An Immigration Plan for Growth

Attracting the people the country needs most, retaining British talent and rebuilding the domestic pipeline

July 2026

ProsperUK

Contents

Executive summary

A strong economy is the UK's most urgent priority. Only a strong economy can deliver better public services, higher living standards, sustainable finances and the ability to defend the country. Immigration policy can play a key role in delivering growth if the right choices are made. While recent debates have oscillated between reactive tightening and loosening numbers, they have failed to address the harder questions of who the country will most benefit from attracting, retaining and training.

Immigration is considered, alongside the economy and the National Health Service (NHS), one of the most important issues to UK voters. Legitimate concerns about pressure on public services, illegal immigration and integration are frequently mentioned. Immigrants come to the UK for several reasons. In the year which ended in March 2026, there were 779,000 visas issued for reasons including work, study, family and humanitarian reasons[1]. Most visas were issued for study (413,000), followed by work (253,000), family (62,000) and safe and legal (humanitarian) routes (27,000). 39,000 people were detected arriving via illegal routes[2].

Prosper UK was established to help the UK to prosper. We want the economy to grow, people to be better off, businesses to thrive and the UK to be a country where people can see a bright future. The focus of this paper is therefore legal immigration for work purposes due to its key role in generating growth. It does not cover asylum, irregular migration, students, spouses of British citizens, visa overstayers, or individuals who already hold Indefinite Leave to Remain. Stopping irregular migration is imperative and Prosper UK's position on this key issue will be set out separately.

This paper sets out the case for a serious and selective immigration policy to unlock much-needed growth. The past two years show that net migration can be brought down when the Government chooses as there has been reduction in work related visas across every major category[3]. The challenge is ensuring that reforms to reduce migrant numbers are not driving away the people and businesses who will invest and contribute the most to the UK economy, while at the same time investing in domestic talent to reduce employers' reliance on overseas labour in the first place.

The different routes and skillsets of migrants should not be conflated. Most highly skilled and trained migrants are net economic contributors. They generate tax revenues well in excess of the public services that they consume, raise productivity, pay substantial amounts of tax, launch companies and prop up public services, rather than putting pressure on them. Other migrants come to the UK for short-term postings with their employer to gain valuable international experience before returning to a more senior position.

1. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2026/summary-of-latest-statistics
2. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2026/summary-of-latest-statistics
3. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2026/why-do-people-come-to-the-uk-work

Some migrants fill short-term labour shortages and relieve acute pressure in crucial roles that domestic workers are currently unable or unwilling to fill due to pay or conditions. The final group are not usually net economic contributors and when these low-wage workers bring non-working dependants and children, they present significant fiscal costs to the UK, which it cannot afford.

Since work routes to the UK can ultimately lead to Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) and given voters' concerns about immigration, the UK must be considerably more selective than it has been to ensure we are doing all we can to welcome the best and the brightest from now on. At the same time, we need to be clear about which routes are not economically beneficial and should be tightened. Our efforts should focus on attracting international investment from global businesses, making the UK more competitive and prioritising the migrants who are most economically beneficial. They are the net contributors who will help keep our public services going and the people we need most to generate the growth that the UK so desperately needs.

Since the UK's immigration costs and long-term settlement opportunities are decisive factors when businesses, highly skilled workers and their families weigh up different countries, we will be evaluating the Government's ILR reforms in more detail as they develop. Prosper UK will analyse their impact on the UK's ability to attract the most economically beneficial migrants and their dependants and the integration implications, given ILR status is frequently associated with better integration outcomes.

The UK now has more than 1 million 16–24-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs). The Government must make a serious effort to reduce that number and rebuild the declining domestic pipeline over the next five years. It must boost training and skills by investing in domestic workers and phase out supply shortages with incentives, thereby enabling employers to reduce the dependency of their business models on imported labour and fill those roles with domestic workers.

At the same time, emigration and the reasons why more British and other nationalities are leaving the UK than arriving need to be explored further. While it's clear that in 2025 around 136,000 more British nationals left than arrived, and that gap has widened every year since 2022[4], data about why they and other nationalities emigrated, their skillsets, income, wealth levels and sectors is missing and should be collected. This data could reveal an important competitive disadvantage of the UK and support the retention of those who make the biggest contribution. In addition, the Government should commission the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to interrogate emigration data to ensure policy makers can act to retain the people who contribute the most.

4. Office for National Statistics, "Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending December 2025", official statistical bulletin published May 2026, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingdecember2025.

The recommendations in this paper draw on discussions convened by Prosper UK and RAMP with business leaders, policy specialists and former civil servants. It recommends four specific measures to re-build trust in the UK's immigration system, keep the people the economy needs most, and boost the UK's domestic talent pipeline. They are:

1. Make the most economically beneficial routes (priority routes) more competitive, including the Immigration Skills Charge and invest in training to close domestic skills gaps

Costs and charges, Immigration Skills charges, salary thresholds, tax, and visa portability could all be made more competitive and attractive to migrants that would be the most economically beneficial to the UK. At the same time, the Government should invest in training to close skills gaps, boost the UK's talent pipeline and reduce employers' reliance on areas with supply shortages.

2. Produce an Annual Migration Plan with strategic objectives, a five-year strategy to reduce employers' dependence on overseas labour, re-build the domestic pipeline and retain British talent

This Annual Plan would include route breakdowns, an evidence-based assessment of the costs and benefits of different migration routes, considering skillsets, fiscal impacts, economic growth, pressure on public services and integration, with forecasts and proposed changes across departments. It would include a plan to incentivise and reduce employers' dependency on overseas workers in key areas of supply shortages over five years, which may include encouraging the use of AI and robotics in roles which British workers frequently do not want to take on, including seasonal agricultural workers' roles. It would include measures to fund skills and training gaps and to create quality jobs for domestic workers. The plan would also commit the Government to collect data in detail on the reasons why people are leaving the UK to support retention.

3. Consider an investor visa focused on productive capital

This measure aims to attract global capital and entrepreneurs and businesspeople to the UK and has broadly produced positive fiscal and economic outcomes in jurisdictions that have adopted it. It would generate economic growth, job creation and innovation as investments would be required in key UK strategic sectors, including artificial intelligence and life sciences.

4. Expand youth mobility in tightly controlled forms

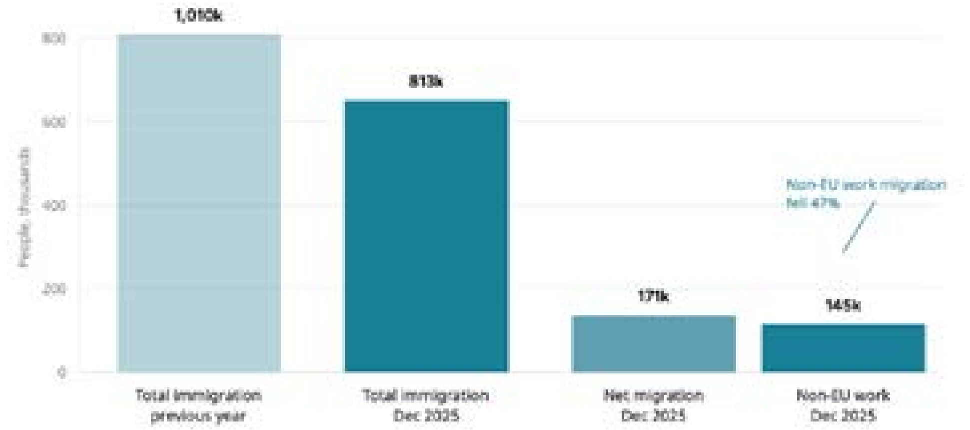
Youth mobility is a gap left in the UK's post-Brexit settlement. It would be time-limited, manageable in numbers and with no access to benefits and no right to bring dependants, while providing necessary labour market flexibility, including for seasonal roles, which the UK may otherwise struggle to fill domestically (and previously had relied on EU workers for), in sectors including agriculture, hospitality, tourism, professional services and higher education.

1. Overview of UK migration

UK net migration has fallen

In the year to December 2025, net migration fell to 171,000, which is roughly half what it had been the year before, and total immigration dropped from 1.01 million to 813,000[5]. Non-EU work migration fell by 47 per cent to 146,000, following a series of changes, including to care worker dependants, salary thresholds, care sector recruitment and the Skilled Worker route[6]. This demonstrates that the current system is capable of bringing numbers down if the Government wants it to. However, the challenge is ensuring that this does not deter the people that the UK economy will benefit from most.

Migration numbers are falling, but the mix still matters



Source: Office for National Statistics, Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending December 2025.

Some migrants produce a net positive fiscal outcome over the long term, others don't

Getting the balance right requires an honest assessment of what migrants contribute and whether it is economically beneficial for them to come to the UK. Some of the strongest economic contributors are in the high earners and investors brackets. They make enormous contributions across their working lives, generating tax revenues well in excess of the public services they consume. Others do not produce a net positive fiscal outcome over the long term, whether because of the sector they work in, the wage levels associated with their role, or the number of family members they bring with them who draw on housing, education.

5. Office for National Statistics, "Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending December 2025", published May 2026, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingdecember2025.
6. Office for National Statistics, "Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending December 2025", published May 2026, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingdecember2025.

A policy that prioritises economic growth needs to consider the (i) route a migrant uses to enter the UK e.g. the type of work visa, (ii) skill level, (iii) fiscal impact and benefit to the economy, (iv) pressure on public services, and (v) the alignment with our wider communities and national values, and integration.

