic / professional qualifications appropriate to the proposed research;
- Be funded by a recognised funding organisation, with financial support equivalent to at least the UK national minimum wage;
- Be a supernumerary role and not be filling a staff vacancy, which would otherwise be advertised through regular recruitment;
- Apply for and obtain an ATAS certificate if the research area requires ATAS clearance;
- Other potential requirements: for example, tuberculosis test results coming from a country where individuals need to take the test.

The maximum sponsorship period under the Temporary Work visa (GAE) is 24 months. The University will act as the licensed work sponsor. The Global Mobility & Immigration team will:

- Prepare and issue the invitation letter to the International Researcher and issue the relevant forms for completion by the researcher and host academic, ensuring all visa criteria will be fully met;
- Review the submitted documents to confirm that the level of overseas funding or scholarship meets National Minimum Wage (NMW) requirements;
- Assign and issue the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) in accordance with UKVI guidelines;
- Complete any required SMS updates within 10 working days.

The HR Operations is responsible for:

- Conducting pre-arrival checks including verification of qualifications and funding,
- Carrying out the RTW check,
- Monitoring and recording attendance and engagement throughout the visa period,
- Reporting to GM and Immigration team any changes of work circumstances, for instance, unauthorised absence, or early termination of the sponsorship (please see section 5).

Hosting Departments are responsible and must also ensure that the proposed research aligns with the academic mission of Brunel University and does not contravene immigration rules.

### 6.3 Indefinite Leave to Remain (Settlement) – Work Route

#### 6.3.1 Eligibility Requirements and Procedures

The University recognises the value of retaining highly skilled and long-serving international staff and is committed to providing administrative and procedural support during the ILR process. This section sets out the University's policy for supporting eligible staff with their applications for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) in the UK, and in accordance with legislation in effect by the time this policy has been published in December 2025. The policy applies to employees who have been employed by the University under eligible visa routes, and primarily the Skilled Worker or Global Talent visa, and who meet the requirements for settlement under UK immigration law.

Following the conclusion of the government consultation on the criteria and qualifying period for settlement, this policy will be updated in 2026 to reflect the revised settlement requirements once they come into force. Currently, an individual must have been sponsored under a work visa for a period of five years and meet the relevant salary threshold for ILR: £41,700 per year or the

‘standard going rate’ for the role, whichever is higher. In some cases, the qualifying period may be shorter; for example, individuals on a Global Talent visa may qualify after three years.

From Spring 2026, the qualifying period is expected to increase, potentially to ten years, with possible reductions based on criteria to be confirmed by the government. The revised criteria are likely to focus on: Character, Integration (for example, demonstrating competency in the English language), Residency, and Contribution, primarily meeting higher salary thresholds than those currently required for ILR.

Besides, to qualify for ILR the sponsored workers must:

- Be currently employed on a continuing contract for the foreseeable future;
- Have been sponsored by the University with a skilled worker visa or have been granted with a Global Talent visa;
- Have been continuously resident and employed in the UK in accordance with the visa terms and meet the qualifying period and salary criteria; Currently, individuals must have been sponsored under a Skilled Worker visa for five years (alternatively, eligibility may be met after a total of three years when combined with a period on a relevant Global Talent visa route) and must not have spent more than 180 days outside the UK in any 12-month period;

The Global Mobility & Immigration team will provide the following support to eligible applicants:

- Confirmation that the University, as a licensed sponsor, supports the individual’s application for settlement and assessment that all eligibility criteria can be met.
- A formal support letter, confirming the individual’s employment and sponsorship details, job title, start date, contract status, and expectation of continued employment for the foreseeable future.
- Verification of salary details and any travel outside the UK during the qualifying period.

The individual applying for ILR is responsible for:

- Ensuring they meet all Home Office criteria at the time of application;
- Compiling and submitting their own application and associated documentation;
- Notifying HR of any changes in immigration status following the outcome of the settlement (ILR) application.

