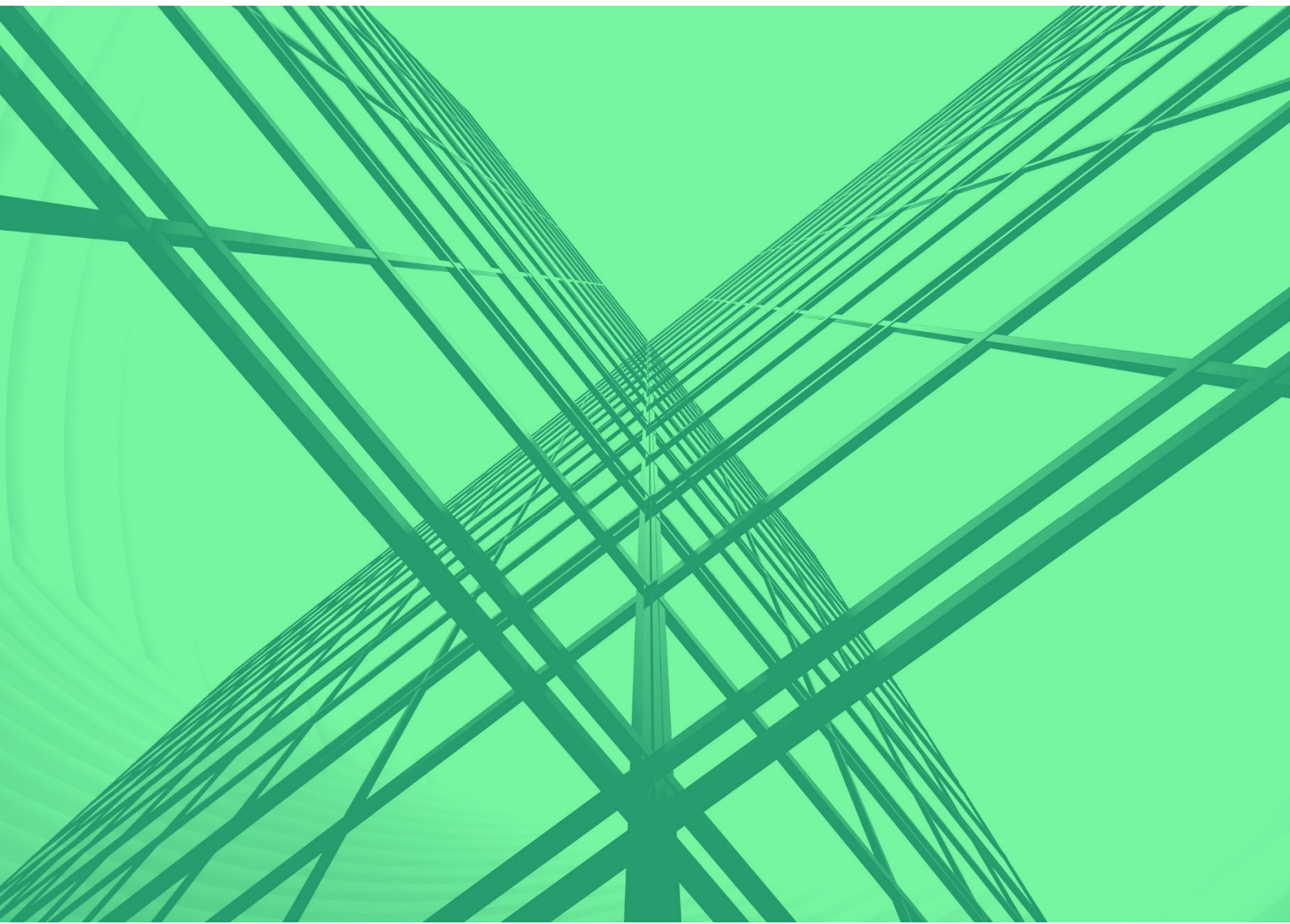


Hiring overseas talent: A comprehensive guide for structural engineering firms in the UK

Author: Christopher Quebral
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Important Note:

This guide is accurate at the time of writing (June 2026). Salary thresholds, Home Office fees, and visa durations may change. Before making any recruitment or sponsorship decision, readers should check the latest information on GOV.UK.

Disclaimer:

Immigration Rules change frequently. The reader is advised to check for changes from time to time.

Table of contents

1. Foreword
2. Introduction
3. Why a sponsor licence matters
4. Eligibility criteria
5. Skilled worker visa requirements
6. Documents required
7. Application process
8. Costs
9. Processing time
10. After approval
11. Ongoing duties
12. Key considerations for structural engineering firms

1. Foreword

The structural engineering sector in the United Kingdom is built on precision, innovation, and collaboration. As projects become increasingly complex and demand for specialist expertise grows, many firms are looking beyond domestic borders to attract highly skilled professionals. Recruiting talent from overseas is no longer a luxury; it is often a necessity for delivering world-class engineering solutions.

