

IMMIGRATION

SPRING NEWSLETTER

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Welcome

Welcome to the Spring issue of our immigration newsletter, where we share the latest developments in the world of travel and immigration to help individuals and keep businesses employing workers from overseas, as well as global travellers, up to date with the UK laws and legislation governing immigration.

This issue highlights the full implementation of the Electronic Travel Authorisations (ETA) which took effect on 2 April 2025 and represents a significant shift in how travellers can gain entry to the UK. Additionally, we provide an update on the evolving E-Visa process, and share some further insights on the governments white paper.

We hope you find this issue an interesting and informative read.

What is an ETA and who needs it?

The UK Government introduced a new scheme called Electronic Travel Authorisations (ETA), which was first announced in March 2023 and has been fully implemented since 2 April 2025.

The scheme covers all travellers from the EU and now aligns the UK with measures that other countries like the USA, EU and Australia have previously introduced for security reasons.

Do I need an ETA to travel?

Visitors who do not currently need a visa to visit the UK, and who do not already have immigration status prior to travelling, are now required to obtain an ETA to the UK for short stays, including for tourism and transiting.

There is a temporary exemption from needing an ETA for travellers who transit airside and therefore do not pass through UK border control. However, this exemption is being kept under review and individuals are advised to check current requirements before travelling.



ETA or Visa?

The ETA is essentially a digital permission to travel and should not be confused with a visa or a permit to travel. The ETA scheme is for individuals on the non-visa national list who were previously issued with a visit visa on arrival. Individuals with an Overseas Territory Citizen passport, or travelling with a British National (Overseas) passport, or legally resident in and entering the UK from Guernsey, Jersey or the Isle of Man, are exempt from applying for an ETA.

Those who are visa nationals are still required to apply for a visa/entry clearance. Those countries on the UK visa national list can viewed [here](#).

How to apply

- Via the UK ETA app, where most individuals will receive an automated decision within minutes.
- Those without a smart phone can apply through the [official UK government website](#) and can expect a decision within three working days or less.
- The current cost of an ETA is £16.00.

How is an ETA issued?

An ETA is issued electronically along with email confirmation that the application has been approved. The ETA is linked to your passport and therefore the same passport must be used to travel to the UK.

The ETA is valid for two years or until the expiry of your passport, whichever is sooner. While it remains valid, it can be used multiple times to enter the UK, unless passport details change, when a new ETA will need to be applied for.

What happens if my application is refused?

If the application is refused, reasons will be given for the refusal. However, there is no right of appeal or administrative review.

Depending on the reasons for refusal, you will either need to apply again or apply for a visa / entry clearance to enter the UK, such as a standard visitor or transit visa.

Obtaining electronic travel authorisation allows you to travel to the UK but does not guarantee entry. UK border officials can still refuse entry, if, for example, it becomes clear false information has been provided.

Update on the E-visa process

The old BRP system has now been replaced with an online eVisa system. Everyone issued with a visa for longer than 6 months, are now encouraged to sign up to eVisa to prove their immigration status.

An eVisa can be used to re-enter the UK and used to show your immigration status to landlords and employers by generating a share code in the 'view and prove' service.

Visa holders first need to create a UKVI account and link their passport or expired BRP card after which their account will be linked with their current immigration status called E-Visa.

eVisa is free and information on how to set up your account can be seen [here](#).

Can I still use a BRP card?

Although BRP cards are now expired, due to technical issues with eVisa, the Home Office has stated that individuals may be able to use their expired BRP card to travel to the UK until 1 June 2025. To be able to use an expired card, you must still have permission to stay in the UK and your BRP card expiry date must show 31 December 2024.

What is the difference between a UKVI account and eVisa?

- You will first need to create a UKVI account in order to access eVisa. It is possible you may already have a UKVI account linked to your passport or expired BRP.
- If so, you can sign into your account and go on to link it to eVisa.
- If not, you must enter your passport or expired BRP details and then follow the instructions to link to eVisa. This will then prompt you to download the UK Immigration: ID
- Check app to confirm your identity online, which is done by scanning the biometric chip in your passport or expired BRP.
- If your document does not register on the app, you will have to confirm your identity another way, usually by booking an appointment at a Visa Application Centre (VAC) or a UK Visa and Citizenship Application Services (UKVCAS) service point.

Once eVisa has been linked to your UKVI account, you must make sure your personal details are correct and up to date before you travel. If you renew your passport, you must update eVisa. Useful online videos that explain step-by-step how to create the account, can be viewed [here](#) and further information can be found [here](#).

Issues with eVisa

The new system is not without its faults, and so if you are struggling to link your eVisa, or update your details, further information can be found by visiting the Home Office online support [here](#).

The Future of UK Immigration with the White Paper Reforms

On 12 May 2025 the UK Government announced many new reforms to its current immigration system. The White Paper titled: 'Restoring control over the immigration system' sets to reduce net migration by deterring applicants and making processes to settling in the UK more difficult and more costly.

In this article, André Minnaar, Partner and head of our Immigration team and Jamie Langley, Paralegal examine some of the key reforms and share their thoughts on some of the proposals.

What does a White Paper mean?

