Visa update webinar: trends, risks and best practice

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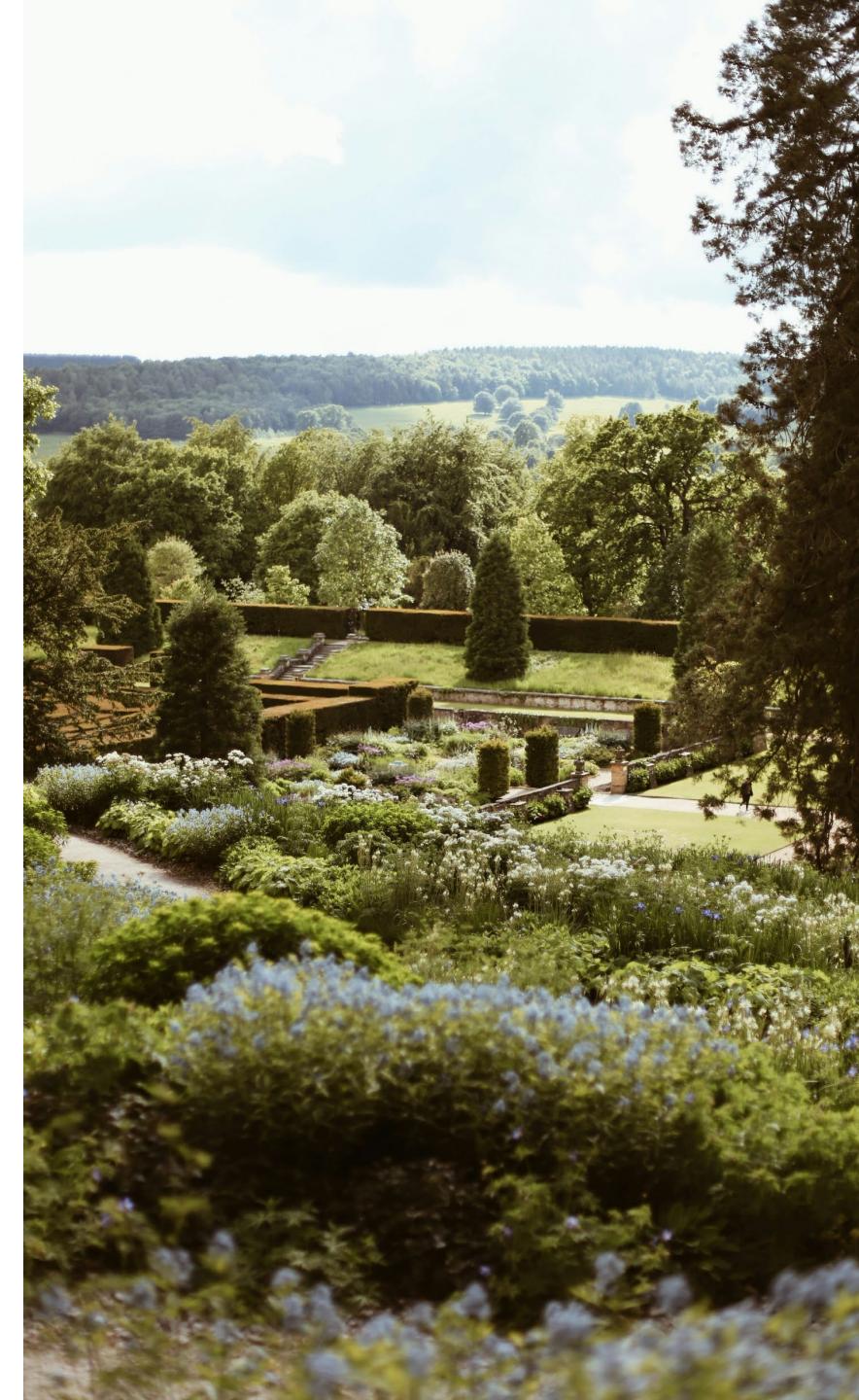
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Visas: definitions and types

Visas: definitions and types

What is a visa?

- Permission (Leave) to enter the UK

What is entry clearance?

- Permission to travel to the UK on the selected visa route

What is the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)?

- Permission to travel to the UK for non-visa nationals for all visits of up to six months

What is an eVisa?

