

HIRING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES

A QUICK GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

The information provided in this resource is accurate as of September 2025. Immigration rules and visa requirements are subject to change. For the most up-to-date guidance, please visit: <https://migrationservice.scotland.org/>

A photograph of three people in a modern office environment. A man in a white shirt and dark tie is seated at a desk, looking towards a woman standing next to him. Another woman is seated to the left, smiling. They are all looking at documents on the desk. In the background, there are framed abstract paintings on a shelf and large windows letting in natural light.

Learn how to employ international graduates - short term on the Graduate visa or long term through the Skilled Worker visa. This guide outlines your options and available support.

The legal information was written by immigration lawyers at Seraphus.

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GRADUATE VISA

Graduate visa holders apply independently. The employer only needs to conduct the **right to work check**.

International graduates who have successfully completed a UK degree may apply for a Graduate visa, which allows them to live and work in the UK for an extended period, post-graduation.

- Employers do not need to sponsor this visa
- Graduates manage the application and costs themselves
- Graduates can work in any job, at any skill level, including Graduate schemes.

Many students finish their course with a few months left on their Student visa, during which they can work full time. If they don't yet have a Skilled Worker-eligible job offer, they can apply to the Graduate visa and continue working without sponsorship.

This is a flexible, low-risk way to hire international talent quickly, without taking on any visa responsibilities as an employer.

SKILLED WORKER VISA

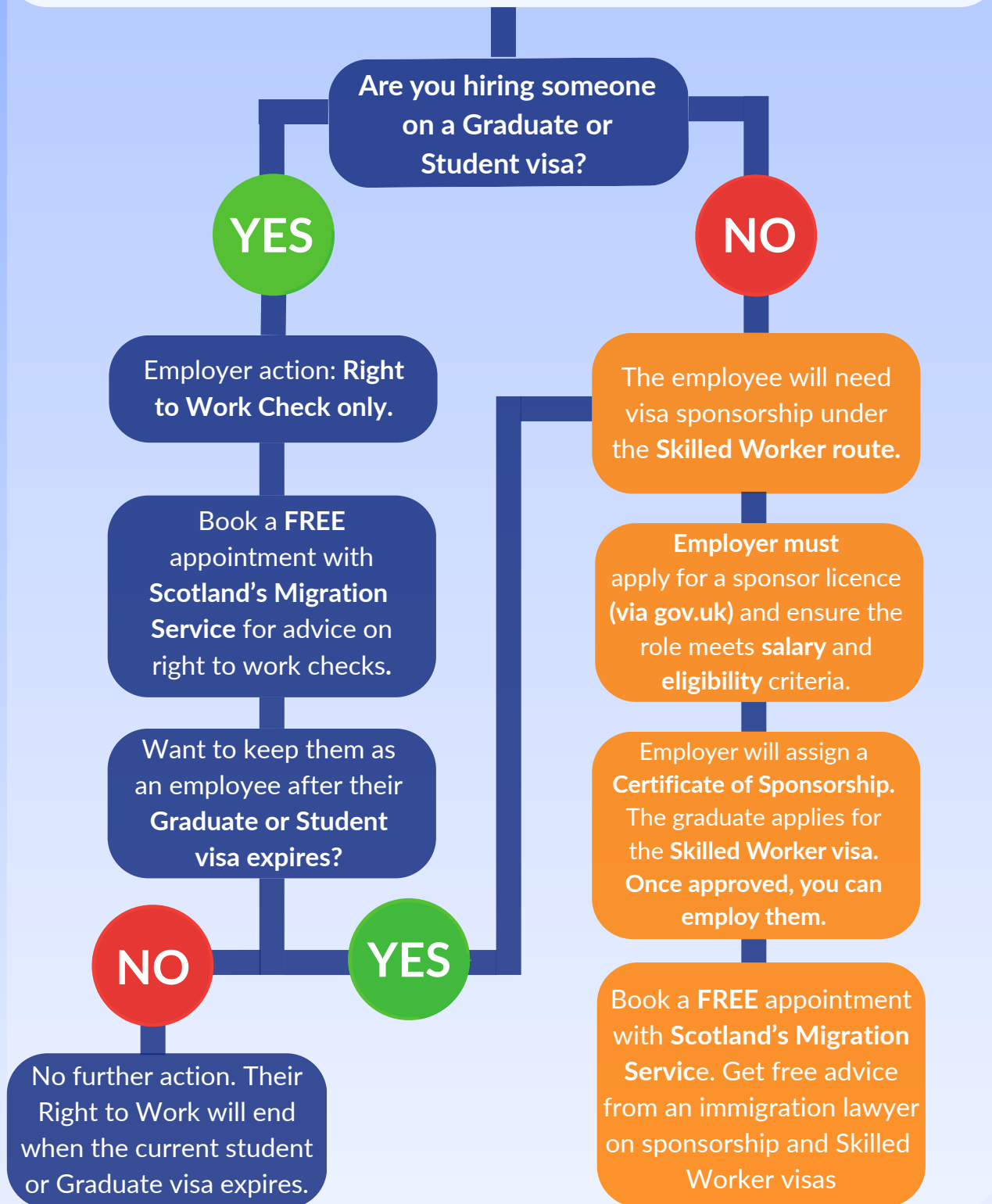
To retain international graduates beyond the Graduate visa, employers should consider becoming a sponsor.

