

Comparison tables of 2026 UK sponsored work visas

Initial Insight

The “skilled worker” visa category is more popular with our clients than the global business mobility (GBM) categories because it may have a lower minimum salary requirements, the fact that there is no prior work experience required with the individual’s current employer and that it can lead to settlement i.e. indefinite leave to remain in the UK. The removal of the quotas on the previous Tier 2 (General) category and the mandatory resident labour market test has also liberated the skilled worker system further. However, there is still an English language requirement which is not shared by the GBM categories and businesses may have other reasons (tax, social security, employment laws overseas in the UK and overseas etc.) why they may wish to transfer staff temporarily, using the GBM categories, in some cases.

The GBM routes

Introduced in April 2022, this category replaced (for new applicants), the previous intra-company transfer (ICT) categories and the “sole representative of an overseas business” category. The GBM categories are aimed at overseas businesses temporarily transferring staff to the UK to set up a business presence or facilitate a specific business purpose. There is a general rule that individuals can spend no more than the “maximum cumulative period” in all of the GBM sub-categories which is 5 years in any 6 year period or 9 years in any 10 year period (if you are paid £73,00 or more per year). However, each of the GBM sub-categories has its own visa length as show in the comparison table. The GBM routes do not lead to settlement i.e. indefinite leave to remain

Global Business Mobility (GBM) routes							
	Skilled Worker	Scale-Up	GBM Senior/ Specialist Worker	GBM Graduate Trainee	GBM UK Expansion Worker	GBM Service Supplier	GBM Secondment Worker
What did it replace/ used to be known as?	Tier 2 (General).	The Scale-up route is a new category.	This replaced the ICT visa.	This replaces the ICT Graduate Trainee route.	Sole Representative of an Overseas Business (though the previous category remains open for extensions).	This has replaced the provisions for contractual service suppliers and independent professionals on the Temporary Work - International Agreement route.	This is a new category for overseas workers who are undertaking temporary work assignments in the UK, where the worker is being seconded to the UK as part of a high value contract or investment by their employer overseas.

	Skilled Worker	Scale-Up	GBM Senior/ Specialist Worker	GBM Graduate Trainee	GBM UK Expansion Worker	GBM Service Supplier	GBM Secondment Worker
What are the main differences with the predecessor category?	For those who remember the previous Tier 2 (General) category, there is no longer a specific resident labour market test to undertake as the default position, though there is still a "genuineness" test, such that there must be a genuine vacancy i.e. a real business need for the hire of the individual, the individual was identified via an objective, sensible recruitment process and they have the skills and experience that are genuinely required for the role.	n/a	The main difference is that the minimum salary for the role in the UK is now higher (having increased from £41,500 p.a to £52,500 p.a). Like its predecessor, the individual must have worked for a sponsor group company overseas for at least 12 months (unless they earn more than £73,900 p.a, in which case there is no minimum service requirement) prior to the application.	The minimum salary threshold for graduate trainees is £27,300 per year (or the minimum rate under the relevant SOC code, whichever is higher) an increase from £23,000 under the previous "ICT - Graduate Trainee category). There is also no longer a limit on the number of Certificates of Sponsorship that you can assign on this route (the limit was previously 20 per financial year).	Unlike the previous "sole representative" category, the UK Expansion Worker route requires the worker to have a sponsor and the sponsor must exist but not yet be trading in the UK. The sponsor will be a branch or wholly-owned subsidiary of an established overseas business. It is important to note as well that the sponsor will be required to demonstrate their UK footprint (though they must not yet be trading), credible expansion plans and requisite overseas trading presence prior to being granted a sponsor licence in this category.	The requirements of the new route are essentially the same as its predecessor route, except that: you must register details of any eligible contracts, and the overseas service provider with whom you have that contract, when you apply for your licence. Sub-contracting is expressly permitted, provided there is a clear contractual link between you, the sub-contractor and the overseas service provider. The role being performed must have a "SOC code" listed in Appendix 'Skilled Occupations' as eligible for the GBM route, or, in some cases, the applicant must have a university degree or equivalent technical qualification. There is a minimum 12 month prior work requirement for the overseas service provider. There is no minimum salary requirement.	n/a

	Skilled Worker	Scale-Up	GBM Senior/ Specialist Worker	GBM Graduate Trainee	GBM UK Expansion Worker	GBM Service Supplier	GBM Secondment Worker
What is the purpose of the visa?	The Skilled Worker route allows employers to recruit people to work in the UK in a specific job in an eligible skilled occupation.	This category is aimed at talented individuals recruited by a UK business that meets the definition of a qualifying Scale-up sponsor.	This allows senior/specialist workers from an overseas linked business within the sponsor group to undertake temporary work assignments in the UK.	The Graduate Trainee route is for individuals to undertake a UK-based work placement as part of a structured graduate training programme that leads to a senior management or specialist position and the UK placement is part of that programme.	To enable overseas businesses to establish a branch or subsidiary in the UK and it enables eligible businesses to sponsor senior managers or specialist workers (with a maximum of 5 at any one time) who are being assigned to the UK for a temporary period to undertake work related to the business's expansion to the UK. Sponsors are expected to establish a UK trading presence within two years.	The Service Supplier route allows you to sponsor overseas workers who are undertaking temporary work assignments in the UK, where the worker is either a contractual service supplier employed by an overseas service provider, or is an independent professional established outside the UK, and the work is part of a contract covered by one of the UK's international trade commitments.	To transfer staff to the UK as part of a high value contract/investment made with the overseas employer.