- Online record of the immigration status

Visas: definitions and types

Visa nationals must:
- always apply for entry clearance before travelling to the UK (e.g. students from Turkey and China)

Non-visa nationals must:
- apply for an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) if they are visiting the UK for up to six months (e.g. students from Saudi Arabia, Japan, Italy).
- apply for entry clearance in the correct visa category when staying for longer than six months

Visa definitions: ETA (part 1)

- Valid for two years or passport end date (whichever is the shortest)

- Mandatory from 25 February 2026

- Contact details of guardian needed for under 18s

- When allowed to enter the UK non-visa nationals are granted a 'standard visitor visa'

Visa definitions:
ETA (part 2)

- Quick decision – around 20 minutes

- Can take a maximum of 3 days to be processed

- Application can be refused; visitor will need to apply for entry clearance before travelling

- If ETA is refused, student must apply for a Standard Visitor visa

- No limit on number of times the ETA can be used to travel to the UK during the validity period

Visa definitions:
eVisa

- Immigration status in digital format

- Used instead of vignettes in passport

- Students must have a UKVI account to access the eVisa

- Proof of visa/ status is via a share code which confirms the visa category, validity and other permissions e.g. work rights

- Will be rolled out to other visa categories from Wednesday 25 February 2026

Visa types

Visa for study

- Standard visitor visa (SVV)
- Short-term study visa (STSV)
- Student visa

The choice of visa depends on four factors:

- Length of the course
- Age of students
- Current level of English
- Further study in the UK

Visa definitions:
Standard visitor visa

- Study up to six months
- Any course(s), any accredited provider(s) but must be completed within six months
- Students can switch course and provider
- No prior course booking required for visa application
- No work rights – up to 30 days of volunteering allowed
- No set amount of funds needed but must demonstrate own funds are available
- Students can apply for multiple consecutive SVVs
- Not recommended for students enrolled on a course longer than six months
- Visa issued as vignette or digitally as an 'eVisa'

Visa definitions: Short-term study visa

- For English language courses only
- For students aged at least 16
- Course length of 6 to 11 months
- Cannot change course/ provider - study only on the course and with the provider named on the application form
- Course can be extended – e.g. from 7 months to visa end date (11 months)
- No work rights - up to 30 days of volunteering allowed
- All students must apply for the visa before travelling
- International health surcharge payable at point of application
- Visa issued digitally as an 'eVisa'; entry visa no longer issued

Visa definitions:
Student visa

- Minimum English language level required (B1); evidenced via a Secure English Language Test (SELT)
- Centre must be on the Home Office register of licenced sponsors
- Work allowed when studying with a 'sponsor with a track record' and the course is at degree level and above
- Can apply for a new visa in the UK (new course must be at a higher level)
- Government sponsored students can bring dependants
- Cost: 524GBP plus International Health Surcharge – 776GBP per year, additional 388GBP for every additional six months

Changes to immigration rules and Accreditation UK criteria

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Changes to immigration rules

Immigration rules

e-Visa

- Being rolled out to holders of standard visitor visas
- Applicants no longer need to leave their passport at the VAC

German school group travel

- For school children up to 19 years old
- Group of 5 children minimum
- Travel on ID card instead of passport + visa/ ETA
- No start date or further guidance published
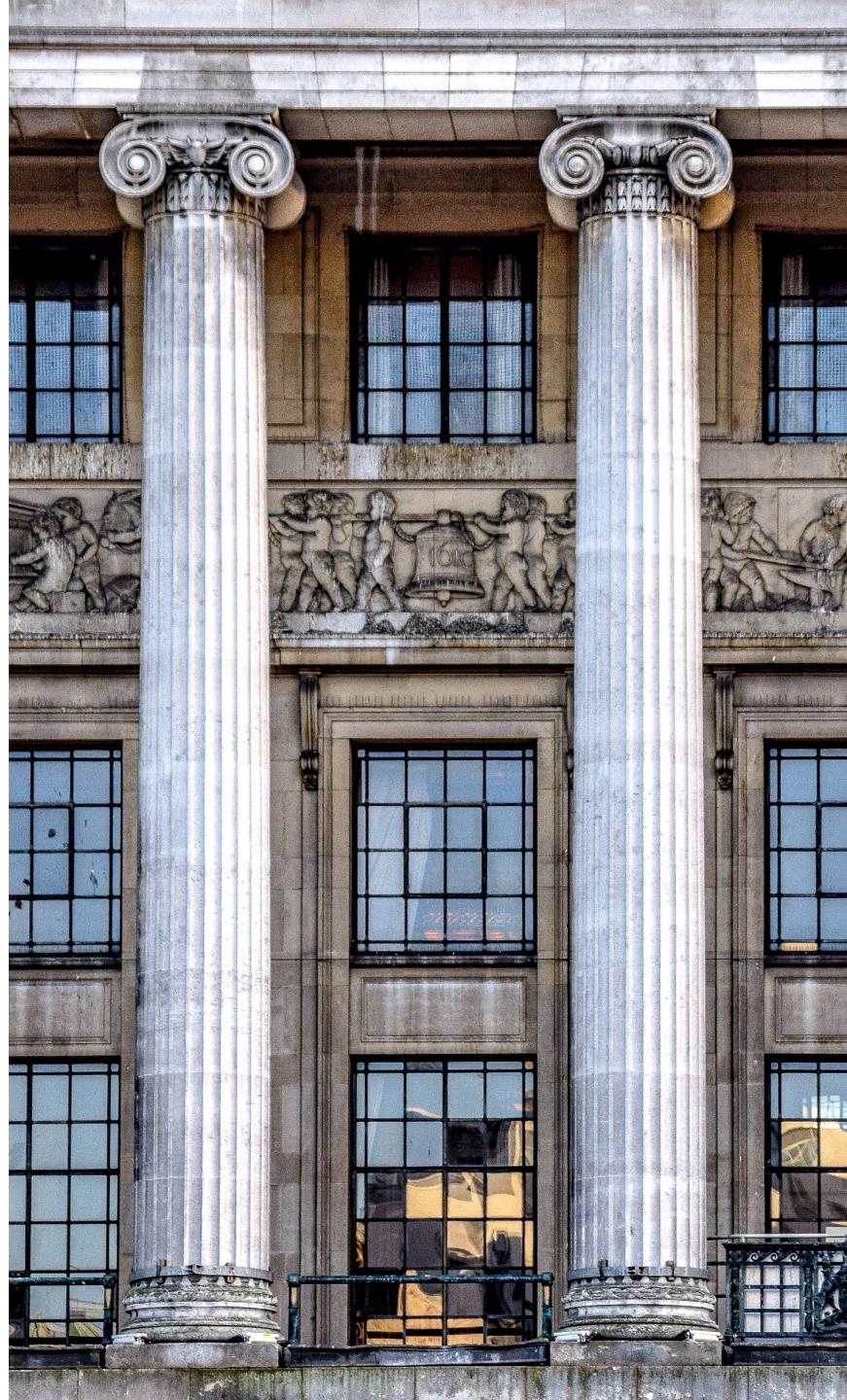
Changes to immigration rules