However, the process of hiring European or other foreign nationals is governed by strict immigration rules. Since the UK's departure from the European Union, employers must hold a Sponsor licence to lawfully employ most non-UK workers. This licence, issued by the Home Office, enables companies to assign certificates of sponsorship (CoS), which candidates use to apply for a skilled worker visa.

This guide has been prepared for structural engineering firms to provide clear, practical advice on obtaining and maintaining a Sponsor licence. It explains the legal requirements, documentation, costs, timelines, and compliance obligations in detail, ensuring that employers can navigate the process with confidence.

2. Introduction

The importance of global talent in structural engineering

Structural engineering is a discipline that underpins the safety, functionality, and sustainability of the built environment. From bridges and skyscrapers to complex infrastructure projects, the demand for highly skilled engineers is constant, and growing. As the UK continues to deliver ambitious projects, the domestic talent pool alone cannot always meet the specialised skills required. Global talent brings fresh perspectives, advanced technical expertise, and innovative solutions that strengthen the industry's ability to compete internationally.

Recruiting overseas professionals allows firms to:

- ▶ Access niche skills and experience not readily available in the UK market
- ▶ Enhance diversity and innovation within project teams
- ▶ Meet deadlines and quality standards for large-scale or technically demanding projects

Impact of immigration law changes post-Brexit

The UK's departure from the European Union marked a significant shift in immigration policy. Previously, EU nationals could work freely in the UK without visas. Post-Brexit, this freedom of movement ended, and EU citizens (except Irish nationals) now require a visa to work in the UK. This change introduced the points-based immigration system, which applies equally to EU and non-EU nationals.

Key implications for employers:

- ▶ Sponsor licence requirement: UK firms must hold a Home Office-issued Sponsor licence to employ most foreign nationals
- ▶ Skilled worker route: Roles must meet specific skill and salary thresholds, and candidates must demonstrate English language proficiency
- ▶ Compliance obligations: Employers face strict reporting and record-keeping duties to maintain their licence and avoid penalties.

For structural engineering firms, these changes mean that hiring overseas talent is no longer a simple administrative process. It requires strategic planning, investment in compliance systems, and a clear understanding of immigration rules.

3. Why a sponsor licence matters

For structural engineering firms in the UK, hiring overseas talent is no longer just an option; it is often essential to meet project demands and address skills shortages. Complex infrastructure projects require expertise that is not always available locally, and a Sponsor licence is the key to accessing that global talent pool.

Holding a sponsor licence allows your business to legally employ skilled professionals from outside the UK under the points-based immigration system. It also signals to clients and partners that your firm is committed to compliance and high standards. Without this licence, you cannot issue certificates of sponsorship, which are required for candidates to apply for a skilled worker visa.

Beyond legal compliance, a sponsor licence gives your firm flexibility and resilience. It enables you to recruit specialists for roles that are critical to project delivery, maintain competitiveness in a global market, and build diverse teams that bring fresh perspectives and technical innovation. In short, securing a sponsor licence is not just about meeting immigration rules; it is about ensuring your business has the capability to deliver complex projects on time and to the highest standards.

4. Eligibility criteria

To qualify for a sponsor licence, a structural engineering firm must demonstrate that it is a genuine and lawfully operating business in the UK. The Home Office requires evidence that the organisation has no unspent criminal convictions for immigration-related offences, fraud, or money laundering, and that it has not had a sponsor licence revoked within the previous 12 months. A cooling-off period of at least 12 months applies following revocation, and longer periods can apply in some circumstances.

In addition, the firm must have robust HR and recruitment systems capable of monitoring sponsored workers and ensuring compliance with reporting duties. The roles offered must be genuine vacancies that meet the required skill level and salary thresholds under the skilled

worker route. The company must also appoint key personnel, such as an authorising officer and a level 1 user, who are honest, dependable, and competent to manage sponsorship responsibilities. The level 1 user is the individual responsible for day-to-day management of the sponsorship management system (SMS), which includes assigning certificates of sponsorship, updating worker details, and reporting any changes in employment status to UK visas and immigration (UKVI). This role is critical for maintaining compliance and ensuring that all sponsorship activities are accurately recorded and reported. UKVI may conduct a compliance visit to verify that these requirements are met before granting the licence.

5. Skilled worker visa requirements

For structural engineering firms seeking to sponsor overseas talent, understanding SOC codes, salary thresholds, and English language requirements is essential. SOC codes, or Standard Occupational Classification codes, determine whether a job is eligible for sponsorship under the skilled worker visa route. These codes are listed in Appendix skilled occupations and must match the job description accurately. Structural engineers typically fall under SOC code 2121 (civil engineers), which includes structural engineering roles.

Selecting the correct SOC code is critical, as errors can lead to visa refusals and compliance audits.

Since 22 July 2025, the skilled worker route has also been restricted to roles skilled to RQF Level 6 (degree level) and above, subject to transitional arrangements for certain roles on the Immigration Salary List and Temporary Shortage List. Structural engineering roles under SOC 2121 are degree-level occupations and remain eligible, but firms should be aware that sub-degree support roles can no longer be sponsored unless they appear on one of the transitional lists, which are currently due to expire on 31 December 2026.