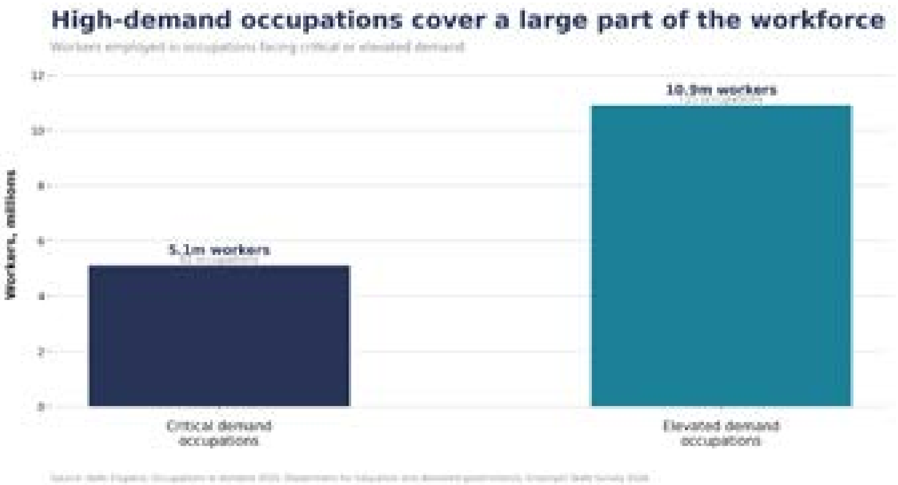
The UK has skill shortages, with most in construction, education, manufacturing and skilled trades

In the February to April 2026 wider labour market, vacancies fell to the lowest level since the equivalent period in 2021, while unemployment stood at 5.0 per cent and economic inactivity at 20.9 per cent in the first quarter of 2026[7]. At the same time, there are more than 1 million 16-24-year-olds who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) in the UK[8]. Nevertheless, the 2025 Employer Skills Survey, the latest official version, recorded 250,500 skill-shortage vacancies, with the heaviest concentrations in construction, education, manufacturing and skilled trades[9]. Skills England's 2025 analysis identified 62 occupations in critical demand covering 5.1 million workers, and a further 125 occupations in elevated demand covering 10.9 million more[10].

There are several reasons why migrants currently fill many of these roles. Some fill roles that British workers do not currently want to do at the wages and conditions on offer. If immigration routes were shut off imminently in these areas, these roles would require increased domestic spending to fulfil demand.

Some migrants fill highly skilled posts

Highly skilled posts may require extensive, lengthy training which domestic workers lack, and generate growth and fiscal value. Policy therefore must distinguish between the different categories of migrants.



7. Office for National Statistics, "Labour market overview, UK: May 2026", https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/may2026.
8. Milburn review
9. Department for Education and devolved governments, "Employer Skills Survey 2024", latest official survey published July 2025, https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/employer-skills-survey/2024.
10. Skills England, "Occupations in demand 2025", https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/occupations-in-demand/2025.

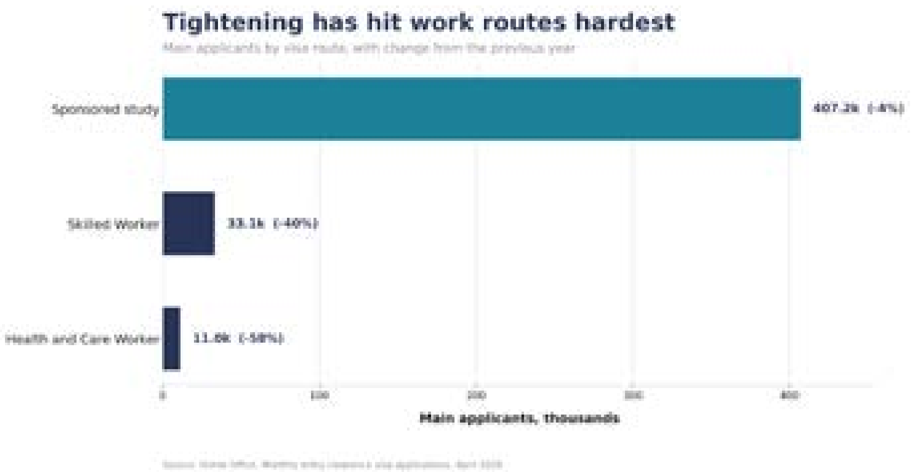
Many businesses, universities, public bodies and large international employers need people to fill vacancies whose skills, experience or commercial backgrounds simply cannot be built at home in the time available. While immigration should not be doing the work of domestic training and investment, it would be wrong to treat every act of international recruitment as a mark of failure.

The aim of this report, therefore, is to identify migration that adds little and could be avoided, while making recommendations to attract the type of individuals that genuinely strengthen our country. A system that treats every work-based inflow as equivalent cannot tell the difference between labour supply that is filling a short-term low-wage gap and migration that is bringing specialist skill, international connectivity, and measurable economic return. That distinction is central to whether migration supports growth or merely substitutes for unresolved domestic labour-market failures.

Legal migration is falling

Legal migration has already fallen sharply in the last twelve months. Skilled Worker main applicant applications fell to 33,100 in the year to April 2026, a fall of 40 per cent on the previous year, while Health and Care Worker main applicant applications dropped to 11,000, down 58 per cent[11]. This shows that the current system is capable of bringing numbers down, if the Government wishes to do so.

The political and policy challenges are already moving from reducing numbers.



However, employers need access to skills where domestic supply cannot keep up. Public services need a workforce resilient enough to function under pressure. Universities need to stay competitive internationally, both financially and as academic institutions. Families and communities need to feel confident that the system is fair, that it is enforced, and that it is not adding unmanaged pressure to housing, local services or community cohesion.

11. Home Office, "Monthly entry clearance visa applications, April 2026", https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/monthly-entry-clearance-visa-applications-april-2026/monthly-entry-clearance-visa-applications-april-2026.

The Office for Budget Responsibility's March 2026 forecast works on an assumption of average net migration of 235,000 a year between 2026 and 2030, down from 295,000 in its November 2025 forecast[12]. It estimates that the lower migration assumption reduces the adult population by around 200,000 by 2030, leaving the UK's potential output around a quarter of a percentage point lower by the end of the forecast period[13]. These figures are alarming in their own right. However, making the economic case for selective migration cannot rest on aggregate GDP figures alone. It has to show which specific flows improve the country's productive capacity and its public finances.

Standard processing times for many key UK work routes are fast

The UK immigration system has operational strengths that tend to get overlooked in political debate. For example, standard processing for the Skilled Worker, Health and Care Worker, Global Talent, High Potential Individual, Youth Mobility and key Global Business Mobility routes normally take three weeks, subject to checks, application volume and complete documentation[14]. Applicants willing to pay extra will have their visas granted in one to five days. That compares well against many competing systems and matters in practice for employers working to project timelines, investment rounds, client commitments or research programmes.

12. Office for Budget Responsibility, "Economic and fiscal outlook: March 2026", https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-march-2026/.
13. Office for Budget Responsibility, "Economic and fiscal outlook: March 2026", https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-march-2026/.
14. UK Visas and Immigration, "Visa processing times: applications outside the UK", https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visa-processing-times-applications-outside-the-uk.

2. The Challenges

If the UK's Global Business Mobility routes become too expensive or unpredictable, it may impact firms' decisions to invest in the UK at all, let alone their decisions to sponsor visas

Global Business Mobility routes are for workers based outside the UK who are undertaking a temporary work assignment in the UK as a Senior or Specialist Worker, Graduate Trainee, UK Expansion Worker, Service Supplier or Secondment Worker. Britain needs to remain a place where internationally mobile businesses genuinely want to operate. Large employers decide where to locate headquarters, teams, research operations and client-facing functions partly on whether they can move senior staff, specialists and graduate trainees quickly and with some predictability. The Global Business Mobility routes exist precisely because intra-company transfers, UK expansion workers, secondments and service supplier placements serve a different purpose from ordinary permanent recruitment[15]. If those routes become too expensive or too unpredictable, as they have become, the damage may not be seen in visa numbers first. Instead, it will show up in where firms choose to put their investment and their management capability.

Labour shortages are commercially and nationally significant

As previously mentioned, overall demand for labour has eased, but specific shortages remain commercially and nationally significant. The economy as a whole is not short of workers, but there are particular shortages, skills gaps and mobility needs serious enough to affect investment decisions, productivity, public service delivery or the UK's attractiveness as a place to do business[16]. The policy challenge is that labour shortages do not all arise for the same reasons. In some sectors, vacancies persist because wages, hours or working conditions are not attractive enough for domestic workers. In others, the domestic labour market simply cannot supply the required expertise quickly enough, especially where roles depend on specialist technical skills, international experience or continuity of operations. A credible migration policy needs to distinguish between these cases, because the case for immigration is much stronger in the latter than in the former.

The businesses we have spoken to turn to immigration for different reasons and rarely for the same purpose. Some need technical skills that take years to develop. Some need experienced managers capable of leading teams, transferring knowledge or delivering complex international projects. Some need people with deep market-specific expertise to serve overseas clients from a UK base. Smaller firms may need to hire a single specialist whose absence holds back a product launch, a contract or an expansion plan. Universities and research institutions compete globally for academic and postgraduate talent. Care homes and the NHS use international recruitment to maintain capacity in areas where domestic supply has simply not kept pace. If the domestic labour market will not supply workers at current pay and conditions, the choice is not between migration and no migration; it is between migration, higher wages, greater investment in training, or accepting reduced capacity or increased domestic spending in essential services.

15. Home Office, "Sponsor a Global Business Mobility worker", updated April 2026, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sponsor-a-global-business-mobility-worker.
16. British Chambers of Commerce, "Cost Pressures Hit Jobs Market Further", published January 2026, https://www.britishchambers.org.uk/news/2026/01/cost-pressures-hit-jobs-market-further/.

Skills England found that information and communication had the highest proportion of workers in high-demand occupations, at 66.8 per cent, while health and social care had the largest absolute number, at 2.7 million workers[17]. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's AI Labour Market Survey found that 35 per cent of surveyed organisations had struggled to fill AI roles, 38 per cent had hired talent from outside the UK, and 28 per cent said skills shortages in this area had already affected their business goals[18]. None of that is an argument for open-ended migration. It is evidence that some of the constraints are specific, high-value and slow to fix domestically.

From a fiscal point of view, we can see that skilled hires are often, if not always, self-sufficient. The Migration Advisory Committee's (MAC) 2025 salary review found that Skilled Worker migrants admitted at current thresholds are projected to be fiscally positive on average, albeit the contribution is heavily concentrated among higher earners[19]. It estimated the lifetime fiscal breakeven salary for a Skilled Worker main applicant on a route permitting dependants at around £29,000, with the breakeven level varying according to age[20]. A system that is serious about economic contribution should therefore focus on expected fiscal and productive impact rather than treating all work migration as equivalent.