Immigration rules

Visa fees from April 2026

- ETA 20GBP
- Other visa fees up by 6.5%
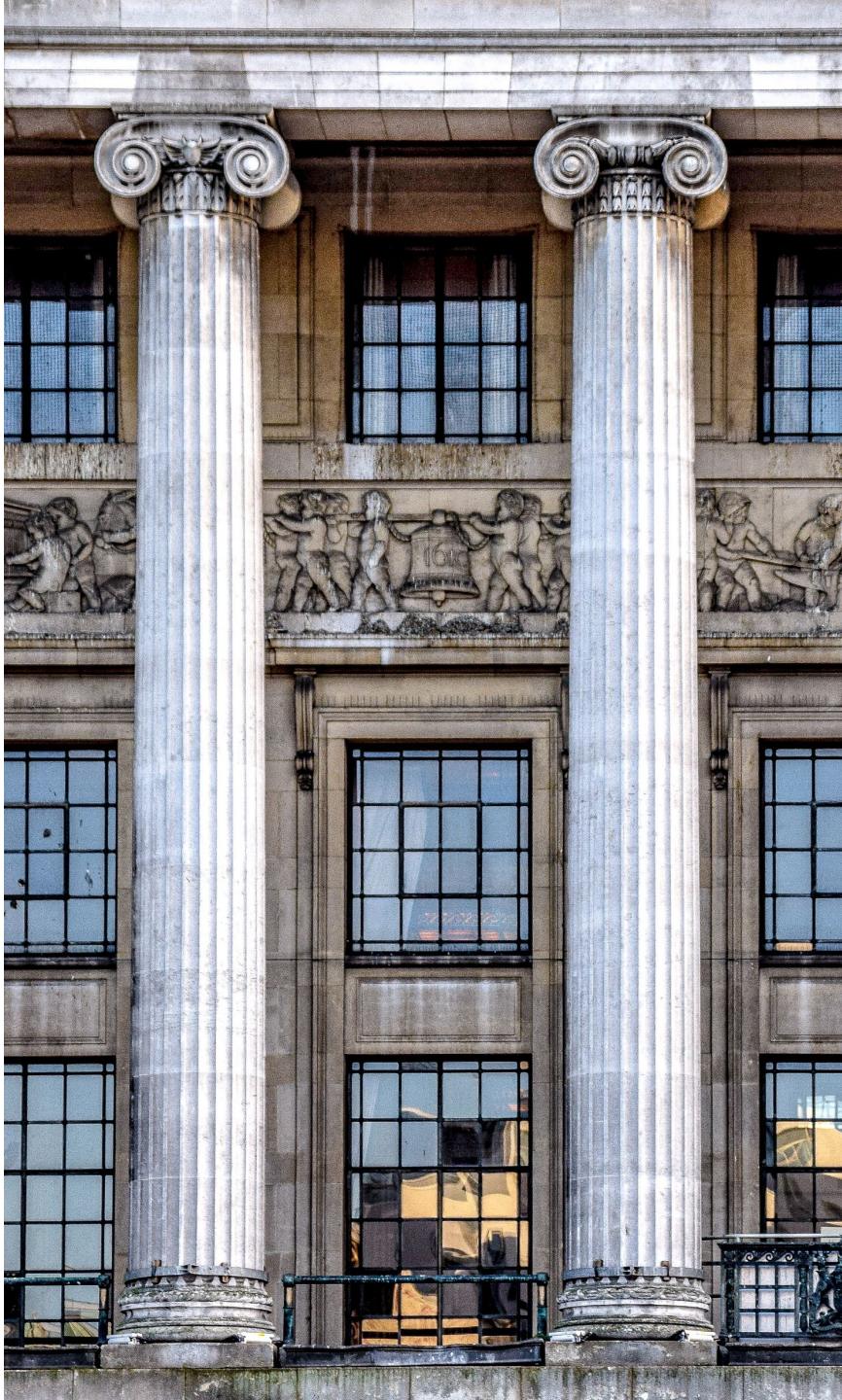
Changes to Accreditation UK criteria