Salary thresholds increased for certificates of sponsorship issued on or after 22 July 2025, and from this date the general minimum salary requirement is £41,700 per year or the “going rate” for the role, whichever is higher. For civil and structural engineers, the going rate sits close to this figure, based on a 37.5-hour workweek, so in practice the £41,700 general threshold will usually apply. These salary thresholds and going rates are updated periodically, so employers must always check the latest Skilled worker salary guidance and Appendix Skilled Occupations on GOV.UK before assigning a certificate of sponsorship.

The salary figures in this guide are illustrative of the rules at the time of writing; actual minimum salaries and going rates must always be checked against the latest GOV.UK guidance before any offer or Certificate of Sponsorship is issued.

Lower salary thresholds apply in specific circumstances under the skilled worker route. If the applicant holds a relevant PhD in a non-STEM subject, the minimum salary requirement is £37,500 per year and at least 90% of the going rate for the occupation. For candidates with a relevant STEM PhD, the threshold drops further to £33,400 per year and at least 80% of the going rate. For roles listed on the Immigration Salary List, the threshold is £33,400 per year and 100% of the going rate (the percentage discount previously available for shortage roles no longer

applies). The same reduced rate of £33,400, together with at least 70% of the going rate, also applies to new entrants, which typically includes individuals under the age of 26, recent graduates, and those switching from the student or graduate routes. In every case the salary must meet both the cash threshold and the relevant percentage of the going rate. These concessions provide flexibility for employers seeking to recruit highly qualified candidates or early-career professionals while still meeting immigration compliance standards.

In addition to salary requirements, candidates applying for the first time under the skilled worker route on or after 8 January 2026 must demonstrate English proficiency at CEFR level B2 (upper-intermediate, broadly equivalent to A-level standard). This is an increase from the previous B1 requirement and was introduced by the Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules HC 1333. Existing skilled worker visa holders who have already proved their English at B1 in a previous successful application remain subject to that level when extending. The English language requirement may change again in future, so employers should always confirm the current CEFR level required for the Skilled worker route on GOV.UK before recruiting. The requirement can be met through a Secure English Language Test (SELT), a degree taught in English, or UK qualifications such as GCSEs or A-levels.

Nationals of certain majority English-speaking countries are automatically exempt from proving their English language ability when applying for a UK Skilled worker visa. These countries include Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, British Overseas Territories, Canada, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Ireland, Jamaica, Malta, New Zealand, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States of America. Applicants from these countries only need to provide a valid passport or national ID as proof of citizenship to meet the English language requirement. Additionally, Irish citizens are exempt under the Common Travel Area arrangements, meaning they do not need to demonstrate English proficiency for visa purposes.

These three elements, accurate SOC classification, compliance with salary rules, and verification of English language ability, form the foundation of a successful sponsorship process and help employers avoid costly mistakes.

6. Documents required

The Home Office requires proof that your business is genuine, legally operating, and capable of managing sponsored workers effectively. To demonstrate this, you must provide at least four documents from their approved list in Appendix A. These documents confirm that your company is actively trading, complies with UK regulations, and has the necessary systems in place to meet sponsorship responsibilities. Below is a list of core documents you can choose from; however, in practice, it is strongly recommended to submit all relevant documents to strengthen your application. Additionally, your firm should have a dedicated company email address and telephone number that the Home Office can use for official contact purposes.

Core documents for structural engineering firms:

- ▶ Certificate of Incorporation
- ▶ Employer's liability insurance certificate showing at least £5 million cover
- ▶ VAT registration certificate
- ▶ Business bank statements to prove financial activity
- ▶ Lease agreement and recent utility bills showing your trading address
- ▶ PAYE and HMRC registration evidence confirming that you operate a payroll system and comply with tax obligations
- ▶ Annual accounts or audited financial statements showing that your business is financially stable and actively trading
- ▶ Policies and systems for monitoring sponsored workers, including absence tracking and reporting changes to UKVI

7. Application process

Step 1: Check eligibility

Before applying, confirm that your business:

- ▶ Is a genuine UK entity operating lawfully
- ▶ Has no unspent criminal convictions for immigration offences, fraud, or money laundering
- ▶ Has robust HR systems to monitor sponsored workers and report changes
- ▶ Offers genuine job roles that meet the Skilled worker visa skill and salary thresholds

Step 2: Prepare key personnel

You must appoint individuals to manage the licence:

- ▶ Authorising Officer: senior person responsible for compliance
- ▶ Key Contact: main liaison with the Home Office
- ▶ Level 1 User: manages the Sponsorship Management System (SMS)

Step 3: Gather supporting documents

Submit at least four documents from Appendix A to prove your business is genuine and trading. Common examples include:

- ▶ Certificate of incorporation
- ▶ Employer's Liability Insurance certificate
- ▶ VAT registration certificate
- ▶ Business bank statements
- ▶ Proof of premises (lease or utility bill)
- ▶ PAYE and HMRC registration evidence

Step 4: Submit online application

Complete the application form via the UKVI portal. Pay the licence fee (rates effective 8 April 2026):

- ▶ £611 for small or charitable sponsors
- ▶ £1,682 for medium or large sponsors

Upload supporting documents within 5 working days of submission.

