

Immigration Update

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Veristat specialises in providing immigration advice, support and other compliance services to employers and education providers. We also support individuals applying for leave to enter/remain in the UK.



Please contact us for further information about our training sessions, which will also cover the changes announced recently by the UK government.

Introduction

During the summer months, there have been limited changes announced and indeed implemented. We hope this has provided you with the opportunity to further consider and review the impact of the recent changes to the Immigration Rules and to review your internal policies and procedures accordingly.

We appreciate many of you may have concerns about the impact of recent changes on your businesses and institutions. We are here to support you with any immigration matters and remove some of those challenges associated with Immigration compliance. Should you need any advice or support with anything, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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Working in the UK

Decrease in UK Work visa applications

The Home Office (UKVI) have published their Visas and citizenship data for Q2 2024 which has shown a significant decrease in the number of work visas being received from those applying from outside the UK for entry clearance. The full statistics can be viewed [here](#).

In Q2 2024, there were a total of 68,776 'Leave to Enter' sponsored work visa applications compared to 130,187 for the same period in 2023, which is a 47% decrease!

Despite the above, there was an increase of 22% for 'Leave to Remain sponsored work visa applications for Q2 2024 (88,258) compared to the same period in Q2 2023 (72,601).

The decrease may possibly be due to the introduction of increase salary thresholds and restrictions on dependants entering the UK.

There are increased concerns as to how employers will be able to manage skills shortages going forwards, as it is unlikely that the resident labour market will be sufficient to fill any gaps. Concerns were already expressed by many earlier this year that this would likely 'deter' highly qualified and skilled individuals from considering the UK as a career destination and sadly these statistics appear to be confirming those fears.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visas-and-citizenship-data-q2-2024>

<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1885092/uk-working-visa-applications-drop-third-%E2%80%93-does-mean-ongoing-skills-shortages>

UKRI endorsement: endorsed funders (Global Talent visa)

The Home Office (UKVI) have published an updated list of endorsed funders approved by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) for Global Talent.

The updated list of endorsed funders approved by UKRI can be viewed [here](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukri-endorsement-endorsed-funders-global-talent-visa>

Review of the Seasonal Worker visa

The *Migration Advisory Committee (MAC)* has published their report following a review of the Seasonal Worker visa. The aim of this review was to assess its useability and impact for both employers and workers by considering the rules under which the scheme operates, the size and costs of the scheme, its economic rationale, the potential for exploitation and poor labour market practice, evidence from international comparisons, and the long-run need for such a scheme.

The key findings and recommendations are as follows:

- Provide certainty around the future of the scheme – further certainty was required from government regarding the long-term future of the scheme. The MAC has also recommended changes to the scheme's eligible occupations.
- Allow for a more flexible visa – the MAC believes that greater flexibility would enable employers to plan more efficiently and for workers to maximise their earnings without adding complexity to the route. The MAC recommends shortening the current 'cooling-off' period from the current 6 months to 3 months and allowing workers to work any 6-month period in an individual calendar year.
- Fairer work and pay for workers – a lack of pay data for those on the visa makes effective monitoring of pay very difficult. The MAC recommends that Seasonal Workers are guaranteed at least 2 months' pay to cover their costs in coming to the UK and reduce the risk that low-income workers are required to take.
- Tighten, communicate and enforce employee rights – Seasonal workers coming to the UK are particularly susceptible to exploitation due to the nature of the work in often isolated rural areas, frequently with little or no English. Workers are often concerned that if they make a complaint that they will lose their visa and significant potential earnings. Many employers are taking steps to improve the welfare of those on this route, but there appears to be some that are not doing so. There are also some instances where migrants have paid significant fees abroad to unofficial agents, taking loans, or accruing large debts. The MAC recommends a more coordinated approach between the bodies currently involved in worker welfare and a clearer delineation of responsibility for each. It is also important that worker rights are clearly communicated to workers in their own language.
- Give consideration to the Employer Pays Principle – Seasonal Workers currently bear the cost of both their visa and their travel to and from the UK. Further work is needed to investigate how these costs might be more equitably shared along the supply chain.
- If the government intends to maintain current levels of domestic food production then there is a clear need for a Seasonal Worker Scheme in the short-to-medium term. This will provide certainty to businesses who operate in a sector unusually reliant on migrant labour, given the lack of domestic workers and the seasonal and rural nature of the work.