UKVI expectation
- 'Accrediting bodies must ensure their processes are robust…'

What centres must do
- Take 'reasonable measures to establish a student's true intention to study'
- Make a note of the course details and visa type, and confirm sighting of passport/visa on students' record
- Provide written guidance to students about rights and obligations under student visa rules

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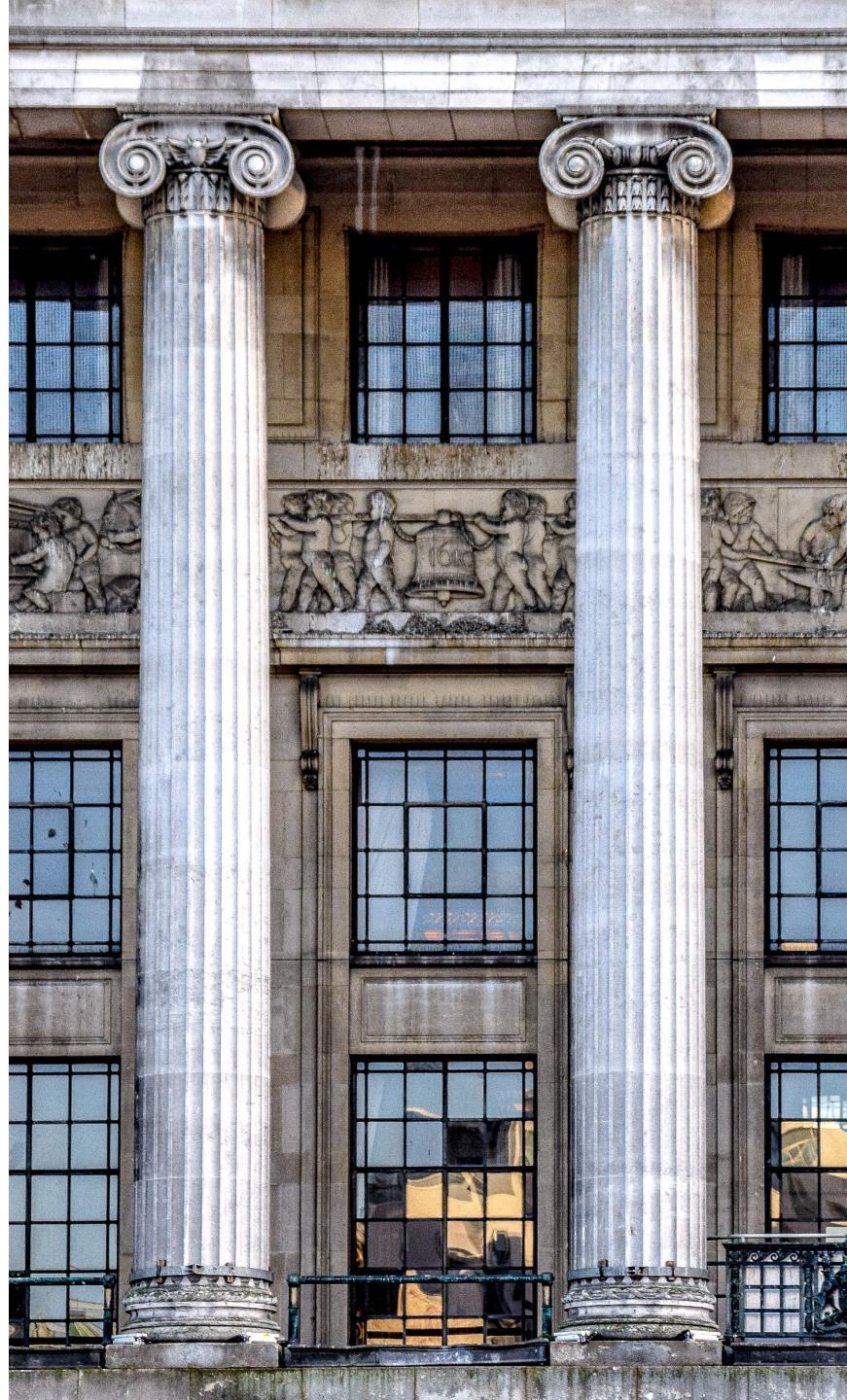
Making a successful visa application

