



10 December 2025

# UK IMMIGRATION: NEXT ROUND OF CHANGES

The UK government's white paper published in May 2025 announced a raft of changes to the UK immigration system. Please see our recent notes on [changes to sponsored work routes](#) and [The UK Government's plans to restrict immigration and reduce net migration](#).

The latest Statement of Changes, published on 11 November 2025, implemented further changes to the sponsored work routes.

Furthermore, the government is currently consulting on drastic, proposed changes to Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), also known as settlement or permanent residence.

We set out the details below.

## CHANGES TO THE SPONSORED WORK ROUTES

### Increase in Immigration Skills Charge (ISC)

The ISC is a fee paid by UK employers when sponsoring overseas skilled workers under specific visa routes, such as the Skilled Worker and the Global Business Mobility (Senior or Specialist Worker) (GBM) routes. The charge is payable upfront depending on the length of the visa being applied for.

From 16 December 2026, the ISC will increase by 32%. The government hopes this will encourage UK employers to invest in domestic talent and reduce reliance on overseas recruitment.

Sponsor	First 12 months (new rate)	Each additional 6 months thereafter (new rate)
Small organisations or charities	£480	£240
Medium or large organisations	£1,320	£660

However, certain exemptions to the ISC remain in place, including:

- + Workers assigned a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) for six months or less and applying from overseas;
- + Eligible EU nationals assigned a CoS under the GBM route for up to three years;
- + Individuals switching from a Student visa to a Skilled Worker or GBM visa from within the UK.

### English language requirement

From 8 January 2026, individuals sponsored under the Skilled Worker route must meet a higher level of English language proficiency:

- + The required English language level will be raised from level B1 (intermediate) to level B2 (independent user) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).



- + However, applicants who have previously been granted UK immigration permission under level B1 will be exempt from this change.

## PROPOSED CHANGES TO ILR

The UK government published "[A Fairer Pathway to Settlement](#)" which sets out the proposed changes to ILR. Some of the proposed changes are under consultation until the end of 12 February 2026. The government intends to implement the changes in the April 2026 statement of changes.

### Individuals who will not be affected by the changes

The government has confirmed that the individuals below will not be affected by the proposed changes:

- + Those who already hold ILR;
- + Those in the UK under the EU Settlement Scheme;
- + Those in the UK under the British Nationals (Overseas) route;
- + Partners of British citizens – it appears that only partners on Partner visas would be protected. It does not appear that it would benefit those on a different immigration category, for example a Skilled Worker, and are married to a British citizen.

The government has not clarified the treatment of those in the UK holding an Investor visa. Investor visa holders must apply for ILR by 17 February 2028, after which this route will close (i.e. no one will be able to hold an Investor visa after this date). We therefore hope that the proposed changes will not affect Investor visa holders.

### Individuals who will be affected by the changes

Besides the above individuals, it appears that the government's intention is to apply the proposed changes to any individual who do not hold ILR when the changes come into effect, which is likely to be in April 2026. However, the UK government is consulting on whether there should be transitional arrangements for those already in the UK on a pathway to ILR. This of course is causing great uncertainty.

Dependant spouses, civil partners and unmarried partners (**Dependant Partners**) may be assessed independently of the main applicant to determine how long they must wait to apply for ILR. Although the requirement that the main applicant must qualify for ILR in order for the Dependant Partner to qualify for ILR would remain.

Regarding Dependant Children, currently they can only obtain ILR once both parents qualify for ILR. The government is consulting on whether Dependant Children can qualify for ILR independently, for example once they reach a certain age.

### Mandatory requirements for ILR

The requirements are:

1. **Suitability:** the applicant must meet the general suitability requirements, such as having no criminal convictions, ongoing litigation or outstanding government debts (e.g. taxes or NHS charges).
2. **Integration:** the applicant must meet English level B2 of the CEFR and have passed the Life in the UK Test;
3. **Contribution:** the applicant must have had annual earnings or taxable income above £12,570 for a minimum of 3 to 5 years, in line with the current thresholds for paying income tax and National Insurance Contributions.

Requirements 1 and 2 above are not being consulted on and will come into effect. Requirement 3 is being consulted on and therefore is not confirmed.

### Qualifying Periods for ILR

The government is consulting on increasing the baseline qualifying period for ILR to 10 years.

If any attributes apply in Table A below, the qualifying period would be reduced from 10 years by the adjusted number of years.

If any of the attributes apply in Table B below, the qualifying period would be increased from 10 years by the adjusted number of years.

The applicant can only rely on, or be subjected to, one attribute from each table, but Table A and B can be offset against each other.



**Table A**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Adjustment from 10-year qualifying period for ILR</b>
Applicant has 3 years' continuous residence as a Global Talent or Innovator Founder visa	Minus 7 years – which means they can qualify for ILR after 3 years of continuous residence. <sup>1</sup>  The government is consulting on whether Dependants of this group should benefit from a 5-year reduction, meaning they could still obtain ILR after 5 years of continuous residence.
Applicant has earned a taxable income of £125,140 for 3 years immediately prior to applying for settlement <sup>2</sup>	Minus 7 years
Applicant has earned a taxable income of £50,270 for 3 years immediately prior to applying for settlement	Minus 5 years
Applicant has been employed in a specified public service occupation for 5 years (e.g. medical or teaching professionals working in public services at RQF level 6, which are roles that typically require a university degree)	Minus 5 years
Applicant has worked in the community (volunteering, etc) – currently unclear what would qualify	Minus 3-5 years
Higher English language proficiency at level C1 of the CEFR	Minus 1 year
Specific vulnerable groups	Subject to consultation

**Table B**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Adjustment from 10-year qualifying period for ILR</b>
Applicant has been in receipt of public funds for less than 12 months during the route to settlement	Plus 5 years
Applicant has been in receipt of public funds for more than 12 months during the route to settlement	Plus 10 years
Applicant arrived in the UK illegally (e.g. via small boat / clandestine)	Plus up to 20 years
Applicant entered the UK on a visit visa	Plus up to 20 years
Applicant has overstayed an immigration permission / visa for 6 months or more	Plus up to 20 years

<sup>1</sup> Continuous residence means that they were not outside the UK for more than 180 days in any 12-month period during the qualifying period for ILR.

<sup>2</sup> We believe this would be the latest 3 tax years if relying on self-assessments to show taxable income.



## Other areas considered in the consultation

These are:

- + for those sponsored in roles at RQF levels 3-5, requiring them to wait 15 years before being eligible for ILR;
- + no access to benefits for those who hold ILR, reserving the right only to British citizens.

## CONCLUSION

The government has announced significant changes, and proposed changes, to our UK immigration system.

The proposed changes to ILR are not confirmed and may change following the consultation period.

Individuals who currently qualify for ILR should submit their applications as soon as possible.

For those who do not qualify for ILR yet, they should review the proposed changes to determine whether they could be impacted and plan accordingly. For example:

- + start taking English language lessons to improve their English language abilities should they wish to apply for ILR in the future;
- + review their taxable income over the last 3 calendar years or tax years to determine whether they qualify for a reduced qualifying period to ILR;
- + applying for British citizenship if they have a partner on a Partner visa.

We will continue to monitor the proposed changes and provide an update following the ILR consultation period.

## CONTACT US



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