The University will continue to maintain accurate records of all staff immigration statuses and for sponsored workers will update its Sponsor Management System (SMS) accordingly, with the termination of sponsorship following a successful ILR application. Support letters will be issued within five working days upon request, provided that all required information has been submitted and the application aligns with the most recent payroll data. The support letter for ILR will be prepared and issued by the Global Mobility & Immigration team. Employment reference letters for other immigration matters, including citizenship application, will be prepared by the HR Ops team.

## 7. ACADEMIC VISITORS

### 7.1 Eligibility Requirements and Procedures

This section outlines the University's policy and procedures for hosting international academics under the Academic Visitor route, in line with UKVI requirements.

The Academic Visitor visa is intended for overseas academics undertaking independent research relevant to their academic field or overseas employment, usually when on sabbatical or academic leave from their home institution. The University will also consider proposals for academic visits, for those participating in formal academic exchanges with overseas institutions or counterparts.

To qualify under this route, individuals must be employed by a higher education or academic institution outside the UK. Academic visits can last up to six months, or up to twelve months for highly qualified academics (typically, visitors holding a doctoral degree) undertaking research. The proposed host academic will evaluate the research proposal and liaise with the hosting department and HR Operations team to complete and submit the nomination form for the academic visit, subject to assessment and approval. The Standard Visitor visa for academic visits visa cannot be extended beyond 12 months. The process for academic visitors refers to non-UK international visitors, while visiting academics will not require a visitor visa to enter the UK.

The Academic Visitor process applies to non-UK international visitors who are expected to be present in the UK for the duration of their academic visit. Academics Visitors who require a Standard Visitor visa must **NOT**: undertake paid employment, accept a formal teaching or research role, receive a salary from the UK institution, remain in the UK beyond the authorised visit period, or apply to switch to another visa category from within the UK. Academic visitors are subject to ATAS clearance where their research falls within a subject requiring ATAS clearance.

Highly qualified academics are also permitted to carry out limited paid engagements within the first 30 days of arrival, such as examining students, participating in selection panels, delivering expert lectures, or speaking at conferences, without assuming a broader teaching role.

**Hosting Departments** wishing to host academic visitors are responsible for ensuring the visit aligns with the UKVI immigration rules, University's policy and academic priorities, with issuing an official invitation letter, confirming the individual is not filling a paid post, and maintaining appropriate records during the visit. More specifically, host departments wishing to host academic visitors are responsible for:

- Ensuring the visit aligns with the University's academic mission;
- Issuing an official letter of invitation, outlining the purpose of visit, description of activities and dates of the academic visit;
- Confirming that the visitor is not undertaking paid employment or a formal staff role;
- Keeping appropriate records of the visitor's engagement in line with compliance protocols;
- Confirm whether an ATAS is needed or not.

**The Global Mobility & Immigration team** will offer expert guidance and advice on academic visa requirements where necessary, and the HR Operations team will provide compliant invitation letter templates as well as advice on practical arrangements, such as access to university facilities and IT systems.

**Academic Visitors** are responsible for applying for the Standard Visitor visa and they must demonstrate sufficient personal funds during their stay, demonstrate necessary information and documentation about their expertise abroad, issued with a formal invitation letter, and arrange their own travel, insurance, and living expenses.

## 8. IMMIGRATION COSTS SUPPORT

### 8.1 Eligibility

Brunel University is dedicated to attracting top-tier academic talent globally, driven by diversity and strengthening its global status as a leading research institution. In line with this commitment, financial support is available for newly appointed employees in permanent roles of at least Grade 7, and who meet the eligibility requirements for a Skilled Worker visa.

New joiners on permanent contracts can claim Skilled Worker visa expenses whether they relocate to the UK from overseas (out-of-country application) and have been offered relocation assistance (visa expenses will be considered as part of the overall relocation assistance package), or if they are being sponsored for a skilled worker visa with an in-country application and regardless of their current place of residence.