White papers are policy documents produced by the Government that set out their proposals for future legislation and whilst these changes have not yet been implemented, they are in the pipeline and **individuals and businesses should take note.**

Work Visas

The reforms intend to encourage businesses to employ from within the UK, rather than seek those who may have the skills for the role outside the UK. Their solution to make this a realistic reform is to contribute further to the training in the domestic labour market where there are skills shortages. Many medium-skilled job roles will be removed from the current eligible list, and eligibility for skilled worker visas will be restricted at RQF Level 6 or above (which is graduate level). The Immigration Salary List will be abolished, meaning current occupations on the list will no longer benefit from a salary threshold discount. Instead, a Temporary Shortage List with roles below graduate level may be sponsored on a temporary basis, unlikely to lead to settlement. The reforms also suggest there will be restrictions placed on bringing dependents in the Temporary Shortage List.

The Health and Care Worker visa route will no longer be open to new applicants from outside the UK. However, those wishing to switch in-country and extend will be able to do so, in a transition period up to 2028. Finally, minimum salary thresholds are to be increased, designed to put off employers from hiring people from outside the UK, when instead they could pay someone who is free from immigration restrictions significantly less.



André Minnaar

Comment from André

"Whilst these proposals are a drive to bring down net migration, statistics show that the biggest proportion of immigration originate from India, yet the government has just struck a trade deal with India in which concessions were made to make it easier for global mobility of Indians coming to work in the UK. Whilst the government may sugar coat this as temporary workers, it is yet to be seen how many of those workers will end up making application to stay in the UK. So, whilst being very harsh in targeting the care sector yet again, having already on 11 March 2024 being targeted as the only group not allowed to bring their dependent families, in exchange for a trade deal, the government promotes more Indian workers to come to the UK."

English Language Requirements

Currently, for most work routes, the required English language proficiency level is Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Level B1 (which is classed as an intermediate user). This will be increased to CEFR Level B2 (known as an independent user). B2 level requires solid fluency in everyday and professional interactions. There has also been some consideration as to whether to apply this change to settlement applications, but no further details have been provided at present.

The most effective change is a new reform requiring adult dependants of workers and students to pass CEFR Level A1 (equivalent to basic user) to enter the UK, followed by Level A2 when they extend their leave, and finally Level B2 for settlement. Previously there was no such requirement before passing Level B1 at the settlement stage.



Jamie Langley

Comment From Jamie

"This is arguably one of the most significant changes proposed by the Government, as dependants have never before been required to pass an English Language test in order to begin their leave to remain under this route. This acts as another obstacle for those seeking to join their family in the UK as dependants, and will arguably lead to applications being put off by applicants until they are able to pass the required English language test. With regard to work routes now requiring Level B2 CEFR, fewer applications are likely to be made as a result which means we could see more vacancies in these highly skilled roles."

Graduate Visas

Graduate visas are currently valid for 2 years, allowing those that have successfully completed their studies in the UK to live, work or seek employment in the UK. The new reform will shorten the length of this visa to 18 months. This may also apply to PhD graduates who currently enjoy permissions on graduate visas for up to 3 years.

Settlement

The new reform will see the qualifying period for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) double from five to ten years for most work routes. Individuals may have the opportunity to shorten the qualifying period for ILR and later citizenship based on demonstrable contributions to the UK economy and society. Those on the family route to settlement will stay on the 5-year route. The requirements for settlement will have an increased focus on English language proficiency, with a review of the Life in the UK test.

Other reforms and timeline

Other reforms will look to reduce the risk of migrant exploitation among employers where there is an abuse of the sponsorship system by those with a sponsor licence.

Fees are expected to increase once again, specifically with the Immigration Skills Charge applicable to skilled worker visas.

This will be raising by:

- 32% from £1,000 to £1,320 per year for medium or large businesses, and from
- £364 to £480 per year for small or charitable businesses.

It is important to note that the White Paper is a strategy plan of proposals for future rules. Some may be implemented imminently, such as the fees increase and new skilled worker rules, however other proposed changes may need legislation passed which could take several months or longer.

Comment from André

“The government also suggest increasing the time to 10 years before becoming eligible for ILR. The Government has not given any clear plans on how this will be implemented. Under the current system, requiring 5 years residency before being eligible to apply for ILR, a typical applicant will ordinarily receive 2 periods of leave which comes with hefty fees. To suddenly double that to a 10 year requirement, will add a significant amount of fees, causing hardship and pushing migrants further into debt and poverty or alternatively more and more people will need to apply for fee waiver. This will create a 2 tier system for the more financially fortunate who can afford to apply and discriminate against those on lower paid jobs and unable to afford the fees”.

Those who do not meet the rules, but who succeed based on a successful art 8 family life argument, receives 4 periods of 30 months on the 10 year route already, which means fees double. If the first group who meets the rules now increase from 5 to 10 years, the white paper is silent on those who previously succeeded on the 10 year route. Are they now going to have to wait 10+, possible 20 years, at a crippling cost or alternatively more and more people will need to apply for fee waiver. This will create a 2 tier system for the more financially fortunate who can afford to apply and discriminate against those on lower paid jobs and unable to afford the fees”.

Further information

You can view the full white paper [here](#).

Get in touch

If you have been delaying a job search or putting off making an immigration application to the UK, now is the time to do so before these changes potentially change the requirements.

For more information or advice on how the new reforms may affect your current immigration status or any of the other matters discussed above, get in touch with us today by contacting our team on 0121 698 2200 or email enquiries@sydneymitchell.co.uk