UK domestic total training expenditure has fallen

None of this, however, removes the obligation, or what should be an obligation, to reform and fund domestic training provisions, which is particularly relevant given the number of NEETs in the UK and given the challenges being faced by older workers in the evolving economy. The latest Employer Skills Survey found that total UK training expenditure fell by 18.5 per cent in real terms between 2011 and 2024, spending per employee fell by 29.5 per cent, and spending per person trained fell by 38.7 per cent[21]. The Institute for Fiscal Studies reports that total adult skills and apprenticeships spending in 2025 to 2026 is expected to remain 25 per cent below its 2010 to 2011 level in real terms[22]. Migration can relieve acute pressure in the short term, but any credible plan has to include a serious effort to rebuild a declining domestic pipeline.

There are two very different categories of migration which are often conflated

As previously mentioned, there are two fundamentally different categories of migration, but they are often incorrectly conflated.

17. Skills England, "Occupations in demand 2025", https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/occupations-in-demand/2025.
18. Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, "AI Labour Market Survey 2025: executive summary", published January 2026, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-labour-market-survey-2025-report/ai-labour-market-survey-2025-report-executive-summary.
19. Migration Advisory Committee, "Review of salary requirements", published December 2025, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-salary-requirements/review-of-salary-requirements-accessible.
20. Migration Advisory Committee, "Review of salary requirements", published December 2025, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-salary-requirements/review-of-salary-requirements-accessible.
21. Department for Education and devolved governments, "Employer Skills Survey 2024", latest official survey published July 2025, https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/employer-skills-survey/2024.
22. Institute for Fiscal Studies, "Annual report on education spending in England: 2025 to 2026", https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2026-01/IFS-annual-report-on-education-spending-in-England-2025-26.pdf.

The first is labour supply migration, where workers are brought in to fill domestic shortages that the UK workforce is not currently meeting, despite the Department for Work and Pensions stating that nearly one million young people aged 16 to 24 in the UK are not in education, employment or training[23].

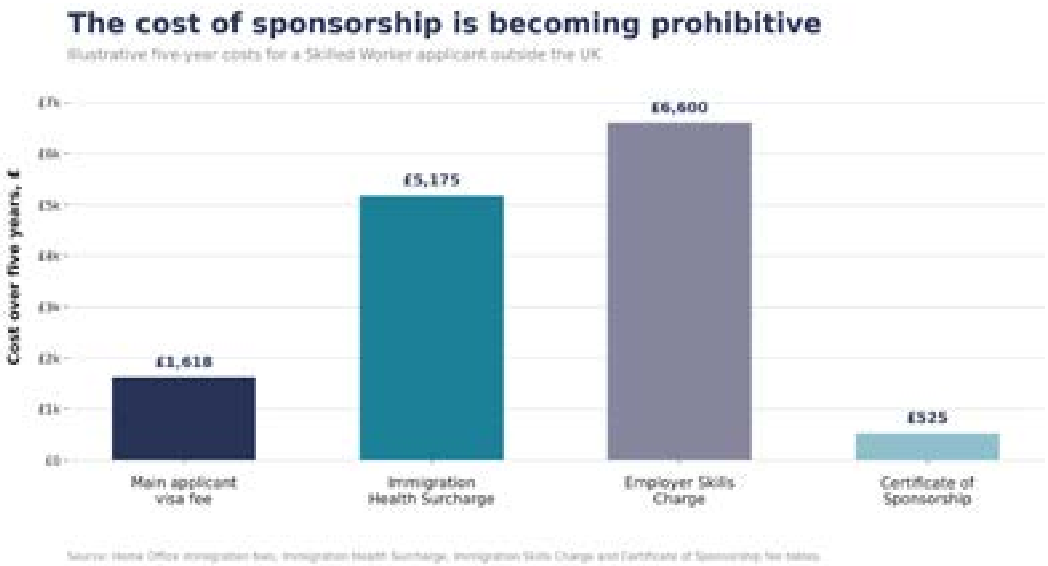
Continued reliance on overseas labour to fill roles that domestic workers could, with the right investment and training, fill themselves is not a long-term solution. It is a deferral of a structural problem.

The second category is intra-company and career-development mobility, where individuals are posted internationally as part of a deliberate talent development strategy. One company at the roundtable we conducted noted that employees are required to demonstrate experience working across multiple countries before being considered for promotion. This is a legitimate and distinct business need, entirely separate from filling a labour gap.
These two categories must not be conflated. Policy responses appropriate for one are not appropriate for the other. Conflating them risks either undermining legitimate business mobility or using corporate mobility as a shield to avoid addressing genuine domestic supply failures.

The cost of sponsoring workers is becoming prohibitive

A five-year Skilled Worker visa from outside the UK costs £6,793 for the main applicant before employer sponsorship costs are factored in, made up of a £1,618 application fee and five years of Immigration Health Surcharge at £1,035 a year[24]. Dependants will typically pay equivalent visa fees for the relevant period of stay[25]. For employers, the Immigration Skills Charge can add up to £6,600 over five years for a medium or large sponsor, or £2,400 for a small or charitable one[26]. If fewer employers are prepared to pay these charges and migrants opt for other destinations, the Government will miss out on the revenue it generates from these charges, which will not be available to fund intended domestic training and skills development. The Certificate of Sponsorship fee for Skilled Worker and Senior or Specialist Worker applications now stands at £525, compared with £199 in June 2023[27]. Where employers pay these fees for an employee already in the UK, whether changing jobs or extending stay, they are taxed at a rate of 60 per cent to 117 per cent or more in Scotland.

23. Department for Education, "Young people and work: interim report", published on GOV.UK, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-people-and-work-interim-report/young-people-and-work-interim-report
24. Home Office, "Skilled Worker visa: how much it costs", https://www.gov.uk/skilled-worker-visa/how-much-it-costs.
25. Home Office, "Skilled Worker visa: how much it costs", https://www.gov.uk/skilled-worker-visa/how-much-it-costs.
26. Home Office, "Immigration Skills Charge", https://www.gov.uk/uk-visa-sponsorship-employers/immigration-skills-charge.
27. Home Office, "Immigration and nationality fees: 29 June 2023", https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visa-regulations-revised-table/home-office-immigration-and-nationality-fees-29-june-2023.

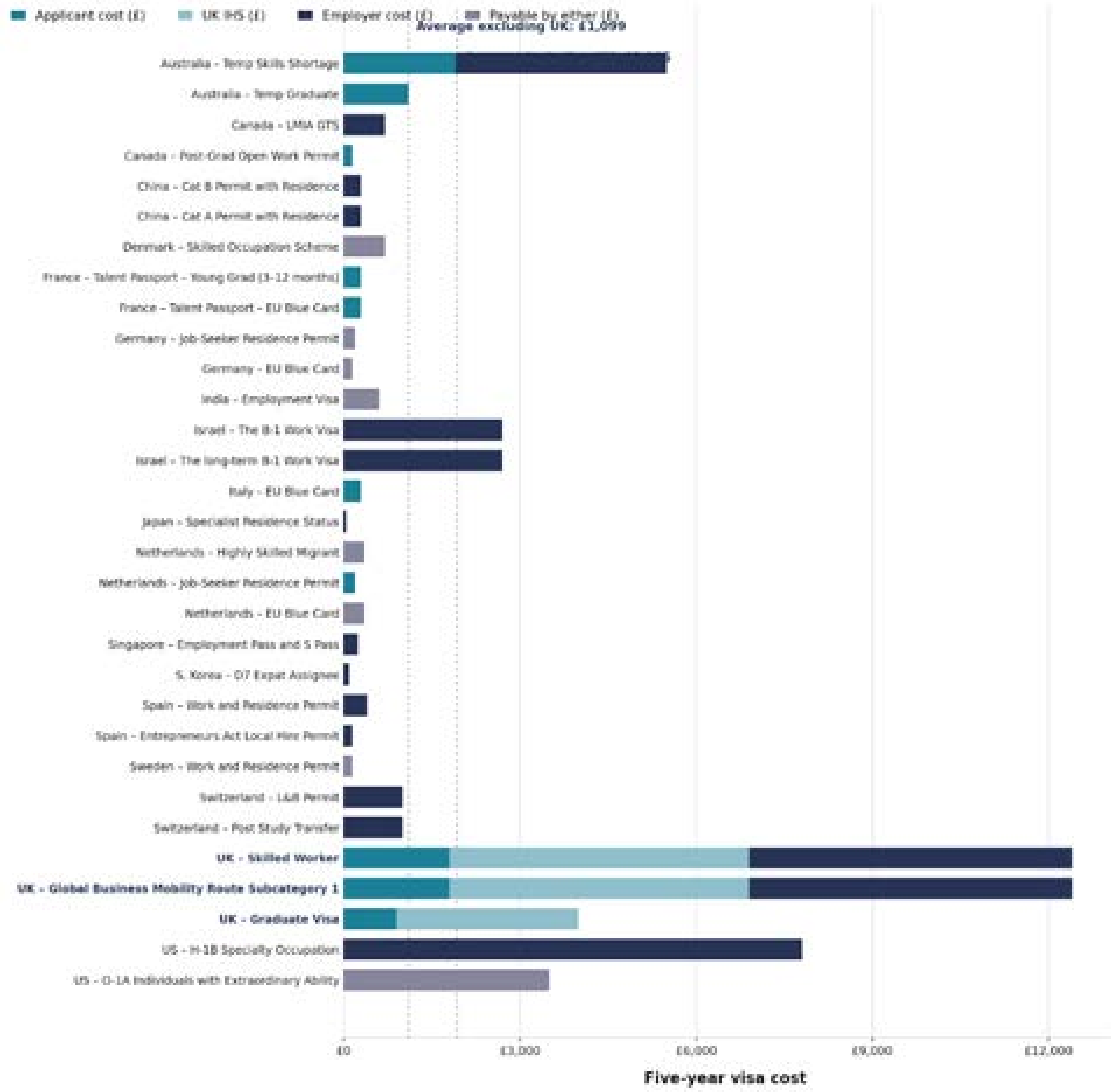


These charges may reduce overall immigration demand and thereby allow the "numbers to go down", but they are blunt instruments. They do not reliably separate a weak business case from a high-value role in a smaller firm, a specialist engineering post, a research appointment, a critical public service vacancy or a senior transfer within a multinational. The Migration Observatory estimates that immigration costs from entry through to citizenship can reach around £12,000 for a Skilled Worker without family, and around £43,950 for a Skilled Worker with a partner and two children[28]. That creates a real competitiveness problem for the UK as well as a fiscal one.