The MAC's report on the Seasonal Worker visa can be viewed [here](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/seasonal-worker-visa-review>

Current Visa Processing Times – Work visas

The Home Office (UKVI) have published their current decision waiting times for those applying from inside or outside the UK.

Those applying to switch or extend their work visa from within the UK, should receive a decision within **8 weeks** of attending their biometric appointment or the date the application / documents were received by the UKVI (if no appointment is required). Applications made under the Health and Care Visa normally receive a decision within **3 weeks** if applied for from inside the UK. The latest processing times for those applying from inside the UK can be viewed [here](#).

Those applying for a work visa from outside the UK, should get a decision within **3 weeks** once they have either attended their appointment at the visa application centre (VAC) or used the ID Check app and submitted their application/supporting documents. The latest processing times for those applying from outside the UK can be viewed [here](#).

Applicants may be able to pay an additional fee to expedite their applications for a quicker decision.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visa-processing-times-applications-outside-the-uk>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visa-processing-times-applications-inside-the-uk>

Illegal Working Civil Penalties – Anonymous regional report

The Home Office (UKVI) have published their illegal working civil penalties regional report for the period 1 January to 31 March 2024.

During this period, the key statistics were as follows:

- The total number of penalties issued was 411.
- The total number of illegal workers found was 532.
- The total value of civil penalties issued was £8,120,000.

The full report can be viewed [here](#).

Veristat provides training sessions on Right to Work checks for employers which can be delivered over Microsoft Teams or on the client's site. For further information and a quote, please email enquiries@veristat.co.uk.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/illegal-working-civil-penalties-anonymous-regional-report>

Studying in the UK

Decrease in UK Study visa applications / Financial implications of decline in international student recruitment

UK universities and other institutions are facing an ever growing struggle to recruit international students, which is having a major financial impact on the sector.

The Home Office (UKVI) have published their Visas and citizenship data for Q2 2024 which has shown a significant decrease in the number of study visas being received from those applying from outside the UK for entry clearance. The full report can be viewed [here](#).

In Q2 2024, there were a total of 58,723 'Leave to Enter' Student visa applications compared to 89,986 for the same period in 2023, which was a 35% decrease!

There was a slight increase (8%) of 'Leave to Remain Student visa applications for Q2 2024 (5102) compared to the same period in Q2 2023 (4706).

The significant impact on international student recruitment is most likely due to previous government changes that were introduced to restrict migration.

There are also huge financial challenges facing institutions as they strive to attract international students and generate sufficient revenue, as was outlined by Professor Sally Mapstone, President of Universities UK in her speech at their annual conference 2024. Further information can be viewed [here](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visas-and-citizenship-data-q2-2024>

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/latest/insights-and-analysis/speech-professor-sally-mapstone-dbe-frse-0>

Illegal visa networks targeting International Students

A BBC investigation has identified a global network of recruitment agents that have fleeced international students out of tens of thousands of pounds providing worthless visa documents which they hoped would enable them to work in the UK.

The students who wanted jobs in the care industry, reportedly paid £17,000 for sponsorship certificates that should have been free. Their visa applications under the Skilled Worker route were rejected by the Home Office as invalid.

The news article can be viewed [here](#).

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c97w1x2deyvo>

Current Visa Processing Times – Study visas

The Home Office (UKVI) have published their current decision waiting times for those applying from inside or outside the UK for a study visa.

Those applying to switch or extend their study visa from within the UK, should receive a decision within **8 weeks** of attending their biometric appointment or the date the application / documents were received by the UKVI (if no appointment is required). The latest processing times for those applying from inside the UK can be viewed [here](#).

Those applying for a Student/Child Student visa or Short-term study visa from outside the UK, should get a decision within **3 weeks** once they have either attended their appointment at the visa application centre (VAC) or used the ID Check app and submitted their application/supporting documents. The latest processing times for those applying from outside the UK can be viewed [here](#).

Applicants may be able to pay an additional fee to expedite their applications for a quicker decision.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visa-processing-times-applications-outside-the-uk>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visa-processing-times-applications-inside-the-uk>

Sponsorship – please note...

Skilled Worker - Errors in the Immigration Rules

The Immigration Rules changes in April 2024 contained a number of errors where the occupation-specific 'going rates' stated for occupation codes were too high. Guidance on GOV.UK has now been updated with the correct, lower rates and the Immigration Rules will be corrected in the autumn.