Brunel University will issue a three-year Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) for permanent positions and will provide financial support for visa application fees and other eligible visa related expenses (please see section 8.2). The University will process the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) fee and the Immigration Skills Charge (applicable for professional services roles). Employees can request reimbursement for visa expenses after their employment begins through the system for expenses. Financial support is not available for other visa categories, visa extensions, or roles offered on a fixed-term contract basis, except where visa costs for a work visa are funded externally through a grant award.

Where new hires require a Skilled Worker Visa, the University will cover the expenses associated with the visa application and the Immigration Health Surcharge under its immigration cost support scheme, which entails reimbursing total specified costs up to £8,000, including any other relocation assistance, and in line with the **Relocation Expenses Policy**. These expenses will be subject to PAYE deductions, as HMRC does not categorise visa costs as allowable expenses for tax exemption.

If the support extends to covering visa application fees for dependent family members, the total reimbursement ceiling will be increased to £10,000. To clarify, the aggregate expense claim is comprising visa expenses and other eligible relocation costs under agreed relocation assistance policy, and must not surpass these limits. In cases where there is no agreed relocation package, eligible employees are only entitled to claim for visa expenses up to the specified thresholds.

Visa expenses for the Global Talent visa may be reimbursed for eligible new hires appointed to permanent positions at Grade 7 or R1, subject to approval by the hiring department and the repayment terms of immigration assistance (please see 8.4). For individuals employed on fixed-term contracts, the reimbursement of Global Talent visa costs is only available where visa fees are explicitly included in an externally funded research grant and covered by the designated funder.

The University will not provide financial support for individuals switching from a Skilled Worker visa to a Global Talent visa, unless the visa expenses are eligible for reimbursement through a research grant and have been explicitly included in the grant offer's terms and conditions. If an employee has previously received reimbursement for Skilled Worker visa expenses, they will be required to repay the financial support in line with the repayment terms of immigration assistance.

The University will support the use of the standard visa service wherever possible. Where employment requirements or contractual obligations necessitate using the priority service, the University may consider covering the associated priority service fee.

Employees who were initially appointed while holding a Graduate visa and who transition to a Skilled Worker visa, may be eligible for financial support of the visa application fees. Eligibility is contingent upon the individual being appointed to a permanent position of Grade 7 and above and approval by the relevant department at the beginning of the appointment process that the visa switch and an early start date would be necessary (to avoid waiting for the outcome of the skilled worker visa application). The Global Mobility & Immigration team should be informed by the Recruitment team and the hiring manager at recruitment stage if visa sponsorship will be required in the future. Additionally, the hiring manager will be notified by the Global Mobility and Immigration team if the individual may meet the eligibility requirements for sponsorship, and of the anticipated visa costs involved in switching to a Skilled Worker visa. Financial assistance, if any, will be considered only for the same role the candidate has been appointed to.

### 8.2 Reimbursable Visa Expenses

Eligible employees can claim the following visa expenses under the immigration costs support scheme:

- Visa Application Fee;
- Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS);
- Other related visa expenses (if applicable): English language test and Ecctis certificate.

The University will cover standard service visa fees; claims for priority service will only be considered if the request comes from the work sponsor and hiring department. Since the priority service incurs an additional cost, the decision on which service to opt in this scenario may also lie with the hiring department and employer. The visa application fees for sponsored workers can also be found here.

### 8.3 Loan Assistance for Skilled Worker Visa Extensions

Employees, who are extending their skilled work visa with the University, and for whom the relocation assistance policy would have normally applied (i.e. for permanent roles), can apply for an interest-free loan provided by the University, of up to £8,000. Repayment must occur within a maximum period of one year, contingent upon holding a contract that extends until the end date of the agreed repayment period.

In addition, loans of up to £10,000 are available if they include visa application fees for dependent family members, repayable within 24 months, and ensuring the repayment does not exceed the employment end date. The loan scheme does not apply to employees who are applying for any other visa category, for example, the Global Talent visa, Graduate visa, ILR etc.