28. Migration Observatory, "Q&A: Immigration fees in the UK", published April 2026, https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/commentaries/qa-immigration-fees-in-the-uk/.

UK skilled-worker visa costs are far above international competitors

Five-year visa costs compared with equivalent routes in leading science nations, 2025



Source: Royal Society (2025). UK immigration costs. An international comparison of skilled worker, researcher and student visas in 2025, p. 5.

Values have been reconstructed from the supplied published chart and are approximate.

28. Migration Observatory, "Q&A: Immigration fees in the UK", published April 2026, https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/commentaries/qa-immigration-fees-in-the-uk/.

The full economic effect has not yet been measured in terms of lost investment or relocated roles, but the clearest sign is the fall in applications following recent policy restrictions. In the year to April 2026, Skilled Worker main applicant applications were down 40 per cent and Health and Care Worker main applicant applications were down 58 per cent[29 30]. Again, those drops may be consistent with the objective of control, but their economic value depends entirely on what has been reduced. A fall in low-value dependency is a gain. A fall in the ability to hire a unique specialist or relocate a management function to Britain is not.

Furthermore, public services require their own test. Adult social care had 111,000 vacant posts in England in 2024/25, a vacancy rate of 7.0 per cent, alongside a turnover rate of 23.1 per cent[31]. International recruitment helped drive vacancies down from their post-pandemic peak, but overseas direct care recruitment fell from 105,000 in 2023/24 to 50,000 in 2024/25[32]. The Home Office has now closed new overseas recruitment for care worker roles while permitting some in-country switching until July 2028[33]. This highlights the need for an urgent and serious domestic care workforce plan covering pay, commissioning, retention and career progression.

This issue is particularly acute in health and social care. Although employers should develop a plan to reduce their dependence on overseas workers where there are short-term supply shortages, if migration routes are closed too quickly in sectors already under pressure, the fiscal impact is not neutral. The costs do not disappear; they are simply shifted into higher domestic recruitment expenses, greater wage pressure, increased reliance on agency staff, additional spending on retention, and, in some cases, reduced service capacity.

In effect, a tighter immigration regime may transfer costs from migration policy to the Exchequer and frontline services rather than eliminating them. But it also means the underlying problem cannot be assumed to have been resolved. If overseas recruitment is reduced before domestic labour supply is in place, the likely outcome is higher public spending, heavier dependence on agency workers, or a deterioration in service quality.

Universities and research institutions, on the other hand, face a different kind of exposure. Education exports are a substantial national asset. The Department for Education's latest figures, published in 2025 for calendar year 2022, put total UK education-related exports and trans-national education revenue at £32.29 billion, including £23.70 billion from higher education alone[34].

29. Home Office, "Monthly entry clearance visa applications, April 2026", https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/monthly-entry-clearance-visa-applications-april-2026/monthly-entry-clearance-visa-applications-april-2026.

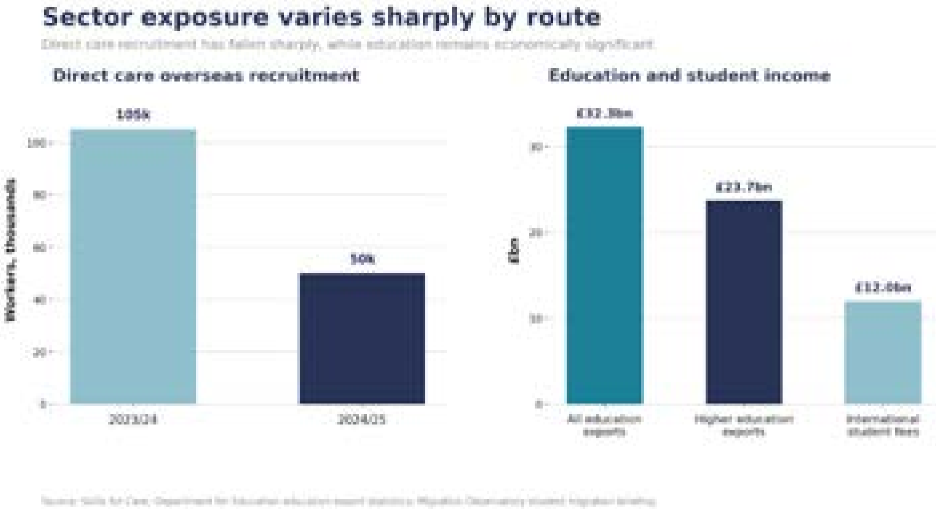
30. Part of the decline in Health and Care applications reflects immigration rule changes, but part also reflects the NHS's decision to scale back international recruitment of nurses and other staff under its long-term workforce plans.

31. Skills for Care, "The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England 2025: executive summary", https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/workforceintelligence/resources/Reports/National/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-in-England-2025-Executive-Summary.pdf.

32. Skills for Care, "The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England 2025: executive summary", https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/workforceintelligence/resources/Reports/National/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-in-England-2025-Executive-Summary.pdf.

33. Home Office, "Monthly entry clearance visa applications, April 2026", https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/monthly-entry-clearance-visa-applications-april-2026/monthly-entry-clearance-visa-applications-april-2026.

34. Department for Education, "UK revenue from education-related exports and transnational education activity: 2022", published June 2025, https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/uk-revenue-from-education-related-exports-and-transnational-education-activity/2022.

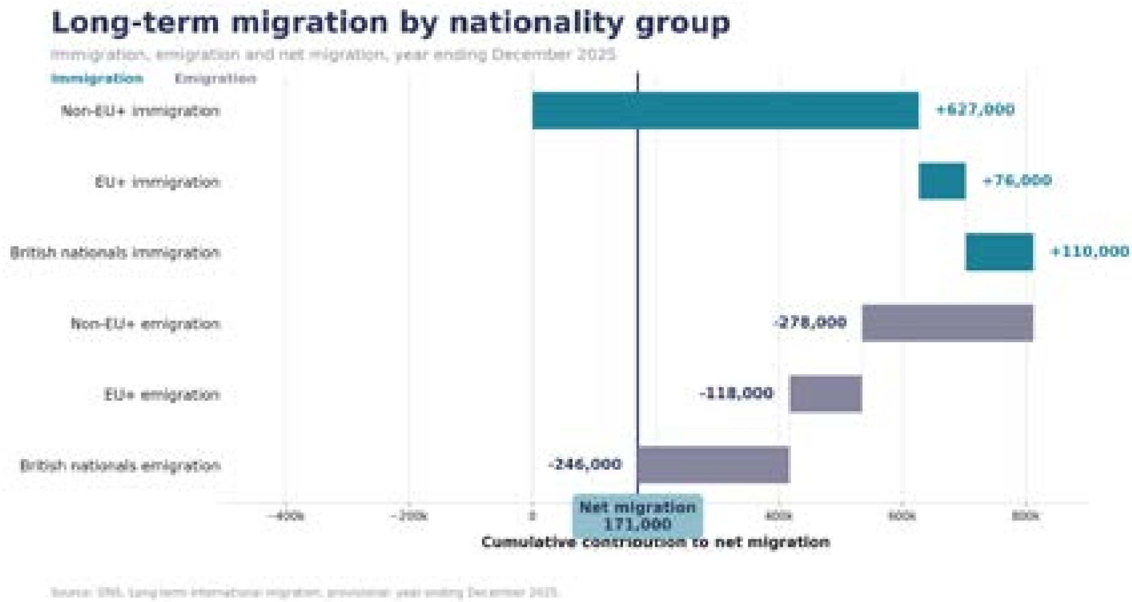


The UK's immigration system has become difficult to rely on

Britain needs a credible immigration system. The UK's problem is not that it lacks routes to work in the UK. It is that the overall system has become difficult to read and hard to rely on. A Skilled Worker visa may be processed quickly, but high family costs and uncertain settlement prospects may lead the applicant to opt for another destination. An initially favourable tax regime for new arrivals that becomes significantly less attractive once they are taxed on their worldwide income and assets over the longer term may also have an impact. For a government focused on control, the lesson is not to relax every constraint. It is to decide which migrants matter most to the economy and make those routes work reliably.

More British nationals are leaving than arriving and there is a lack of data on the reasons