	Skilled Worker	Scale-Up	GBM Senior/ Specialist Worker	GBM Graduate Trainee	GBM UK Expansion Worker	GBM Service Supplier	GBM Secondment Worker
What are the main requirements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role must be at the minimum skill level 3 of England and Northern Ireland's Regulation Qualifications Framework ('RQF') – (comparable to an A-level qualification), or above to be capable of sponsorship according to the SOC code; Salary must be at least £41,700 or the "going rate" as stated in the SOC, whichever is the higher code; A lower salary of no less than £33,400, can be offered, provided the migrant meets the minimum 70 points by way of "tradable points" (for which there is a points table in the Home Office guidance); and Skilled Worker migrants may be able to include their spouses, unmarried partners, and children under 18 under their immigration permission. 	<p>The applicant must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a job offer at the required skill-level (graduate level or above); Be paid at least £39,100 per year, £10.10 per hour or the 'going rate' for the occupation code, whichever is highest of these figures; Be expected to work for the Sponsor for at least the first 6 months of their permission; Speak, understand, read and write English to the required standard (starting 8 Jan 2026 this will rise from level B1 to level B2 on CEFR); and There is no Immigration Skills Charge payable. <p>A worker can make either a 'sponsored' or an 'unsponsored' application. An applicant applying for the first time on this route must make a sponsored application (i.e. they must be issued a Certificate of Sponsorship by a scale-up sponsor.</p>	<p>Minimum salary for the role: £52,500 p.a or minimum rate according to the SOC code, (whichever is higher).</p> <p>The individual must have worked for a sponsor group company overseas for at least 12 months (unless they earn more than £73,900 p.a, in which case there is no minimum service requirement) prior to the application.</p>	<p>The individual must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a valid Certificate of Sponsorship; Have worked for their employer outside the UK for 3 months immediately prior to the application; Be sponsored for a role that is on the list of eligible occupations; and Be paid the minimum salary required for the role. 	<p>UK Expansion Workers must be paid at least the general salary threshold of £52,500 per year, or the specified going rate for the occupation (whichever is higher). The individual must have worked for the sponsor group (and be working for the sponsor group at the date of application) for at least 12 months prior to the application (certain exceptions apply).</p>	<p>The individual must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be an employee of an overseas business/ self-employed service provider based overseas; Provide a service under a contract that is covered by a valid international trade agreement; Provide a service to a UK business that has been approved as a sponsor by the Home Office; Do an eligible job or prove you have relevant qualifications and professional experience; Have a Certificate of Sponsorship from the UK sponsor with information about the work you'll be doing in the UK; and Have worked for your employer for at least 12 months outside the UK, or have at least 12 months' professional experience if they are self-employed. 	<p>The individual must be an existing employee of an overseas organisation that is a party of the high value contract with the UK sponsor and must have worked for the overseas employer for at least 12 months. The sponsored role in the UK must be governed by a "SOC" code of practice. There is no minimum salary requirement.</p>

	Skilled Worker	Scale-Up	GBM Senior/ Specialist Worker	GBM Graduate Trainee	GBM UK Expansion Worker	GBM Service Supplier	GBM Secondment Worker
How long can you stay?	<p>This category may lead to indefinite leave to remain ('ILR') or permanent settlement after a continuous period of 5 years residence in the UK. However, there is no limit on how long a migrant worker can stay in the UK as a Skilled Worker. This is a significant advantage over the GBM categories.</p> <p>A sponsored Scale-up Worker will be granted stay for 2 years initially. However, they will only be sponsored for the first 6 months of their permission. The sponsor will no longer sponsor the worker after this period (so sponsor duties end after 6 months), even if you continue to employ them. The worker can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue working for the sponsor without being sponsored; and • change job or employer without requiring new sponsorship (provided they continue to meet the requirements of the Scale-up route). <p>At the end of the 2-year grant of permission, the worker can make an unsponsored application and be granted permission on the route for a further 3 years. After 5 years' continuous residence in the UK on this route (or in combination with another eligible route, or eligible routes), they can apply to stay permanently in the UK i.e. settle/obtain indefinite leave to remain.</p>	<p>This visa allows a maximum time of 5 years in any 6 year period if paid less than £73,900 per year; or 9 years in any 10 year period if paid £73,900 or more per year. Like all GBM categories, this sub-category does not lead to UK settlement.</p>	<p>Graduate trainees can come for up to one year at a time, up to the maximum cumulative period for GBM visas (5 years in any 6 year period, or 9 years in any 10 year period for high earners). Like all GBM categories, this sub-category does not lead to UK settlement.</p>	<p>A UK Expansion Worker can come to the UK for up to one year initially, with the option to extend their stay by up to a further year. Two years is the maximum continuous period a person can stay in the UK on this route. UK Expansion Workers are also subject to the maximum cumulative period for the GBM routes. Like all GBM categories, this subcategory does not lead to UK settlement.</p>	<p>Service Suppliers can come to the UK for up to 6 months or 12 months (depending on the trade agreement) per assignment. Service Suppliers can return to the UK for further assignments but are subject to the maximum cumulative period for the GBM routes. Like all GBM categories, this sub-category does not lead to UK settlement.</p>	<p>A Secondment Worker can come to the UK for up to one year initially, with the option to extend their stay by up to a further year. Two years is the maximum continuous period a person can stay in the UK on this route. Secondment Workers are also subject to the maximum cumulative period for the GBM routes. Like all GBM categories, this subcategory does not lead to UK settlement.</p>	