Graduates who wish to stay longer-term will need to switch to a Skilled Worker visa. This requires sponsorship by a licenced Employer. To do this, you must:

- Apply for a sponsor licence (via gov.uk)
- Have a role that meets the Skill Level and Salary requirements

Once approved, your licence allows you to sponsor international talent under the Skilled Worker route. Some graduates may switch to the Skilled Worker visa directly from a Student visa (without using a Graduate visa). In most sectors, it's typical to hire under the Graduate visa first, then sponsor them as a new entrant. Being a new entrant means the employee can benefit from the lower salary threshold for up to four years, including time spent on the Graduate route. Employers offering graduate schemes can sponsor international graduates at either stage.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO HIRING INTERNATIONAL APPLICANTS



SPONSOR LICENCE PROCESS

Make sure your organisation meets the requirements and gather necessary documentation (e.g. proof of registration, HR processes).

Submit your sponsor licence application through the (gov.uk) official portal.
Cost for small sponsors: £536.

Most applications are processed within 8 weeks, or 10 working days with the fast-track option (additional fee).

Once approved, you can assign Certificates of Sponsorship to eligible international hires and sponsor their Skilled Worker visa applications.

Book a FREE appointment with Scotland's Migration Service for expert advice on sponsorship and Skilled Worker visas.

SPONSOR LICENCE BENEFITS



Holding a sponsor licence allows you to recruit from a growing number of international graduates and skilled workers already in the UK – as well as talent based overseas.



Sponsor licences are valid indefinitely, as long as you continue to meet your responsibilities – giving you flexibility and stability in planning your future recruitment needs.