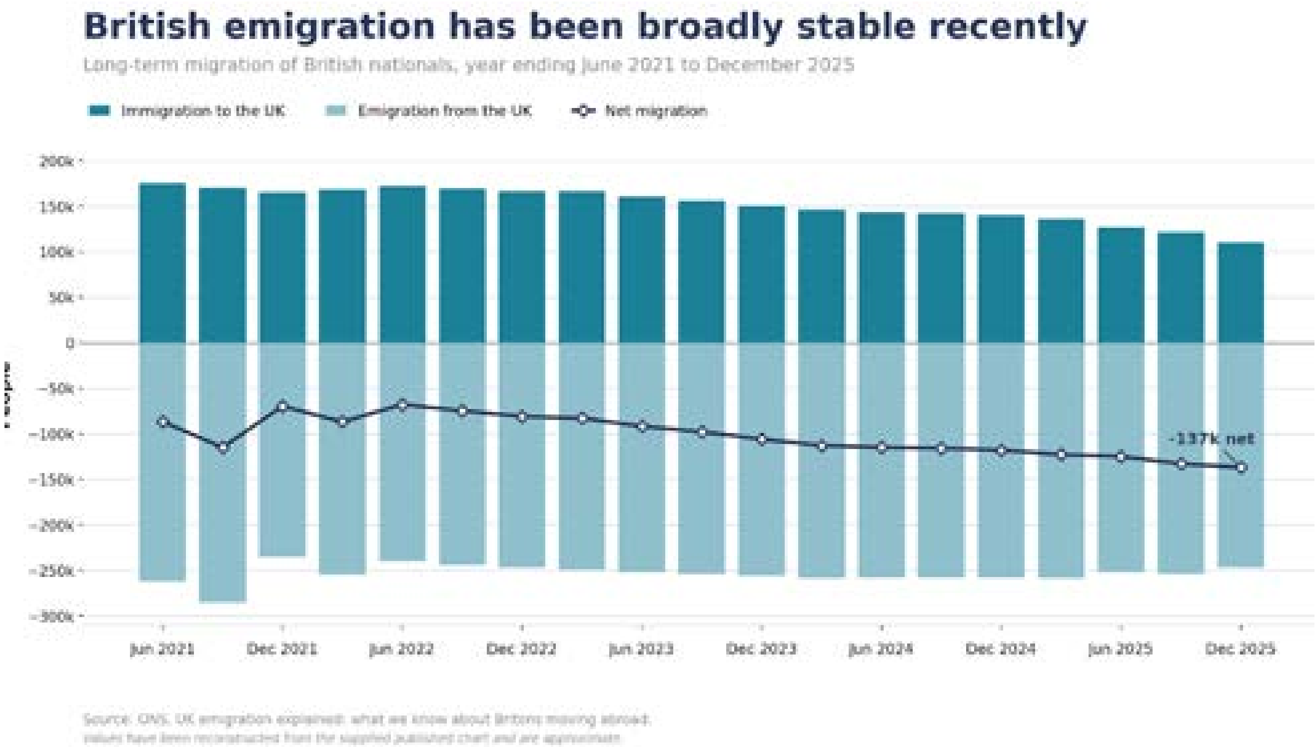
Finally, the outflow side of the equation also deserves attention. In the year ending December 2025, 642,000 people in total emigrated from the UK and 813,000 migrated to it, resulting in net migration of 171,000[35].



35. House of Commons research briefing "Migration statistics," https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06077/

There have been reports that the UK's abolition of the non-dom tax regime has led to the exodus of many millionaires from the UK. While some have estimated from HMRC data that 1,800 non-doms have already left the UK, which is 50 per cent more than a forecast from the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), others deem HMRC data incomplete as the wealthiest non-doms are often investors, not workers, and are therefore not fully captured by HMRC data[36].The ONS confirmed in December 2025 that it has not researched income or earnings- related characteristics of emigrants, nor wealth or asset-related information linked to emigrants[37]. However, Companies House estimates that as few as one in six and as many as one in three of the people on The Sunday Times wealth list have left the UK[38].

An estimated 246,000 of the people emigrating from the UK in the year ending December 2025 were British nationals, while immigration of British nationals back to the UK fell to 110,000 in 2025 from 140,000 in 2024[39].



36. "Blow to chancellor's tax take as '1,800 non-doms leave the UK'" The Times, 18 October 2025 https://www.thetimes.com/business/companies-markets/article/blow-to-chancellors-tax-take-as-1800-non-doms-leave-the-uk-p72rtfh78
37. Office for National Statistics: "Emigration estimates for British nationals by age, income, and wealth" https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/emigrationestimatesforbritishnationalsbyageincomeandwealth
38. Higher earners: Emigration, House of Commons debate 21 May 2026, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2026-05-21/debates/1A37168C-56D7-4717-921F-4A416748C3F1/HigherEarnersEmigration
39. Office for National Statistics: "UK emigration explained: what we know about Brits moving abroad" https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/ukemigrationexplainedwhatweknowaboutbritsmovingabroad/2026-05-21

Therefore, in 2025, around 136,000 more British nationals left than arrived, and that gap has widened every year since 2022[40]. But, as the ONS itself acknowledges, the picture beyond those headline figures is still very limited. However, it highlights that around two-thirds of British nationals who emigrated in the year ending March 2025 were aged between 16 and 34[41].

The ONS does not estimate how many British nationals are living abroad or where they are, and it cannot run high-quality surveys overseas or access the administrative data held by foreign governments. The UN's global migrant stock database provides only a partial alternative, and in 2024 it did not include more than 70 countries, including Germany, Pakistan and Singapore, all of which are likely to host sizeable British populations. Crucially, the data tells us very little about why people are leaving, what skill levels they have, their wealth levels, incomes or which sectors they work in. The Government should treat this as an urgent data gap. An Annual Migration Plan, as recommended later in this report, should include a proper emigration data strategy, with tracking by occupation, earnings band, age and destination, so that retention is treated as a policy objective rather than an afterthought.

40. Office for National Statistics, "Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending December 2025", official statistical bulletin published May 2026, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingdecember2025
41. Office for National Statistics "UK emigration explained: what we know about Brits moving abroad" https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/ukemigrationexplainedwhatweknowaboutbritsmovingabroad/2026-05-21

3. Specific Policy Recommendations

1. Make the priority routes competitive

The overall reform agenda should be organised around the idea of contribution. That means keeping the current tools of control, including salary thresholds, sponsorship requirements, compliance checks and route conditions, but applying them with greater selection to generate economic growth.

Costs and charges of skilled migration should be made proportionate to the value of the role being recruited.

Charges should help sustain a well-run and controlled system, not deter recruitment that the country has a clear interest in securing. The Government should look at the combined weight of visa fees, the Immigration Health Surcharge, the Immigration Skills Charge and repeated applications for roles that carry clear fiscal, public service, research or investment value. The answer does not have to be blanket fee cuts. It could involve staged payment arrangements, targeted relief, faster refunds where sponsorship ends early, or exemptions for tightly defined numbers of categories.

Salary thresholds should be better calibrated to how the labour market works

The MAC recommends keeping the Skilled Worker general threshold at £41,700 while setting occupation-specific thresholds at the 25th percentile of occupational earnings rather than the median[43]. That is a sensible position. It preserves salary as a meaningful filter against undercutting domestic workers and avoiding weak fiscal contributors, while reducing the risk of excluding genuinely valuable roles because of broad occupational codes or significant regional wage differences[44]. The MAC's latest review of salary requirements also rejects regional thresholds on the basis that pay varies more within regions than between them and that regionalising the system would add complexity without clear gain[45].

Thresholds also sit on top of a set of rules that are more complicated than they need to be. Employers, for example, have to deal with Foreign Income and Gains (FIG) claims through self-assessment, reporting foreign income even where no UK tax is ultimately due, and uncertain tax treatment of visa, sponsorship and related legal fees.

42. Explanatory memorandum to the Immigration Skills Charge (Amendment) Regulations 2025, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2025/1324/pdfs/uksiem_20251324_en_001.pdf.
43. Migration Advisory Committee, "Review of salary requirements", published December 2025, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-salary-requirements/review-of-salary-requirements-accessible.
44. Migration Advisory Committee, "Review of salary requirements", published December 2025, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-salary-requirements/review-of-salary-requirements-accessible.
45. Ibid.
46. HM Revenue and Customs, "Reforming the taxation of non-UK domiciled individuals", https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tax-changes-for-non-uk-domiciled-individuals/reforming-the-taxation-of-non-uk-domiciled-individuals.

Reduce disproportionate reporting burdens related to tax and the FIG regime

Tax policy needs to be considered and designed alongside immigration policy. The post-April 2025 FIG regime gives eligible new arrivals 100 per cent relief on foreign income and gains for their first four years of UK tax residence, provided they have not been UK tax resident in any of the previous ten consecutive tax years[46]. A practical burden imposed by the regime is the requirement to report non-taxable foreign income through self-assessment. Under the former arrangement, unremitted foreign income and gains did not generally need to be reported on a tax return. The FIG regime reverses that position. A qualifying new resident who makes a FIG claim must identify and declare each source of foreign income and gains on the return, even where the income bears no UK tax liability[47].

The Low Incomes Tax Reform Group and HMRC's own published guidance confirm that almost all UK-resident taxpayers must now report their foreign income and gains to HMRC, with the narrow exception applying only where no UK tax would be due and the taxpayer is not otherwise required to file a return. That additional compliance cost is a material friction for globally mobile individuals managing complex cross-border affairs and has not been adequately acknowledged in the policy design. The same reforms move inheritance tax onto a residence basis, bringing non-UK assets into scope once an individual has been UK resident for at least ten of the previous twenty tax years, with a continuing tail after departure[48]. While the UK may not wish to revert to an open-ended non-dom regime, many businesses have cited the combined effect of tax treatment, visa costs and settlement rules as the number one deterrent for attracting the business founders, investors and senior executives that the country wants.

Visa portability

One final overall reform that merits consideration is greater visa portability for highly skilled and highly paid workers. At present, a sponsored worker who loses their job will usually have around 60 days to find a new sponsor or leave the UK[49]. That may be reasonable for most sponsored roles. However, for senior executives, specialist professionals and business founders, it can act as a genuine deterrent. Individuals with internationally competitive skills often have multiple options, and a system that ties them closely to a single employer is unnecessarily restrictive.

Singapore has taken a better approach. Its Personalised Employment Pass is designed for high earners and is not linked to one employer, allowing holders to move between jobs provided they continue to satisfy the relevant salary and employment requirements[50].

47. Low Incomes Tax Reform Group (LITRG), 'Foreign income and gains from 6 April 2025', 5 April 2025, https://www.litrg.org.uk/international/uk-tax-uk-residents-foreign-income-and-gains/foreign-income-and-gains-6-april-2025; HMRC, RFIG41000 'FIG regime: Introduction', HMRC Internal Manual, 3 April 2025, https://www.gov.uk/hmrc-internal-manuals/residence-and-fig-regime-manual/rfig41000.
48. HM Revenue and Customs, "Reforming the taxation of non-UK domiciled individuals", https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tax-changes-for-non-uk-domiciled-individuals/reforming-the-taxation-of-non-uk-domiciled-individuals.
49. Home Office, "Employees: if your visa sponsor loses their licence", GOV.UK guidance, https://www.gov.uk/employee-lose-sponsor-licence.
50. Ministry of Manpower (Singapore), "Personalised Employment Pass -- Singapore", https://www.mom.gov.sg/passes-and-permits/personalised-employment-pass. for Take-Off (2026).

A similar model could work in the UK. Skilled Worker visa holders who have maintained lawful residence for a number of years and meet a specified earnings threshold should be granted greater freedom to change employers without restarting the sponsorship process each time. Such a reform would strengthen the UK's appeal to globally mobile talent while leaving the wider sponsorship framework intact for the vast majority of workers.