Under the new immigration rules, salary threshold requirements for the Skilled Worker visa must be met after any deductions, including those related to loan schemes. If deductions from a loan result in the applicant's salary falling below the minimum salary threshold or the applicable going rate for the relevant skilled occupation, the loan request will either not be processed or will only be approved up to an amount that ensures continued compliance with UKVI salary requirements. This is to ensure that sponsorship remains valid and lawful under the Skilled Worker visa criteria.

Eligible employees should contact the Payroll Team (payroll@brunel.ac.uk) for guidance on claiming support via the loan scheme, covered under this policy, and for the relevant form.

### 8.4 Repayment of immigration assistance

In the event that the sponsored worker (or for any employee whose visa expenses have been covered) resigns within three years from the start date of their appointment, the amount to be repaid will be proportionally as follows:

- Within 1 year of appointment: 100%
- More than 1 year but within 2 years: 50%
- More than 2 years but within 3 years: 25%

Please note that the repayment terms and conditions continue to apply to any employee who has received financial assistance and was initially sponsored under a Skilled Worker visa, even if they subsequently transition to another visa type, such as a Global Talent visa.

## 9. MAIN ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The visa application process requires close collaboration between the HR Operations team, Hiring Managers, the Sponsored Worker (applicant), and the Global Mobility and Immigration team. Each stakeholder has defined responsibilities to ensure a smooth, timely, and compliant sponsorship process.

**Global Mobility and Immigration Team**

- Assess the role's and candidate's eligibility for Skilled Worker visa sponsorship.
- Initiate the visa process by providing the CoS request forms to the applicant and Hiring Manager, three months before the proposed start date, where possible.
- Issue the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) upon receipt of the completed CoS request forms, at least 8 weeks prior to the intended start date, where possible.
- Notify UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) of any changes to the sponsored worker's employment circumstances via the Sponsor Management System (SMS).

**HR Operations Team**

- Review and approve as complete for auditing purposes the interview decision sheet and assessment forms following the completion of the recruitment stage.
- Notify of all reviewed and completed documentation to the Global Mobility and Immigration team for CoS issuance.
- Conduct Right to Work (RTW) checks once the visa is granted.

**Hiring Managers**

- Complete the Employment Details in the Hiring Manager CoS form.
- Work collaboratively with the HR Ops team and GM and Immigration team, and applicant to gather accurate and timely information, including confirming the proposed start date.
- Ensure compliance with CoS requirements, including job role details, salary, and working hours. Notify the GM and Immigration team of any changes in employment circumstances.

**Sponsored Worker (Applicant)**

- Complete the CoS request form accurately.
- Use the assigned CoS to apply for the Skilled Worker visa application.
- Inform GM and Immigration and HR Operations teams of the visa application outcome and, if successful, provide the share code for the Right to Work verification.
- Notify the Global Mobility and Immigration team of any changes in employment or personal circumstances during the sponsorship period.

## 10. RISKS: CONSEQUENCES OF NON-COMPLIANCE

Non-compliance with Skilled Worker visa requirements and UKVI regulations can have serious consequences for both employees and the University. For employees, breaches will result in visa cancellation, removal from the UK, and potential restrictions on future entry. For employers, failure to comply will result in legal penalties, including substantial fines and criminal convictions, reputational damage, and the suspension or revocation of the sponsor licence for workers and students.

It is therefore essential to adhere strictly to Skilled Worker visa requirements and UKVI regulations. Key responsibilities encompass ensuring visa eligibility, maintaining accurate records, fulfilling all reporting obligations and RTW checks, and ensuring that both the sponsored worker and the University remain fully compliant throughout the work period. Brunel University conducts regular internal compliance audits and monitors changes in immigration policies to mitigate risks and ensure the lawful employment of all sponsored workers and visa holders.