Making a successful visa application: the requirements

Documents students need to submit

- Course confirmation letter
- Parental consent form (for under 18s)
- Financial statements; including in student's own name
- Certified translated copies of documents that are not in English/ Welsh
- Evidence in support of the reason for learning English (e.g. work/ study/ leisure)
- TB test if necessary

Making a successful visa application: the requirements

The details

Course confirmation letter should include:

- the student's current level of English and the level of the course
  - course dates
  - fees paid
  - accommodation and transfers (especially for under 18s)
- Parental consent form should include details of accommodation/ homestay host and transfers, and it should match the details in the course confirmation letter from the school
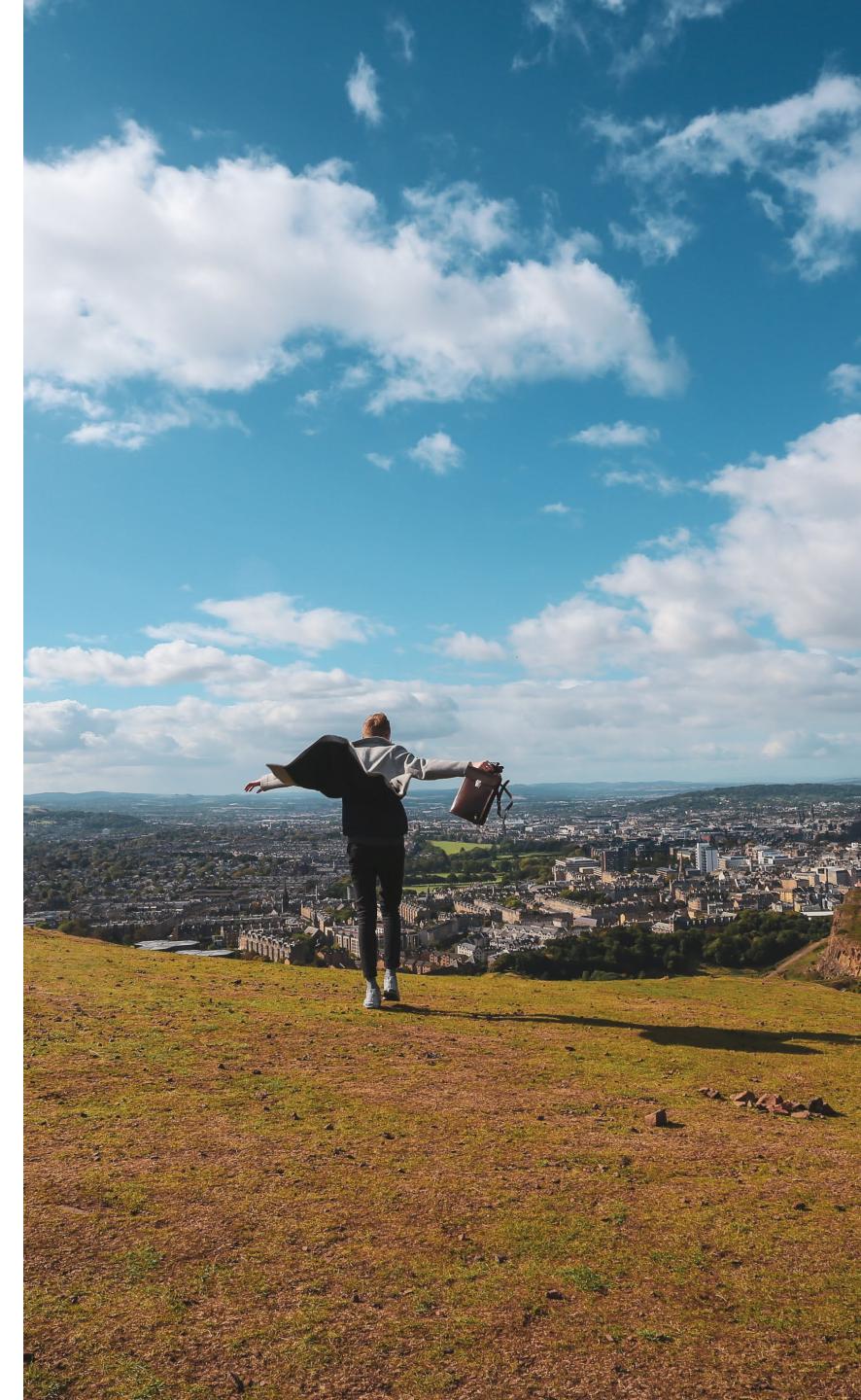
Making a successful visa application: the requirements

The details (cont.)