	Skilled Worker	Scale-Up	GBM Senior/ Specialist Worker	GBM Graduate Trainee	GBM UK Expansion Worker	GBM Service Supplier	GBM Secondment Worker
Can dependents obtain a visa?	Yes, subject to eligibility.	Yes, subject to eligibility.	Yes, subject to eligibility.	Yes, subject to eligibility.	Yes, subject to eligibility.	Yes, subject to eligibility.	Yes, subject to eligibility.
Specific eligibility requirements for the sponsor to obtain a licence?	N/A	<p>To obtain a scale up sponsor licence, the company will need to demonstrate that they have an annualized growth of at least 20% for the previous 3-year period in terms of turnover or staffing. Companies will also need to have had a minimum of 10 employees at the start of this 3-year period.</p> <p>You do not need to send any specific documents for the scale-up licence application alone, unless you are required to be registered with, or inspected or monitored by, a regulatory body to operate lawfully in the UK. The Home Office will securely access and check Pay As You Earn (PAYE) information and/ or VAT returns you have submitted to HMRC to assess whether you meet this definition. This means that, in theory, it should be a fast-track verification process to obtain a licence.</p>	<p>The UK sponsor must be linked by common ownership or control or by a joint venture agreement to an overseas business from which you will be transferring the graduate trainees. You must evidence the structured graduate training programme that has a legitimate work placement in the UK.</p>	<p>You must be linked by common ownership or control or by a joint venture agreement to an overseas business from which you will be transferring the graduate trainees. You must evidence the structured graduate training programme that has a legitimate work placement in the UK.</p>	<p>You must provide evidence that you intend and are able to establish a new UK branch or wholly-owned subsidiary of an established overseas business. The overseas business must normally have been trading overseas for a minimum of 3 years (some exceptions apply). It is important to note as well that the sponsor will be required to demonstrate their UK footprint (though they must not yet be trading), credible expansion plans and requisite overseas trading presence prior to being granted a sponsor licence in this category.</p>	<p>You must have an eligible contract with an overseas service provider for the supply of a service which is covered by a relevant UK trade commitment.</p>	<p>You must have an eligible contract with an overseas business for goods of investment worth at least £10 million per year (and no less than £50 million in total).</p>

	High Potential Individual	Graduate Visa
What did it replace/use to be known as?	This is a new category but it bears some similarity to a now, prehistoric Tier 1 (General) category from many years ago.	This is a relatively new category but has some similarities with previous “post-study worker” categories.
What is the purpose of the visa?	The High Potential Individual route is a new route aimed at attracting “the brightest and best” to the UK.	To allow foreign students time to find a job in the UK following their degree.
What are the main requirements?	The applicant must have either a bachelor’s or postgraduate degree qualification from one of the top (non-UK) global universities outside the UK as published in the Home Office’s Global Universities List. It must have been awarded within the last 5 years from the date of application.	The individual must apply in the UK as a student or Tier 4 (General) student visa holder and have studied a bachelor’s degree or higher during the currency of that visa and have successfully completed the course.
How long can you stay?	18 months for applicants relying on a qualification equivalent to a UK Bachelor’s or Master’s level degree; or for 3 years where the applicant holds a qualification equivalent to a UK PhD. This category does not lead to settlement i.e. indefinite leave to remain in the UK.	A Graduate visa gives you permission to stay in the UK for 18 months (3 years for PhD students) after successfully completing a bachelor’s degree or higher level course whilst on a student visa in the UK. This category does not lead to settlement in the UK, though you may be able to switch into other work visa categories.
Can dependents obtain a visa?	Yes, subject to eligibility.	In some cases, dependents can obtain a visa.