Step 5: Compliance checks

The Home Office may:

- ▶ Review your HR systems
- ▶ Conduct a pre-licence compliance visit to verify your processes and premises

Step 6: Decision

- ▶ Standard processing: up to 8 weeks
- ▶ Priority service: 10 working days for an additional £750 (subject to availability)

Step 7: After approval

- ▶ Your business may receive an A-rating and access to the sponsorship management system (SMS)
- ▶ You can assign certificates of sponsorship (CoS) to eligible candidates
- ▶ Licence validity: since 6 April 2024 there is no longer a requirement to renew the licence every four years. Licences are now automatically extended for 10 years from the date of grant, with no routine renewal application or fee. A licence remains valid unless it is surrendered, suspended, or revoked, and the Home Office can take compliance action at any time

Note: Employers must not pass the sponsor licence fee, the certificate of sponsorship fee, the immigration skills charge, or any related costs to the sponsored worker. Doing so is a serious breach of Home Office rules and can lead to license revocation. Additionally, it is essential to keep your HR systems fully audit-ready at all times. Failure to maintain accurate records or comply with reporting duties may result in suspension or permanent revocation of your license, which could prevent your business from hiring overseas talent in the future.

Special note for employers hiring graduates on the graduate visa

Many small structural engineering practices first encounter the sponsorship system when a graduate visa employee approaches the end of their permission to work. The graduate visa is strictly time-limited, non-extendable, and does not lead to settlement. At the time of writing, the graduate visa normally provides 2 years of work permission (or 3 years for PhD graduates). However, employers should note that the Government has confirmed that the graduate visa will be reduced to 18 months for most applicants from 1 January 2027. Any future changes to the length or conditions of the graduate route should be checked against the latest GOV.UK guidance, and the forthcoming reduction makes early planning even more important.

Because the graduate visa cannot be extended, any firm wishing to retain the graduate beyond this period must hold a sponsor licence and sponsor the worker under the skilled worker route. Unlike the graduate visa, a skilled worker certificate of sponsorship can be issued for up to 5 years, giving employers long-term workforce stability and reducing the need for repeated visa applications.

Employers should therefore be cautious when reviewing CVs that state “eligible to work in the UK,” as this often refers only to the short graduate visa period. Early planning is essential to avoid last-minute pressure when the graduate visa expires and to ensure continuity for both the business and the employee.

8. Costs

Employing overseas talent under the Skilled worker visa route involves several costs that employers must plan for from the outset. These expenses cover the sponsor licence application, the ongoing management of sponsored workers, and the issuance of certificates of sponsorship (CoS). All Home Office fees and charges quoted in this chapter reflect the position at the time of writing (June 2026), following the fee increases that took effect on 8 April 2026 and the immigration skills charge increase of 16 December 2025. Employers must confirm the latest sponsor licence fees, immigration skills charge rates, and visa application fees on GOV.UK before proceeding.

1. Sponsor licence application fee

The initial cost depends on the size of your organisation:

- ▶ Small or charitable sponsors: £611
- ▶ Medium or large sponsors: £1,682

This fee is paid when submitting your application to the Home Office and is non-refundable, even if your application is refused.

2. Priority processing fee (optional)

If you need a faster decision, you can request priority processing for an additional £750, reducing the processing time from up to eight weeks to around ten working days (subject to availability).

3. Certificate of sponsorship (CoS) Fee

Once your licence is approved, you must issue a CoS for each sponsored worker. The cost is £525 per certificate for worker routes such as the skilled worker route. This is a mandatory step before the worker can apply for their visa.

4. Immigration skills charge (ISC)

Employers must pay the immigration skills charge for each sponsored worker. The rates increased by 32% on 16 December 2025 and are now:

- ▶ Medium or large sponsors: £1,320 for the first 12 months, then £660 for each additional 6 months of sponsorship.
- ▶ Small sponsors or charities: £480 for the first 12 months, then £240 for each additional 6 months of sponsorship.

The charge is calculated based on the length of the visa and is paid upfront when assigning the CoS. By way of illustration, a 3-year visa now costs a large sponsor £3,960 in ISC, or £1,440 for a small sponsor.

Under UK immigration rules, businesses are classified as either small sponsors or large sponsors based on specific criteria. A business qualifies as a small sponsor if, within a single financial year, it meets at least two of the following three conditions: an annual turnover of £15 million or less, total assets of £7.5 million or less, or 50 employees or fewer. Registered charities automatically qualify as small sponsors regardless of their size. This classification is significant because small sponsors pay lower fees for both the sponsor licence and the immigration skills charge. In contrast, a large sponsor is any business that does not meet two of the above criteria. Additionally, certain organisations, such as public companies, banks, insurance companies, e-

money issuers, and investment firms regulated under financial services law, are automatically treated as large sponsors regardless of their size.