- As much information about the reasons for doing the course now and in the UK; e.g. previous English language study or job opportunities if relevant
- Explain why they have chosen not to study in their home country even if it would be cheaper
- If in education/ work: letter from provider/employer confirming permission of absence and the period of agreed leave
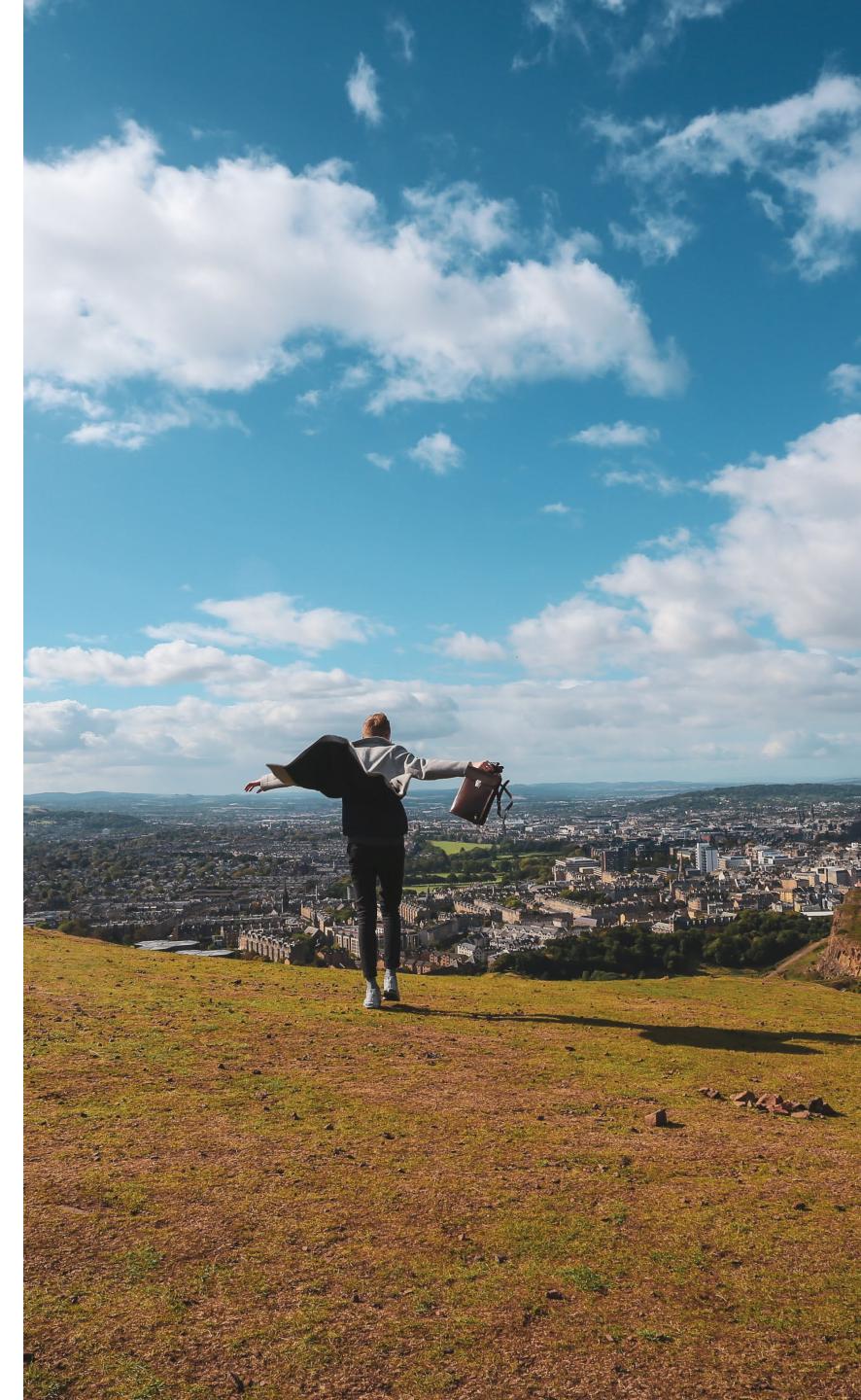
Making a successful visa application: the requirements

The details (cont.)

