



What is the new UK Scale-up visa and who can apply?

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Chancellor Rishi Sunak has hailed the new fast-track visa for scale-ups as an important development to make it “quicker and easier for fast-growing businesses to bring in highly skilled individuals.”

The Government is set to bring in the new immigration pathway in Spring 2022 as part of its plan to make the UK a global innovation hub by 2035 and it can't come soon enough. “An economy built on innovation must be open and attractive to the best and brightest minds,” Rishi Sunak told MPs in his Autumn Budget statement.

The new immigration route will be a useful tool for firms that can demonstrate they are eligible as scale-ups to access talent from around the world. So who will this new Scale-up visa benefit and who can apply?

A post-pandemic investment boom and the immigration hurdles of Brexit have left Britain's tech and innovation ecosystem with a skilled staff shortage. 21% of scale-ups surveyed in the Scaleup Institute's annual review this year said that a quarter or more of their

staff came from outside the UK, so it's no surprise that 45% of scale-ups currently employing staff from overseas also said this new fast track visa for hiring overseas talent would be "very important or vital."

The Scale-up visa from what we now know should be preferable to the Skilled Worker route for those eligible, mainly as this "fast-track" route appears not to require the time, expense and responsibility of obtaining a sponsor licence and sponsoring someone on this immigration path.

In the Home Office's 'New plan for immigration: legal migration and border control strategy statement' it promised that: "in Spring 2022 we will also introduce a new, unsponsored points-based route to attract the brightest and best to the UK, with a particular emphasis placed on the very high skilled and academically elite. Within this route we will create a 'scale up' stream that will allow those with a job offer at the required skills level from a recognised UK scale-up to qualify for a fast-track visa, without the need for sponsorship."

The Scale-up visa will require a "high skill" job offer from a UK employer, English language proficiency and a minimum salary of £33,000.

To be eligible to make use of the Scale-up visa, firms will need to demonstrate three years' of either annual average revenue or employment growth of 20%. This period should have started with at least ten employees. The requirements are set to be reviewed to widen the scheme to also allow companies with an expectation of high growth.

According to the ScaleUp Institute, there were 33,445 firms with 20% annual increase in growth of employees or turnover in 2019, employing 3.2 million people and generating a total turnover of £1.1 trillion for the UK economy. Some will not be able to boast such growth for three years which included a global pandemic, but nevertheless, a great many people and companies should benefit from this fast-track route to employ foreign talent.

The Scale-up visa will allow people to change jobs and employers and should be extendable, so it is likely there will be a route to settlement. More details will be released before the route opens in the Spring. There has been no information released regarding family members, though similar routes such as the Skilled Worker visa have provisions for spouses, partners and children to accompany those eligible. As always the devil will be in the detail.