The distinction matters because it affects costs: the sponsor licence application fee is £611 for small or charitable sponsors and £1,682 for large sponsors, while the Immigration skills charge is £480 for the first 12 months per worker for small sponsors and £1,320 for the first 12 months per worker for large sponsors.

5. Additional costs to consider

Beyond the fees payable to the Home Office, employers should also account for internal compliance-related expenses. These may include upgrading HR systems to manage sponsorship records effectively, training staff to ensure adherence to immigration compliance requirements, and engaging legal or consultancy services for expert guidance during the application process and ongoing sponsorship duties.

9. Processing time

The processing time for a UK sponsor licence application varies depending on the service chosen. Under the standard service, most applications are completed within six to eight weeks, although the Home Office advises allowing up to eight weeks. In practice, employers should plan for two to three months to accommodate potential delays, such as compliance checks or missing documentation. For those needing a faster decision, a priority service is available for an additional £750, subject to availability, which aims to provide a decision within ten working days. However, factors such as incomplete paperwork, complex business structures, or pre-licence compliance visits can extend the timeline beyond the standard period.

The processing time for a skilled worker visa depends on whether the application is made from outside or inside the UK. For applicants applying from outside the UK (entry clearance), the standard processing time is usually around three weeks, although during busy periods it can extend to three to five weeks. Faster options are available: the priority service typically provides a decision within five working days, while the super priority service, where offered, aims to deliver a decision by the next working day. For applications made inside the UK, such as switching to the skilled worker route or extending an existing visa, the standard processing time is up to eight weeks, though some cases may take nine to twelve weeks if there are backlogs. Priority and super priority services are also available for in-country applications, with decisions usually made within five working days or by the next working day, respectively, subject to availability.

10. After approval

Once your sponsor licence is approved, your business may receive an A-rating, which means the Home Office considers you fully compliant and trustworthy to sponsor workers. This rating gives you access to the sponsorship management system (SMS), an online portal where you manage all sponsorship tasks, such as assigning certificates of sponsorship and reporting any changes about your sponsored employees.

Since 6 April 2024 there is no longer a requirement to renew a sponsor licence every four years. Licences are automatically extended for 10 years from the date of grant, with no routine renewal application and no renewal fee. A licence remains valid unless it is surrendered by the sponsor or suspended or revoked by the Home Office. The removal of the renewal cycle does not reduce compliance scrutiny: the Home Office monitors sponsors continuously and can conduct announced or unannounced compliance visits at any time, so firms must remain audit-ready throughout the life of the licence.

11. Ongoing duties

Once your sponsor licence is granted, you must comply with strict Home Office requirements to maintain your A-rating and avoid penalties. These duties include accurate record-keeping, timely reporting, and proactive monitoring of sponsored workers.

Key responsibilities:

1. Maintain accurate records

- ▶ Keep copies of sponsored workers' passports and evidence of their immigration status. Biometric residence permits (BRPs) have been replaced by eVisas, so status should be checked and evidenced through the Home Office online checking service using a share code, with the result retained on file
- ▶ Keep records of right-to-work checks, including the date of each check
- ▶ Store job descriptions, salary details, and evidence of qualifications
- ▶ Track attendance and absences to ensure workers are fulfilling their roles

2. Report changes promptly via the sponsorship management system (SMS)

You must notify UKVI within 10 working days of any significant changes, including:

- ▶ Job title, duties, or salary adjustments
- ▶ Work location changes, including moves to a different site or office
- ▶ Hybrid or remote working arrangements: report if the worker will work from home regularly or outside the UK for any period
- ▶ Offshore work: if the worker will be based outside the UK for project-related duties, provide details of duration and location
- ▶ Termination of employment or early contract end
- ▶ Extended unpaid leave (other than statutory entitlements)

3. Monitor visa compliance

- ▶ Track visa expiry dates and ensure timely renewals
- ▶ Prevent overstays by initiating extension processes early

4. Audit and training

- ▶ Conduct regular internal audits to confirm compliance
- ▶ Train HR staff on sponsor duties and SMS functionality
- ▶ Keep systems ready for Home Office compliance visits at any time

Failure to meet these obligations can result in licence downgrading, suspension, or revocation, financial penalties, and loss of the ability to sponsor workers. With increased scrutiny on remote and offshore work, accurate reporting is essential to avoid breaches.

12. Key considerations

Applying for a sponsor licence can open doors to a wider talent pool, allowing structural engineering firms to recruit highly skilled professionals from overseas. However, this process requires careful planning and ongoing compliance. Before applying, ensure your business meets the eligibility criteria and has robust HR systems in place to manage sponsorship duties. Budget not only for Home Office fees but also for internal costs such as staff training and system upgrades. Once approved, maintaining your A-rating is critical: accurate record-keeping, timely reporting, and regular compliance checks will help protect your licence.