Similarly, we were told at our roundtables that the number of world-class leaders in tech, science and engineering would rise if the Government were to allow trusted employers to endorse a small proportion of employees as exceptionally talented under the Global Talent scheme. The visa would cost less than sponsorship and settlement, it could be available sooner and would carry prestige. Employers weighing up where to send top AI talent, for instance, would be more likely to choose the UK over Dublin, Berlin, Amsterdam and other European destinations.

2. Produce an Annual Migration Plan, including strategic objectives and a plan to develop the domestic talent pipeline and reduce employers' dependence on overseas labour

Successive UK governments have failed to deliver their signature commitments on migration policy. Reactive approaches create political promises that are not thought out and don't lead to growth, while rapid policy changes make it difficult for businesses to prepare.

Support for an Annual Migration Plan spans the political spectrum. In April 2025, the directors of five think tanks from different parts of the political spectrum: Onward, the Centre for Policy Studies, the IPPR, British Future, and the Institute for Government, jointly wrote to The Times calling on the Government to adopt the approach. This reflects a shared frustration with reactive, piecemeal immigration policymaking, if not agreement on the numbers themselves[51].

The Annual Migration Plan would define the Government's overarching migration objectives, present detailed analysis of recent trends, and provide an evidence-based assessment of the costs and benefits, including expected economic growth, across different migration routes and a plan to reduce employers' dependence on imported labour and boost the domestic talent pipeline. It would also include forecasts of future migration levels and set out proposed policy changes across relevant departments[52].

It is not a net migration target: it does not set a number, impose a cap, or commit the Government to any specific figure, which provides sufficient flexibility for the Government to adjust to labour market changes or needs to benefit the economy.

51. Institute for Government, "An annual Migration Plan", April 2025.
52. Institute for Government, "An annual Migration Plan", April 2025.

The proposal draws on established international models, most notably Canada and Australia, where structured migration planning has demonstrably supported economic growth, sustained public service delivery, and strengthened public confidence in the system[53].

The insight paper proposes the following core components for each Annual Migration Plan

Setting strategic objectives focused on net economic contributors and reducing employers' long-term dependence on overseas recruitment by developing the domestic talent pipeline

The Government would be required to articulate what it wants the migration system to achieve, which may include prioritising migrants who are net economic contributors, while reducing employers' long-term dependence on overseas recruitment by developing the domestic workforce, and investing in domestic training and skills to close gaps. Clear objectives would bring coherence across departments and help balance immediate pressures against longer-term priorities.

A multi-year planning horizon

Because migration policy changes take time to produce effects, the AMP should look beyond the next twelve months. A rolling three-to-five-year forecast, updated annually, would provide the consistency and predictability that annual targets cannot. Canada's Immigration Levels Plan already operates on a three-year cycle; Australia has recently extended its own planning horizon from one year to four[54].

A route-by-route breakdown

Rather than anchoring policy around a single net migration figure, the AMP would analyse each migration route for work purposes - work, study, family, asylum, and humanitarian - individually. For each, it would examine the numbers arriving, the purpose and expected duration of stay, the skill or educational profile of migrants, and subsequent visa transitions or settlement outcomes. This granularity would give a far more accurate picture of how migration actually functions.

It would also include and interrogate emigration data and incorporate, much needed information on a range of issues, including skillsets, sectors, incomes and the destinations of emigrants. This information would help to support the retention of those who make the biggest contribution.

53. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "About the immigration levels plan"; and Australian Department of Home Affairs, "Migration Program report 2024-25".
54. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "About the immigration levels plan", https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/mandate/plans-reports/immigration-levels-plan.html.
our Economy (2022).

An assessment of costs and benefits

The AMP would require honest analysis of migration's economic impact: fiscal contributions through taxes, visa fees and the NHS surcharge; labour market and integration effects; pressures on housing, infrastructure and public services; and the broader benefits to sectors. A comprehensive assessment of this kind would underpin evidence-based policymaking and enable a more grounded public debate.

Forecasts and scenario modelling

Projected migration flows would be presented by route over the planning period, accounting for policy changes, economic conditions, labour market trends and global events. Forecasts would be expressed as ranges with upper and lower bounds to reflect inherent uncertainty. This would support national planning and improve alignment between migration policy and public service capacity.

Link policy changes across the Government

The AMP would not be limited to immigration rules. It would also set out complementary domestic reforms in workforce training, education, health and care, and housing, designed to reduce structural reliance on overseas recruitment over time. Migration policy and domestic policy would, in this way, be treated as parts of the same system rather than separate agendas.

A plan to reduce employers' dependency on overseas labour in specific areas while boosting the domestic talent pipeline

To fulfil objectives of rebuilding the domestic talent pipeline and reducing employers' dependence on imported labour over the next five years, it will be essential to consider the types of roles that migrants currently fulfil, including those where there are domestic shortages and which domestic workers are likely to remain opposed to taking on due to pay or conditions, including seasonal fruit pickers. The Plan should set out the potential implications of this, including how to fulfil these roles. This may result in additional domestic spending. The UK's growing artificial intelligence sector and robotics, which already exist in the agricultural sector, may be deployed to support labour demands in the instances of seasonal fruit pickers, so that domestic workers focus on enhancing their skills and undergoing training for quality jobs.

Process for producing the AMP

The structured annual process for producing the AMP could involve five stages.
Initiation at cabinet level. Each cycle would begin with a joint review by the Prime Minister and Home Secretary of current migration trends and policy priorities, ensuring that the process is anchored at the highest level of government from the outset.

Departmental submissions. Every department would be required to set out its long-term workforce and sectoral needs, and to account for progress in reducing dependence on overseas recruitment over time. This embeds migration planning within the broader machinery of government rather than confining it to the Home Office.

Independent advice and public engagement

The Plan would draw on evidence from the Migration Advisory Committee, Skills England, local authorities, businesses and civil society. A broader public engagement exercise would take place every few years to ensure the process retains democratic legitimacy beyond Westminster.

Parliamentary scrutiny

Once published, the AMP would be debated in Parliament and subject to formal scrutiny by a joint select committee, led by the Home Affairs Committee. This provides a structured accountability mechanism and creates a public record of the Government's reasoning. Tabling the AMP in Parliament, subject to full debate, along the lines of the annual Budget process, would also give elected representatives a regular, structured opportunity to examine and challenge the Government's migration strategy rather than simply react to it.

Alignment with official statistics

To reinforce transparency and public engagement, the AMP should be published alongside the ONS's net migration statistics - released in May or November each year - so that the Government's plan is always read against the most current available data.
The Institute for Government goes further, recommending that scrutiny be led by a joint select committee anchored in the Home Affairs Committee but drawing in counterparts from Treasury, Education, Business and Trade, and Health and Social Care. Given that migration policy touches all these areas, siloing oversight within a single committee would miss the point[57].

An Annual Migration Plan would mark a meaningful shift in how the UK approaches the design and governance of immigration policy, bringing several practical advantages. Across Government, a unified plan would produce greater strategic coherence by ensuring that different policy areas pull in the same direction rather than working at cross-purposes.

A published plan would also help rebuild public confidence: instead of reacting to migration statistics after they emerge, the Government would set out its reasoning in advance, giving people a clearer picture of the thinking behind policy choices. Beyond the political dimension, forward-looking projections within the plan would allow national and local bodies to prepare more effectively for the pressures that demographic change places on housing, schools and NHS capacity.

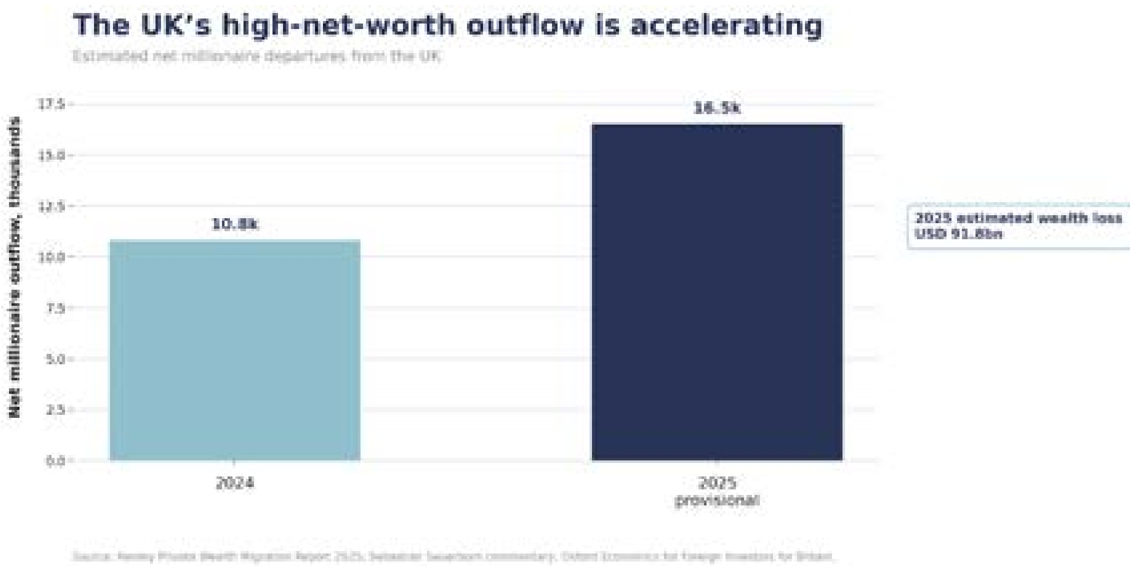
55. Institute for Government, "An annual Migration Plan", April 2025, https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/annual-migration-plan.
56. Office for National Statistics, "Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending December 2025", published May 2026.
57. Institute for Government, "An annual Migration Plan", April 2025.

Finally, grounding the plan in evidence from bodies like the Migration Advisory Committee would help insulate decisions from short-term political noise, ensuring that policy reflects rigorous analysis rather than reactive headline management[58].

Together, these mechanisms could help shift the terms of public debate. Instead of lurching between headlines and political flashpoints, discussion could be grounded in published objectives, transparent data, and parliamentary accountability.