In advance of the Rules change, the Home Office (UKVI) has advised sponsors to refer to the 'going rates' in the GOV.UK guidance when issuing CoS for skilled Workers, as these are the rates that caseworkers will assess applications against.

Further information can either be viewed on the Home Screen of the Sponsorship Management System (SMS) or at the link [here](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/skilled-worker-visa>

Sponsorship transparency data: Q2 2024

The Home Office (UKVI) have published the latest sponsorship transparency data for Q2 2024.

The key statistics are as follows:

- As of Q2 2024, there were a total of 100082 Skilled Worker sponsors (55% increase since Q2 2022), 4399 Temporary Worker sponsors, and 1060 Student sponsors.
- There was a total of 9530 new sponsor licence applications made during Q2 2024. Of these, there were:
 - 8949 Skilled Worker licence applications
 - 346 Temporary Worker licence applications
 - 215 Skilled Worker / Temporary Worker sponsor licence applications
 - 10 Student sponsor licence applications
 - 7 Skilled Worker / Student sponsor licence applications
 - 2 Skilled Worker / Temporary Worker / Student sponsor licence applications
 - 1 Student / Temporary Worker sponsor licence applications.
- As of Q2 2024, there were 94.9% of registered Student sponsors with full 'Student Sponsor' status.
- The average length of time taken to process a licence application was 33 days.
- The maximum length of time taken to process a licence application was 681 days.
- The following actions were taken against sponsors during this period:
 - 524 Skilled Worker licences were suspended
 - 499 Skilled Worker licence applications were revoked
 - 6 Student licences were issued with an Intention to Revoke
 - 4 Student licences were revoked
 - 54 Temporary Worker licences were suspended
 - 47 Temporary Worker licences were revoked

The sponsorship transparency data for Q2 2024 can be viewed [here](#).

People Management has explored the implications of the Home Office's recent clampdown on businesses and considers how they should respond. Further information can be viewed [here](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sponsorship-transparency-data-q2-2024>

<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1886627/increasing-numbers-visa-sponsorship-licences-suspended-revoked-%E2%80%93-employers-worried>

Other Immigration News

Changes to the commercial partner visa application services

Visa application centres are operated by commercial partners (also known as 'suppliers') on behalf of UK Visas and Immigration. In some locations, the commercial partner will change.

Between September 2024 and January 2025, the commercial partner will change from TLScontact to VFS Global for Africa, Europe, the Middle East and central Asia. Other parts of the world will not be affected. Further information can be viewed [here](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-commercial-partner-visa-application-services>

Accessing Online immigration status (eVisa)

The Home Office (UKVI) have published updated videos to give applicants more information on what an eVisa is and how to use one.

The updated videos can be viewed [here](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/online-immigration-status-evisa-help-video>

EU Settlement Scheme Guidance for applicants re: Covid-19

The Home Office (UKVI) have updated their guidance for EU Settlement Scheme applicants on or outside the UK who were affected by restrictions associated with coronavirus (Covid-19). The updated Covid-19 EUSS guidance can be viewed [here](#).

In line with the recent changes to the Immigration Rules, the guidance has been updated in relation to pre-settled status to confirm that you can usually switch to settled status after they've lived in the UK for 5 years in a row.

If settled status cannot be granted automatically, the pre-settled status will be extended shortly before it's due to expire. The Home Office may cancel the extension if they think the applicant no longer meets the requirements for it, for example because they've broken their continuous qualifying period.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-eu-settlement-scheme-guidance-for-applicants>

Current Visa Processing Times – Family route visa applications

The Home Office (UKVI) have published their current decision waiting times for those applying from inside or outside the UK for a family route visa. The latest visa processing times can be viewed [here](#).

For those applying to switch to or extend their Family route visa from within the UK, they should receive a decision within **8 weeks** if minimum income and English language requirements are required, or **12 weeks** if applying under the 'Private Life' category where minimum income and English Language are not required once they've attended their biometric appointment or applied online/provided documentation (if no appointment is required). It may be possible to expedite the applications for a quicker decision by using either the Priority or Super Priority services if they are available at the time of application. The latest processing times for those applying from inside the UK can be viewed [here](#).