Immigration rules can change quickly, and several further changes are already on the horizon at the time of writing: the graduate visa reduces to 18 months for most applicants from 1 January 2027, the immigration salary list and temporary shortage list are due to expire on 31 December 2026 pending the Migration Advisory Committee's review, and further reforms flowing from the May 2025 Immigration White Paper are expected. Staying informed or seeking expert legal advice is essential. By approaching the process strategically, your firm can secure the skilled workforce it needs while avoiding costly mistakes and penalties.

13. Appendices

- ▶ Appendix 1: Links to official Home Office guidance and resources
- ▶ Appendix 2: Sponsor licence compliance manual
- ▶ Appendix 3: Staff training manual
- ▶ Appendix 4: Application process summary chart

Appendix 1: Links to official Home Office guidance and resources

Apply for a sponsor licence - <https://www.gov.uk/apply-sponsor-licence>

UK visa sponsorship for employers (main guidance hub) - <https://www.gov.uk/uk-visa-sponsorship-employers>

Sponsor guidance part 1: Apply for a licence - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/workers-and-temporary-workers-guidance-for-sponsors-part-1-apply-for-a-licence>

Sponsor guidance part 2: Sponsor a worker - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/workers-and-temporary-workers-guidance-for-sponsors-part-2-sponsor-a-worker>

Sponsor guidance Part 3: Sponsor duties and compliance - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/workers-and-temporary-workers-guidance-for-sponsors-part-3-sponsor-duties-and-compliance>

Sponsor guidance appendix A: Supporting documents for sponsor applications - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-documents-for-sponsor-applications-appendix-a>

Sponsor guidance appendix B: immigration offences and sponsorship - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-offences-and-sponsorship-appendix-b>

Sponsor guidance appendix D: Keeping records for sponsorship - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-records-for-sponsorship-appendix-d>

Skilled worker route: Sponsor a skilled worker - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sponsor-a-skilled-worker>

Government authorised exchange - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/workers-and-temporary-workers-guidance-for-sponsors-sponsor-a-government-authorised-exchange-worker/workers-and-temporary-workers-guidance-for-sponsors-sponsor-a-government-authorised-exchange-worker-accessible>

International agreement worker - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sponsor-an-international-agreement-worker>

Immigration skills charge (ISC) - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-skills-charge>

Certificates of sponsorship (CoS) guidance - <https://www.gov.uk/uk-visa-sponsorship-employers/certificates-of-sponsorship>

Appendix 2: Sponsor licence compliance manual

For structural engineering firms (UK skilled worker route)

1.0 Purpose of this manual

This manual sets out the policies, procedures, controls, and record-keeping standards required for a structural engineering firm to maintain compliance with the UKVI worker sponsor licence regime.

It is designed for firms whose core activities include:

- ▶ Structural design and analysis
- ▶ Temporary works design
- ▶ Structural inspections and reporting
- ▶ Engineering management and project delivery
- ▶ Specialist structural consultancy

The manual ensures compliance with:

- ▶ Sponsor guidance part 1, 2, and 3
- ▶ Appendix A (documents)
- ▶ Appendix D (record-keeping)
- ▶ Skilled worker route rules
- ▶ Right to work requirements

2.0 Governance structure

2.1 Key roles

- ▶ Authorising officer (AO): overall responsibility for compliance, systems, and reporting.
- ▶ Key contact: primary UKVI liaison
- ▶ Level 1 user: day-to-day SMS operations
- ▶ Level 2 user: limited SMS functions (optional)

2.2 Engineering-specific considerations

Structural engineering firms must ensure:

- ▶ Sponsored engineers are deployed only on genuine engineering work
- ▶ Job descriptions match SOC 2121 (civil engineers, including structural engineers) or another appropriate eligible engineering SOC code listed in Appendix skilled occupations
- ▶ Salaries meet skilled worker thresholds and industry norms
- ▶ Project-based work locations are accurately reported

3.0 Pre-licence compliance framework

3.1 HR systems required

- ▶ Centralised personnel files
- ▶ Right-to-work verification system
- ▶ Absence and attendance tracking
- ▶ Change-notification workflow
- ▶ Document retention system

3.2 Engineering-specific evidence

UKVI expects proof that the firm is a genuine engineering practice, such as:

- ▶ Structural engineering project briefs
- ▶ Fee proposals and appointment letters
- ▶ PI insurance (structural engineering specific)
- ▶ ICE/IStructE memberships
- ▶ Engineering software licences (Masterseries, Tekla, Tedds, Robot, ETABS)
- ▶ Site inspection logs

4.0 Certificate of sponsorship (CoS) process

4.1 Before assigning a CoS

Confirm:

- ▶ The role is genuine and necessary for project delivery
- ▶ The SOC code is correct
- ▶ Salary meets the applicable threshold and going rate
- ▶ The candidate has the required qualifications (MEng, BEng, IEng/CEng track)
- ▶ The candidate can meet the English language requirement (CEFR B2 for first-time applicants from 8 January 2026)

4.2 Assigning a CoS

The level 1 user must:

- ▶ Log into SMS
- ▶ Select "Create and assign CoS"
- ▶ Enter job details (title, duties, SOC code, salary, hours)
- ▶ Enter work locations (office and project sites)
- ▶ Upload supporting evidence if requested

4.3 After assigning a CoS

- ▶ Provide CoS number to candidate
- ▶ Ensure visa application is submitted promptly
- ▶ Record CoS assignment in internal tracker

5.0 Ongoing sponsor duties

5.1 Reporting duties (10 working days)

Report via SMS:

- ▶ Change of work location (including project sites)

- ▶ Change in job title or duties
- ▶ Salary changes
- ▶ Absence without permission (10 consecutive working days)
- ▶ Termination or resignation
- ▶ Significant changes to company structure

5.2 Record-keeping duties

Maintain:

- ▶ Passport copies and evidence of immigration status via the eVisa online checking service (share code check results), which has replaced BRP copies
- ▶ Right-to-work check evidence
- ▶ Contact details
- ▶ Employment contract
- ▶ Job description and organisational chart
- ▶ Qualifications (degree, professional memberships)
- ▶ Project allocation records

5.3 Monitoring duties

- ▶ Track attendance
- ▶ Monitor project deployment
- ▶ Ensure duties match the CoS
- ▶ Conduct internal audits every 6 months

6.0 Engineering-specific compliance risks

6.1 Project-based work

Structural engineers often work across multiple sites. You must:

- ▶ Record all work locations
- ▶ Report new project sites if they become primary work locations
- ▶ Ensure travel between sites is documented

6.2 Role drift

Engineers must not drift into:

- ▶ Non-engineering roles
- ▶ Labour-only supply
- ▶ Site supervision roles outside the SOC code

6.3 Salary compliance

Engineering salaries must remain:

- ▶ Above skilled worker thresholds
- ▶ In line with industry norms
- ▶ Updated annually

Internal audit procedure

Conduct audits every 6 months:

- ▶ Review all sponsored workers
- ▶ Check CoS accuracy
- ▶ Verify right-to-work documents
- ▶ Confirm job duties match CoS
- ▶ Review project allocations
- ▶ Check reporting logs

Document findings and corrective actions.

UKVI compliance visit preparation

Documents to have ready:

- ▶ HR files
- ▶ Right-to-work evidence
- ▶ CoS records

- ▶ Project allocation logs
- ▶ Organisational chart
- ▶ Engineering project evidence

Interview preparation:

UKVI may interview the AO, level 1 user, and sponsored engineers. Engineers must be able to explain:

- ▶ Their duties
- ▶ Their reporting line
- ▶ Their project work
- ▶ Their salary and hours

Breaches and corrective action

Examples of breaches:

- ▶ Failure to report changes
 - ▶ Incorrect SOC code
 - ▶ Underpayment
 - ▶ Role drift
 - ▶ Missing documents
- Corrective actions:
- ▶ Immediate SMS update
 - ▶ Internal retraining
 - ▶ Updated job descriptions
 - ▶ Revised HR procedures

Annual review and policy update

This manual must be reviewed:

- ▶ Annually
- ▶ After any UKVI guidance update
- ▶ After any compliance incident

Appendix 3: Staff Training Manual: Sponsor licence Compliance

For project managers and HR, structural engineering firm v2.0 (June 2026), internal training document

Purpose of this manual

This manual provides practical training for Project Managers and HR staff on how to comply with UKVI sponsor licence duties within a structural engineering firm. It explains day-to-day responsibilities, reporting requirements, and the behaviours expected from staff who manage or supervise sponsored engineers.

Roles and responsibilities

1. HR team

- ▶ Conduct right-to-work checks
- ▶ Maintain personnel files and required documents
- ▶ Assign and manage Certificates of sponsorship (CoS)
- ▶ Report changes to UKVI within required timescales
- ▶ Maintain accurate contact details for sponsored workers
- ▶ Track absences and employment changes

2. Project managers

- ▶ Ensure sponsored engineers work only in approved roles
- ▶ Notify HR of any changes in duties, location, or salary
- ▶ Monitor attendance and project deployment
- ▶ Ensure engineers are not moved into non-engineering or labour-only roles
- ▶ Support UKVI compliance visits if required

3. Sponsored engineers

- ▶ Keep contact details updated
- ▶ Follow reporting procedures for absences or changes
- ▶ Work only in the role described on their CoS
- ▶ Cooperate with compliance checks and audits

4. Understanding the sponsored role

Every sponsored engineer must have:

- ▶ A defined job title
- ▶ A clear job description
- ▶ A correct SOC code (typically 2121, Civil Engineers, which includes structural engineers; any other code must be an eligible engineering occupation in Appendix Skilled Occupations and must accurately reflect the duties)
- ▶ A salary that meets Skilled worker thresholds
- ▶ A primary work location (office and project sites)

Project Managers must ensure that:

- ▶ Duties match the CoS description
- ▶ Engineers are not reassigned to unrelated roles
- ▶ Any change in duties is reported to HR immediately

5. Work locations and project deployment

Structural engineers often work across multiple sites. Project managers must:

- ▶ Inform HR when an engineer moves to a new primary project site
- ▶ Ensure site-based work aligns with the CoS
- ▶ Keep records of project allocations and site visits
- ▶ Avoid placing engineers into labour-only supply arrangements

6. Reporting duties (10 working days)

HR must report the following to UKVI within 10 working days:

- ▶ Change of job title or duties
- ▶ Change of work location
- ▶ Salary changes
- ▶ Unauthorised absence of 10 consecutive working days
- ▶ Termination or resignation

- ▶ Significant changes to company structure

Project Managers must notify HR immediately when any of these occur.