As this report has set out, the UK's approach to immigration has tightened considerably in recent years, with successive governments pursuing reductions in net migration across most visa categories. While this has reflected broader public sentiment, it has created a policy environment that has applied broadly restrictive principles across all forms of inward movement, including at the wealthiest end of the spectrum. The closure of the Tier 1 Investor Visa in 2022 removed the primary formal route through which high-net-worth individuals could establish a structured relationship with the UK economy, and no adequate replacement has since been introduced.

This gap has coincided with a significant shift in the domestic tax treatment of non-domiciled individuals. The abolition of the non-dom regime from April 2025 and its replacement with the Foreign Income and Gains regime removed protections that had historically made the UK an attractive base for internationally mobile wealth. In recent years there has been a lot of media coverage about wealthy individuals leaving the UK. The most prominent departures include Richard Gnodde, vice chairman of Goldman Sachs; Nassef Sawiris, Egypt's richest man and Aston Villa co-owner; and John Fredriksen, the Norwegian-Cypriot shipping billionaire. Shravin Bharti Mittal, who holds a 24.5 per cent stake in BT Group, relocated to the UAE following the abolition of non-dom status and removal of inheritance tax exemptions on foreign assets. Charlie Mullins, founder of Pimlico Plumbers, moved to Spain, publicly citing rising taxes and new employment legislation as the reason for his departure. Jim Ratcliffe, founder of INEOS and co-owner of Manchester United, had already moved his tax residency to Monaco ahead of this wave, making him an early signal of the broader trend.



58. Institute for Government, "An annual Migration Plan", April 2025.

Several organisations have advocated for some form of investment visa in order to stop this exodus and attract entrepreneurs and businesspeople to the UK. An investment visa would be designed to operate as both a residence pathway and a tax framework, combining a fixed annual charge with a minimum UK investment requirement in exchange for exemption from UK tax on foreign income, gains and inheritance.

The UK would not be pioneering uncharted territory in introducing a structured investor visa regime. A number of comparable jurisdictions have operated similar frameworks for several years, with broadly positive fiscal and economic outcomes.

Italy's flat tax regime, introduced in 2017, charges a fixed annual fee of €200,000 on all foreign income and gains regardless of quantum. It has attracted a significant share of departing UK non-doms, with leading tax advisor Dominic Lawrance estimating that 60 per cent of his UK clients relocating abroad are choosing Italy as their destination. Milan in particular has emerged as a direct beneficiary of the UK's policy misstep, positioning itself as an alternative European hub for internationally mobile wealth. Italy attracted approximately 6,000 participants through its Golden Visa programme, a figure FIFB uses as its conservative floor when modelling GIV participation[59].

Switzerland has long operated a lump sum taxation regime for foreign nationals who do not engage in paid employment in the country. The charge is calculated on the basis of living expenses rather than actual income or gains and has historically made Switzerland one of the most attractive destinations for ultra-high-net-worth individuals seeking fiscal certainty. It remains consistently cited as a primary destination for departing UK non-doms[60].

The United States operates an EB-5 Investor Visa requiring a minimum investment of between $800,000 and $1,050,000 depending on the target employment area, in exchange for permanent residency. The programme has attracted significant capital inflows and has been cited by the US Government as capable of drawing on a global pool of up to 37 million eligible investors[61].

Malta operates a structured residency by investment programme combining a fixed annual tax contribution with property and investment requirements, offering a further illustration that the GIV model is mainstream fiscal competition practice rather than an outlier. The UK's absence from this landscape since the closure of the Tier 1 visa in 2022 has left it as one of the few major economies without a structured pathway for productive foreign capital, at precisely the moment when global competition for that capital has intensified[62].

59. Italian 2017 Budget Law introducing preferential tax regime for new residents; summarised in Ruchelman P.L.L.C., "Italy Introduces a 15-Year Preferential Tax Regime for Wealthy Individuals", 2017, https://publications.ruchelaw.com/news/2017-02/italy-non-dom-preferential-tax-regime.pdf.

60. Federal Tax Administration Switzerland, expenditure-based taxation regime for individuals; summarised in Grant Thornton Switzerland, "Lump-Sum Taxation Regime for Individuals in Switzerland", 2019, https://www.grantthornton.ch/globalassets/1.-member- firms/switzerland/insights/pdf/2019/201901/pauschalbesteuerung_in_der_schweiz_individuals.pdf.

61. United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program minimum investment requirements; summarised in Goze Law, "EB-5 Investment Amounts 2025-2026", 31 December 2024, https://www.gozellaw.com/blog/eb5-minimum-investment-amount-2025-2026.

62. Government of Malta and Residency Malta Agency, Malta Residency by Investment Programme; summarised in Chetcuti Cauchi Advocates, "Malta Residency by Investment", 2025, https://www.ccmalta.com/publications/malta-residency-by-investment.

In terms of what a specific investor visa could look like, there are many different approaches that can be taken in terms of how exactly it would operate. One of the key principles would be to ensure that investment into key strategic sectors such as artificial intelligence, life sciences, and clean energy takes place. This would signal a shift in approach and would focus on productive investment in the economy rather than passive capital and would align migration with national economic priorities.

Attracting global capital is critical to supporting economic growth, job creation, and innovation, particularly in high-value sectors where public funding alone may be insufficient. In this context, the opportunity to create a new, better-designed UK investor visa is timely.

If implemented correctly, a reformed investor visa could complement the UK's industrial strategy and send a strong signal that Britain remains open to credible, long-term investors. The Government's reported focus on strategic sectors is especially important. Rather than allowing unrestricted investments into listed equities or real estate, the new scheme should target sectors that will drive productivity and sustainable development over the coming decades.

Richmond Chambers have highlighted other principles that they believe would be critical in ensuring an investment visa that works well and has the trust of the public.

3. Consider an Investor Visa

Sector-specific investment criteria

Eligible investments should be restricted to pre-approved funds or projects that contribute directly to innovation, green growth and strategic infrastructure. This may include early-stage venture capital, R&D initiatives, or scale-up enterprises in priority industries.

Independent oversight and due diligence

Thorough checks on applicants' source of wealth, business background, and investment intentions must be embedded into the application process. Independent bodies could be tasked with assessing economic impact and compliance. To pay for this, the Government should charge the cost of those checks to the individual as part of their application process. This would ensure that there is not a negative fiscal cost to the Government as well as ensuring the necessary resources can be dedicated towards this.

Genuine residence and integration requirements

The visa should incentivise applicants to establish a meaningful presence in the UK, rather than serve as a passive or speculative residency route. Measures such as minimum physical presence thresholds and engagement with UK-based enterprises should be considered. Exclusion of low-impact assets

63. Richmond Chambers, "A Second Chance for the UK Investor Visa? Lessons from the Past and a Vision for the Future", https://immigrationbarrister.co.uk/a-second-chance-for-the-uk-investor-visa-lessons-from-the-past-and-a-vision-for-the-future/.

Property purchases, government bonds, and other passive financial instruments should be excluded from the qualifying investment options unless they are clearly linked to broader public benefit.

The Tier 1 (Investor) visa was closed for good reason. But its removal left the UK without a credible route to attract global capital through immigration. There is now an opportunity to replace it with something better: a scheme built around modern economic priorities, tighter controls, and a clearer case for what responsible investment migration should look like.

A well-designed investor visa could be a meaningful plank of the UK's growth agenda. To work, it needs to balance economic realism with regulatory discipline, and a coherent view of what role foreign capital should play in the UK economy.

Securing UK immigration residency typically triggers UK tax residency under the Statutory Residence Test, which can bring an investor's worldwide income and gains into scope for UK tax. Non-domicile status or a remittance basis claim can limit exposure, but these need to be structured before arrival, not after. Aligning immigration timing with financial year boundaries can also reduce unnecessary liability, particularly where assets or business interests are being moved into the UK.

Inheritance tax (IHT) is a separate risk that is easy to underestimate. Prolonged UK residence can result in deemed domicile status, pulling worldwide assets into the IHT net. Trust structures, corporate wrappers, and careful management of residence timelines can all help, but the window to act narrows the longer someone has been a UK resident.

An investor visa could be a pragmatic way to retain and attract high-net-worth foreign residents, balancing revenue generation with the UK's competitiveness as a destination for global capital.

4. Expand youth mobility

Youth mobility is one of the clearest gaps left by the UK's post-Brexit settlement with the EU. Free movement gave young people from both sides a straightforward way to work, study or gain experience in each other's countries, and many businesses built quiet but effective operations around that fact.

The UK and EU are currently discussing a youth mobility scheme that should be time-limited, manageable in overall numbers, and with no access to benefits and no right to bring dependants[64]. That would provide genuine cultural and labour market flexibility without recreating free movement or providing a back-door route around domestic skills policy. However, there is a real risk that the talks continue to drift, and that any eventual deal is driven more by nervousness about reopening arguments over Europe rather than what would benefit the country. To date, the Government has not set out a clear case for a youth mobility scheme that expands opportunities for young people while keeping firm limits on who can come, on what terms, and for how long.

63. Richmond Chambers, "A Second Chance for the UK Investor Visa? Lessons from the Past and a Vision for the Future", https://immigrationbarrister.co.uk/a-second-chance-for-the-uk-investor-visa-lessons-from-the-past-and-a-vision-for-the-future/.
64. Cabinet Office, "UK-EU Summit explainer", 2025, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukeu-summit-key-documentation/uk-eu-summit-explainer-html.

As we have seen above in this report, seasonal roles are a struggle for businesses to fill, particularly in places that are attractive to live in but are remote. Instead of trying to sponsor workers for a few months in Cumbria, North Wales or the Highlands, a small business could hire an under-35-year-old from Berlin or Lyon who has come on their own initiative for a summer. Alongside hikes and other activities, the youth would be able to work in local pubs, farms, or hotels to pay their way, and then go home when their visa expires. The same applies in reverse for young Brits who want to spend a season working in the Alps, the Balearics or a German city. From the business side, such a scheme is cheap to administer, flexible, and matches the reality that many hospitality and tourism jobs are seasonal and low-paid enough to sit well below Skilled Worker thresholds but still matter immensely to local economies.