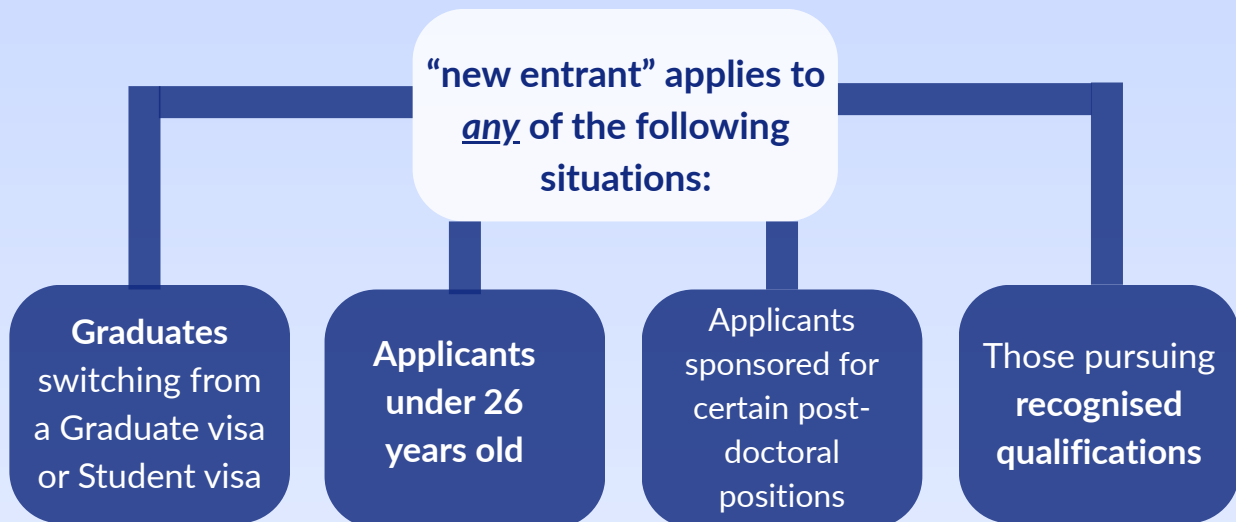


The licence can be used to sponsor many types of roles across sectors, not just graduate roles – so you can fill skills gaps at different levels within your organisation.

SPONSORSHIP REQUIREMENTS

All roles must meet a relevant general salary threshold, which varies according to the employee's circumstances, you must also meet the 'going rate' for the job, which varies by the job type.

However, some international graduates and younger applicants may qualify for a "new entrant" discount, which lowers the required salary.



Always refer to the most up-to-date salary tables at:
<https://www.gov.uk/skilled-worker-visa/your-job>

Book a FREE appointment with Scotland's Migration Service for expert advice on sponsorship requirements.

MAKING THE MOST OF THE NEW ENTRANT DISCOUNT

The new entrant discount can make sponsorship more accessible and affordable. For eligible applicants, this route allows you to offer a lower salary while still meeting Skilled Worker visa requirements.

What does this mean for employers?

You can recruit emerging talent without exceeding tight salary budgets.

The discount can support graduate schemes or early-career roles that wouldn't usually meet the standard salary threshold.

It's a valuable tool to widen your candidate pool and tap into a skilled, global workforce.

What are the key considerations?

The New Entrant rate is time-limited (usually 4 years max).

You must clearly indicate the applicant's eligibility when assigning the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS).

Always double-check the most recent salary requirements for the specific occupation code on gov.uk.

Book a **FREE** appointment with Scotland's Migration Service for expert advice on utilising the new entrant discount.

EMPLOYER QUESTIONS



“Do I need a sponsor licence to hire someone on a Graduate visa?”

No. The Graduate visa is unsponsored. Graduates apply and pay for it themselves. You only need to carry out a standard Right to Work check.

“Can a graduate on a Student visa work full time after their course ends?”

Yes. Most students can work full-time after completing their course, even before switching to the Graduate visa — check visa conditions to confirm.

“What is the salary requirement for sponsorship?”

It depends on the job type and applicant’s circumstances. New entrants can be sponsored at a lower salary threshold. Check gov.uk for up-to-date rates.

“How do I know if a role is eligible for sponsorship?”

You must match the job to an eligible occupation code listed in the relevant qualifying table by the Home Office, at gov.uk/skilled-worker-visa/your-job.

“What happens if we don’t sponsor the graduate?”

They can work until their Graduate visa expires. After that, they will no longer be eligible to continue employment without switching to a different route.

SUPPORT AND ADVICE



Need help understanding your next step?

Scotland's Migration Service offers free, expert support for employers across Scotland.

Book a FREE 1-to-1 Appointment

Get tailored advice from an immigration lawyer on:

- Graduate visa right to work checks
- Applying for a sponsor licence
- Skilled Worker visa sponsorship
- Recent or upcoming changes to visa rules

Explore More Resources Online

- Step-by-step guidance on becoming a sponsor
- Recorded webinars and printable guides
- FAQs and updates on immigration changes

Book advice session:

migrationservice.scotland.org/book-an-appointment-with-seraphus

Full employer guidance:

migrationservice.scotland.org



This resource was created in partnership with
The University of the West of Scotland.

With legal content written by immigration lawyers at
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