Those applying for a Family route visa from outside the UK, should get a decision within **24 weeks** once they have either attended their appointment at the visa application centre (VAC) or used the ID Check app and submitted their application/supporting documents. If paying extra to use the priority visa services, you would normally expect to receive a decision within 6 weeks of the biometric appointment, although delays are still being experienced in some cases. The latest processing times for those applying from outside the UK can be viewed [here](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visa-processing-times-applications-outside-the-uk>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visa-processing-times-applications-inside-the-uk>

Proving English Language Abilities with a secure English Language test (SELT)

The Home Office (UKVI) has updated their list of approved SELT test providers for applicants applying for a visa from inside or outside the UK. Further information can be viewed [here](#).

If the applicant is **in the UK**, they can only take a SELT test with one of the following providers: LanguageCert, Pearson, Trinity College London, or IELTS SELT Consortium.

If the applicant is **outside the UK**, they can only take a SELT test with one of the following providers: LanguageCert, Pearson, PSI Services (UK) Ltd – Skills for English (UKVI), and IELTS SELT Consortium.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-english-language-abilities-with-a-secure-english-language-test-selt>

Veristat Services

Training on IDSPS, the Skilled Worker or Student routes/Right to Work/Forgery

We provide comprehensive training on all aspects of immigration, including IDSPs, the Student route, the Skilled Worker route, Right to Work and the identification of fraudulent documents. Our sessions include the recent changes being brought about by the 2021 points-based immigration system and how employers and education providers can be prepared moving forwards.

All training can be provided in person at the client's site or remotely via Microsoft teams/Zoom.

If you think your organisation would benefit from training in any of these areas, please contact us for a quote by emailing us at enquiries@veristat.co.uk. If you would like to discuss the contents of our training packages or require a bespoke training package to be delivered, please call us on 01344 624016 or email us as above.

Sponsor licence applications

Employers or education providers wishing to employ EEA/EU nationals or non-EEA nationals who do not have right to work need to apply for a Sponsorship licence.

We provide a comprehensive advice and support package to employers and education providers applying for a licence. This can include preparation for a Home Office (UKVI) visit and training on the new Skilled Worker or Student routes and the SMS system, as well as assistance with applying for Certificates of Sponsorship (CoS) or Confirmation for Acceptance for Studies (CAS) and a step-by-step guide for completing the application itself.

Please email us at enquiries@veristat.co.uk or by telephone on 01344 624016 for further details and/or a quote for helping you with your application.

Audits and Inspections

Veristat is hugely experienced in providing compliance audits across all immigration routes. We have worked with hundreds of employers, ranging from small family businesses to multi-nationals, high street retailers and professional sports/football clubs. In the education sector, we have worked with over 30 universities and a significant number of colleges and schools.

Our audit/inspection service is fully flexible and can be tailored to individual requirements. It is based on sound practical experience of UKVI's policies, culture and approach.

- For employers, we offer on-site Skilled Worker or ICT compliance inspections (with staff aware or unaware to simulate an announced or unannounced UKVI visit). We also offer right to work compliance visits.
- For education providers, our service ranges from a “lite” health-check to a comprehensive review of student route activities, assessing compliance with UKVI requirements and sharing best practice. We also offer targeted inspections covering specific issues, such as BCA, Skilled Worker compliance, policies, student unions, relationships with partner institutions, etc.

On completion, we can provide a comprehensive, evidence-based report, together with an assessment of how compliant the business or institution is with UKVI's requirements. We will support the introduction of change if required and offer a 'spot check' follow up service at a later date if beneficial to reassure management that recommendations have been implemented.

If you are interested in booking an audit/inspection, please call us on 01344 624016 or email us at enquiries@veristat.co.uk.

Please note we are also now offering remote audits and inspections- please contact us for more details.

File Inspection Days

If you're unsure whether you require a full compliance audit or specific training but would like an independent check of your files to ensure they are fully compliant with Home Office requirements, we can provide a UKVI file compliance inspection of either your staff or student files.

Depending on the number of employees/students you have, we would either check all files or an agreed sample. After the inspection has taken place, we would provide a written report outlining any risks, feedback and recommendations.

For further information or a quote for our file inspection days, please call us on 01344 624016 or email us at enquiries@veristat.co.uk.

Advice/Support packages

We offer advice/support packages on either a fixed rate monthly retainer basis or on a fixed-hourly basis, which can include a number of our services, such as: acting as your Level 1 user, issuing of CoS/CAS, immigration audit, etc. If you do not require ongoing retainer advice/support, we offer either 5- or 10-hour annual support packages at reduced rates.

If you are interested in discussing our retainer or hourly advice/support packages further, then please contact us on 01344 624016 or email us at enquiries@veristat.co.uk

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