Evidence to the Conservative European Forum's Trade and Cooperation Agreement inquiry described how employers in agriculture, hospitality, tourism, professional services and higher education used to rely on EU nationals in their twenties for seasonal and entry-level roles and sent their own young staff into EU firms for short stints as a normal part of training and expansion[65]. However, that informal infrastructure has gone. Firms now face tighter constraints at peak periods and fewer realistic options for giving early-career staff European experience without full sponsorship. A well-designed UK–EU youth mobility scheme will not solve every problem in the system, but it is one of the simplest, most immediate ways to ease those pressures and show that a controlled approach to migration can still deliver something positive for businesses and for young people.

65. Conservative European Forum, "Negotiating a UK-EU Youth Mobility Scheme – Context and Benefits", https://assets.nationbuilder.com/conservativegroupforeurope/pages/2361/attachments/original/1775757027/Negotiating_a_UK-EU_Youth_Mobility_Scheme_-_Context_and_Benefits.pdf?1775757027.

Conclusion

The UK has already demonstrated that legal migration numbers can be brought down when the political will exists. The next test is whether it can build a system that is genuinely selective, stable and economically credible. A policy that succeeds on those terms would reduce avoidable and low economic-value migration, close routes that are poorly controlled, build a domestic pipeline over the next five years to fill supply gaps and improve skills and training for domestic workers, while requiring employers who have become too reliant on overseas recruitment to invest more seriously in the domestic workforce. It would also protect and prioritise the routes that are most economically beneficial, improve data collection about why people are emigrating, focus on boosting international investment and competitiveness and prioritise highly skilled workers, significant tax revenue, and growth investment.

Immigration policy should serve the national interest rather than the management of newspaper headlines. Fees should help fund an efficient system without making Britain less competitive in attracting the talent it needs. Salary thresholds should safeguard wages and ensure meaningful economic contribution, not shut out valuable workers through blunt or poorly designed rules. Public confidence comes from competence, consistency, and a system that works, not from constant policy overhauls. The UK should be clear about who it wants to attract, why those people matter, and what it expects in return.

The recommendations in this report are designed to achieve that outcome. They would make priority migration routes more competitive, better align costs with the value of what is being recruited, and strengthen links between migration and domestic skills policy so that the domestic pipeline can be enhanced. They would also use tax, youth mobility, and investor policy to support broader economic growth.

Annex 1: UK Work & Business Visa Routes: Comparison Table

Overview of dependants, health and skills charges, settlement routes, permission periods, and access to public funds and services.

Visa Type	Dependants Allowed?	IHS Paid by Applicant?*	ISC Paid by Sponsor?**	Route Category / Route to Settlement	Status	Maximum Period of Permission	Public Funds	Benefits & Services Available
Skilled Worker *For employers to recruit people to work in the UK (including UK waters) in a specific skilled job with a Home Office-approved sponsor.*	Dependant partner and dependant children can apply.	Yes	Yes	Sponsored work route — route to settlement	Temporary	5 years (linked to Certificate of Sponsorship period)	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.
Health and Care Worker *A sub-category of Skilled Worker for medical professionals doing an eligible job with the NHS, an NHS supplier, or in adult social care.*	Dependant partner and dependant children can apply.	Exempt	Exempt	Sponsored work route — route to settlement	Temporary	5 years (linked to Certificate of Sponsorship period)	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.
Minister of Religion *For a person with a key leading role within their faith-based organisation or a religious order in the UK.*	Dependant partner and dependant children of a T2 Minister of Religion can apply.	Yes	No	Sponsored work route — route to settlement	Temporary	3 years per grant; 6-year combined cap across three routes	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.
International Sportsperson *For an elite sportsperson or qualified sports coach, internationally established, who can significantly contribute to the development of their sport at its highest level in the UK.*	Partner and children can apply.	Yes	No	Sponsored work route — route to settlement	Temporary	3 years for grants over 12 months; 12 months for grants of 12 months or less	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.
Scale-up Worker *For talented individuals recruited by a UK Scale-up Sponsor with the skills needed to enable continued growth, with a high-skilled job offer at the required salary level.*	Dependant partner and dependant children can apply.	Yes	No	Sponsored work route — route to settlement	Temporary	2 years	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.

Visa Type	Dependants Allowed?	IHS Paid by Applicant?*	ISC Paid by Sponsor?**	Route Category / Route to Settlement	Status	Maximum Period of Permission	Public Funds	Benefits & Services Available
Temporary Work *For short-term employment under strict conditions, covering sectors such as creative work, religious service, charity projects, international agreements, government exchange programmes, and seasonal agriculture/poultry work.*	Varies by Temporary Work sub-route.	Usually (if visa is over 6 months)	No	Sponsored temporary work route — not a route to settlement	Temporary	Varies by sub-category	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.
Global Business Mobility *For workers based outside the UK undertaking a temporary work assignment as a Senior/Specialist Worker, Graduate Trainee, UK Expansion Worker, Service Supplier or Secondment Worker.*	Not specified in source.	Yes	Yes (Senior/Specialist Worker only; other GBM routes exempt)	Sponsored work route — not a route to settlement	Temporary	Senior/Specialist Worker: up to 5 years · Graduate Trainee: 1 year · UK Expansion Worker: 1 year (max 2 years continuous) · Service Supplier: 6–12 months depending on nationality/trade agreement	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.
Youth Mobility Scheme *A cultural exchange programme for those aged 18–30 (18–35 for some nationalities) from participating countries, to experience life in the UK for up to 2 years (3 for some nationalities).*	Dependants not permitted.	Yes	N/A	Work-related, non-sponsored — not a route to settlement	Temporary	2 years (Australian, Canadian and New Zealand nationals can extend to a total of 3 continuous years)	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.
Global Talent *For those aged 18+ in science, engineering, humanities, social science, medicine, digital technology or arts and culture who can show exceptional talent or exceptional promise.*	Dependant partner and dependant children can apply.	Yes	N/A	Work-related talent route, non-sponsored — route to settlement	Temporary	5 years	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.
High Potential Individual *For recent graduates of top global universities (on the Global Universities List) wanting to work, or look for work, in the UK following successful*	Dependant partner and dependant children can apply.	Yes	N/A	Work-related, non-sponsored — not a route to settlement	Temporary	2 or 3 years depending on qualification length (PhD/doctoral: 3 years; all other degrees: 2 years)	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.

Visa Type	Dependants Allowed?	IHS Paid by Applicant?*	ISC Paid by Sponsor?**	Route Category / Route to Settlement	Status	Maximum Period of Permission	Public Funds	Benefits & Services Available
completion of an eligible bachelor's level or above qualification.								
Innovator Founder *For a person establishing a UK business based on an innovative, viable and scalable idea they generated or significantly contributed to, supported by an endorsing body, with a key role in day-to-day management.*	Partner and dependant children can apply.	Yes	N/A	Work-related business route, non-sponsored — route to settlement	Temporary	3 years	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.
Start-up *For a person establishing a UK business for the first time, supported by an approved endorsing body. Closed to all new applications from 13 July 2023.*	Dependant partner and dependant children can apply.	Yes	N/A	Work-related business route, non-sponsored — not a route to settlement (may progress to Innovator, which is a route to settlement)	Temporary	2 years	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.
Representative of an Overseas Business *For a Media Representative (employee of an overseas media organisation on long-term UK assignment) or a Sole Representative (senior employee assigned to the UK to establish a branch/subsidiary; extension/settlement applications only).*	Dependant partner and dependant children can apply.	Yes	N/A	Work-related business route, non-sponsored — route to settlement	Temporary	3 years (first grant, Media Representative only); 2 years (renewal). Closed to new Sole Representative applicants	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.
Overseas Domestic Worker *For an Overseas Domestic Worker coming to the UK to work for up to a maximum of 6 months as a domestic worker with their current employer.*	Dependants not permitted.	No (6-month visa)	N/A	Temporary work route, non-sponsored — not a route to settlement	Temporary	6 months	NRPF applies	Contributory or statutory benefits (if eligible); NHS treatment and education access subject to normal eligibility rules.

***Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS)** — paid by the visa applicant (unless exempt). Gives access to the NHS on broadly the same basis as UK residents,

****Immigration Skills Charge (ISC)** — paid by the employer/sponsor, not the visa holder. Applies only to certain sponsored work routes. Employers cannot lawfully pass this charge on to the worker.

NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds): A condition attached to most UK visas restricting access to most state benefits. It restricts access to public funds but does not prevent access to most public services.

Public Funds & NRPF: Benefits and Services Reference

What counts as a public fund under the Immigration Rules, and what remains accessible despite a No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition.

Benefits and services considered public funds for immigration purposes (NRPF)*:	***Benefits and services not considered restricted for immigration purposes include, but are not limited to:***
• Universal Credit • State Pension Credit • Personal Independence Payment (PIP) • Attendance Allowance • Carer's Allowance • Disability Living Allowance • Housing Benefit • Social Fund payments (Sure Start Maternity Grant, funeral expenses payment, cold weather payment, winter fuel payment, budgeting loan) • Health in Pregnancy Grant • Severe Disablement Allowance • Income-related ESA • Income-based JSA • Child Tax Credit • Working Tax Credit • Child Benefit • Social housing and homelessness assistance • Council Tax Reduction Schemes • Scottish equivalents (Adult Disability Payment, Scottish Child Payment, Child Winter Heating Assistance, etc.) **Some of these (e.g. Working Tax Credit) are legacy benefits no longer open to new claimants generally but remain listed as public funds under the Immigration Rules.*	• New-Style Jobseeker's Allowance • Guardian's Allowance (if in receipt of Child Benefit) • New Style Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) • Maternity Allowance • State Pension • Statutory Sick Pay • Bereavement Support Payment • Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit • Statutory parental payments (Statutory Maternity Pay, Statutory Paternity Pay, Statutory Adoption Pay, Statutory Shared Parental Pay and Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay) • NHS treatment where entitled through the Immigration Health Surcharge or exemption • State-funded education • Limited local authority services** ***Limited access to local authority services may be available where eligibility criteria are met (e.g. assessed social care needs or children's services). Access to most financial support, homelessness assistance and discretionary payments remains restricted for people with NRPF.*

Reference summary for policy and briefing use. NRPF restricts access to listed public funds but does not remove access to most public services.

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