7. Record-keeping requirements

HR must maintain:

- ▶ Passport copies and eVisa status check evidence (share code check results); BRPs have been withdrawn and replaced by eVisas
- ▶ Right-to-work check evidence
- ▶ Contact details (kept up to date)
- ▶ Employment contract
- ▶ Job description
- ▶ Qualifications and professional memberships
- ▶ Project allocation records
- ▶ Absence and attendance logs

Project managers must provide HR with accurate project information.

8. Monitoring and attendance

Project managers must:

- ▶ Monitor attendance daily
- ▶ Record authorised and unauthorised absences
- ▶ Notify HR of any concerns
- ▶ Ensure sponsored engineers are working expected hours

HR must:

- ▶ Maintain attendance records
- ▶ Follow up on unexplained absences
- ▶ Report prolonged unauthorised absence to UKVI

9. Avoiding common compliance risks

Structural engineering firms face specific risks:

9.1 Role drift

Engineers must not drift into:

- ▶ General labour roles
- ▶ Site supervision roles outside their SOC code
- ▶ Non-engineering administrative roles

9.2 Incorrect work locations

All primary work locations must be reported. Project managers must notify HR before moving an engineer to a new long-term site.

9.3 Salary non-compliance

Salaries must remain above skilled worker thresholds. HR must review salaries annually.

9.4 Labour-only supply

Engineers must not be supplied to clients without supervision or control by the firm.

10. Internal Audit Process

Every 6 months, HR will conduct an audit covering:

- ▶ CoS accuracy
- ▶ Right-to-work documents
- ▶ Job duties vs CoS
- ▶ Project allocations
- ▶ Reporting logs
- ▶ Attendance records

Project Managers must cooperate fully and provide requested information.

11. UKVI compliance visits

Staff may be interviewed by UKVI. Project managers and sponsored engineers must be able to explain:

- ▶ The engineer's duties
- ▶ Who supervises them
- ▶ Their project work
- ▶ Their salary and hours
- ▶ Their work location

HR must ensure all documents are ready for inspection.

12. Communication protocol

Project Managers must notify HR immediately when:

- ▶ Duties change
- ▶ A new project site becomes the primary location
- ▶ Salary or hours change
- ▶ An engineer is absent
- ▶ A project ends early
- ▶ A client requests a change in role

13. Training requirements

All project managers and HR staff must complete:

- ▶ Annual sponsor compliance training
- ▶ Induction training for new staff
- ▶ Refresher training after any UKVI guidance update

14. Escalation procedure

If a compliance concern arises:

- ▶ Project manager notifies HR

- ▶ HR investigates and documents findings
- ▶ HR escalates to authorising officer if needed
- ▶ Corrective action is implemented
- ▶ UKVI is notified if required

15. Annual review

This manual must be reviewed annually or after any compliance incident.

Appendix 4: Application process summary chart

Step	Key details
Step 1: Check eligibility	▪ Business is a genuine UK entity operating lawfully ▪ No unspent criminal convictions (immigration, fraud, etc.) ▪ Robust HR systems for monitoring and reporting ▪ Job roles meet skilled worker skill (RQF Level 6, subject to transitional lists) and salary thresholds
Step 2: Prepare key personnel	▪ Authorising officer (overall compliance lead) ▪ Key contact (Home Office liaison) ▪ Level 1 user (manages the SMS system)
Step 3: Gather supporting documents	▪ Provide at least four documents from Appendix A: ▪ Certificate of incorporation ▪ Employer's liability insurance ▪ VAT registration certificate ▪ Business bank statements ▪ Proof of premises (lease or utility bill) ▪ PAYE and HMRC registration evidence
Step 4: Submit online application	▪ Complete UKVI online form ▪ Pay licence fee (from 8 April 2026): £611 (small/charitable) or £1,682 (medium/large) ▪ Upload documents within 5 working days
Step 5: Compliance checks	▪ The Home Office may: ▪ Review HR systems ▪ Conduct a pre-licence compliance visit Verify premises and processes
Step 6: Decision	▪ Standard processing: up to 8 weeks ▪ Priority service: 10 working days (additional £750, subject to availability)
Step 7: After approval	▪ Business receives A-rating ▪ Access to sponsorship management system (SMS) ▪ Can assign certificates of sponsorship (CoS) at £525 each, plus the Immigration skills charge ▪ No routine renewal: licences are automatically extended for 10 years and remain valid unless surrendered, suspended, or revoked