- Financial documents: income should match payslips; additional evidence for recent cash deposits; do not use business accounts
- If sponsored by their employer: include student's personal bank statements
- If sponsored by relatives: there should be a letter from the relatives and evidence of the relationship
- Evidence of the intention to leave the UK at the end of the course (does not have to be a return flight)
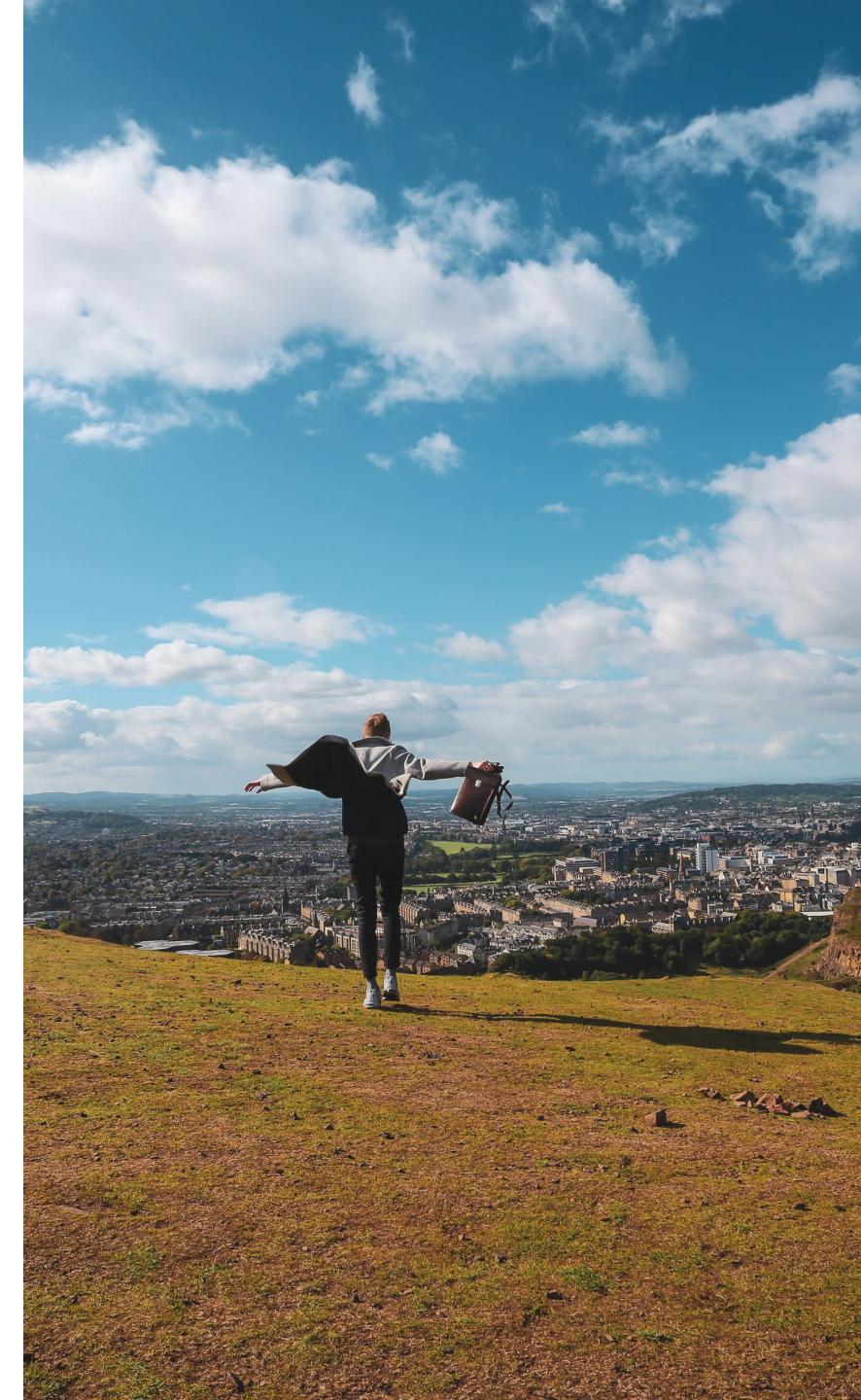
Making a successful visa application: how caseworkers assess an application

Credibility assessment (part 1)

Caseworkers will assess whether the student genuinely intends to study in the UK by looking at:

- Age, nationality and education history
- Current level of English/evidence of (previous)study (in home country)
- Previous immigration history, including visits to the UK and other countries
  - Is there evidence the student has complied with immigration rules?
  - Duration of previous visits especially if there were any extensions of stay
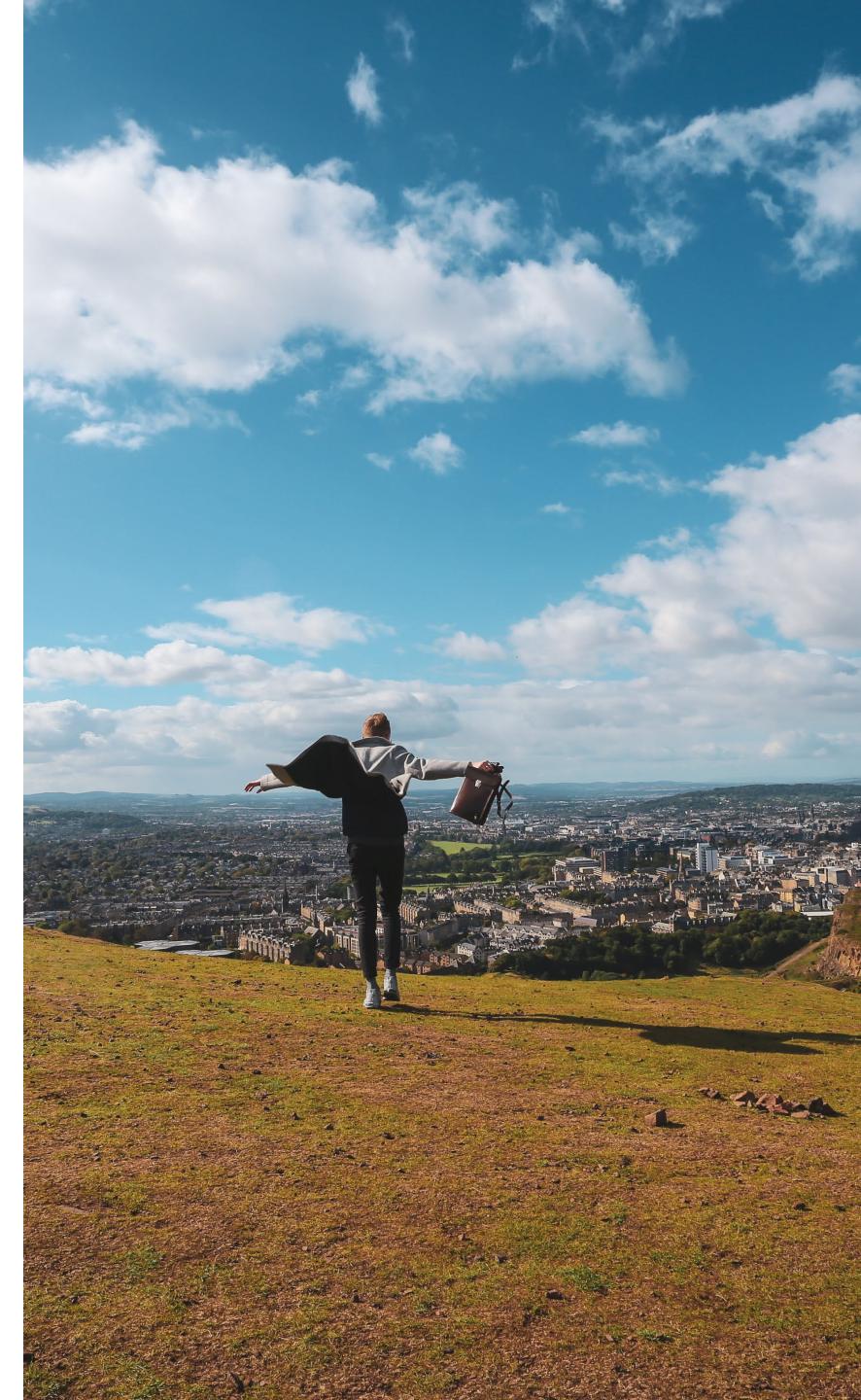
Making a successful visa application: how caseworkers assess an application

Credibility assessment (part 2)

Caseworkers will assess whether the student genuinely intends to study in the UK by looking at:

- Financial circumstances of the applicant and family members if relevant
- Who is paying for the course; are there other dependants?
- How much money is available; how were the funds acquired?

Making a successful visa application: how caseworkers assess an application

Credibility assessment (part 3)

Caseworkers will assess whether the student genuinely intends to study in the UK by looking at:

- Personal and economic circumstances in the home country
    - Is the student working or in education?
    - Do they have a stable income/property in their name?
    - Do they have any dependants?

How you can help your students

How can you help your students

- Read the caseworker guidance for the different visas

- Keep up to date with UK immigration changes (UKCISA website)

- Find out more about the student's reasons for studying in the UK and whether they have studied English previously

- Remind students to get documents translated where necessary

How can you help your students

- Make sure the following information is on the course confirmation letter:
- Course start and end date; not just the number of weeks of study
- Student's current level of English and the expected level upon completion of the course
- Total cost of the course and amount paid to date (note: no need for fees to be paid in full)
- Accommodation and transfer details especially for under 18s

How can you help your students

When the application is being processed:

- Look out for email requests for further information from UKVI
- Provide all requested documents even if already submitted
- Keep the centre informed of any visa processing delays

When decision has been received:

- Make sure students have created their UKVI account
- Check information on eVisa is correct (passport number, name, etc.)

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Visa refusals

Visa refusals

What to do next?

- Inform the centre/ school as soon as possible

Challenging a visa refusal

- No right of appeal for Standard visitor visas
  - A review can be requested in some circumstances
- Administrative Review for Short-term study visa and Student visa
  - 80GBP
  - Apply within 28 days
  - Takes up to six months

Visa refusals

Most common reasons for refusal:

- No clear reasons/ lack of documentary evidence for studying English
- No evidence of student being in employment or actively studying
- Lack of evidence of previous English language learning
- Stated income does not match financial documents
- Source of funds/ account deposits unclear

Other useful information

Other useful information

e-Gates

- EU/ EEA nationals and some other non-visa nationals, including Japanese and South Koreans, can use e-gates where available so don't get a stamp
  - advise students to keep evidence of arrival in the UK, e.g. boarding pass.
- Can be used by children aged 10 when accompanied by an adult
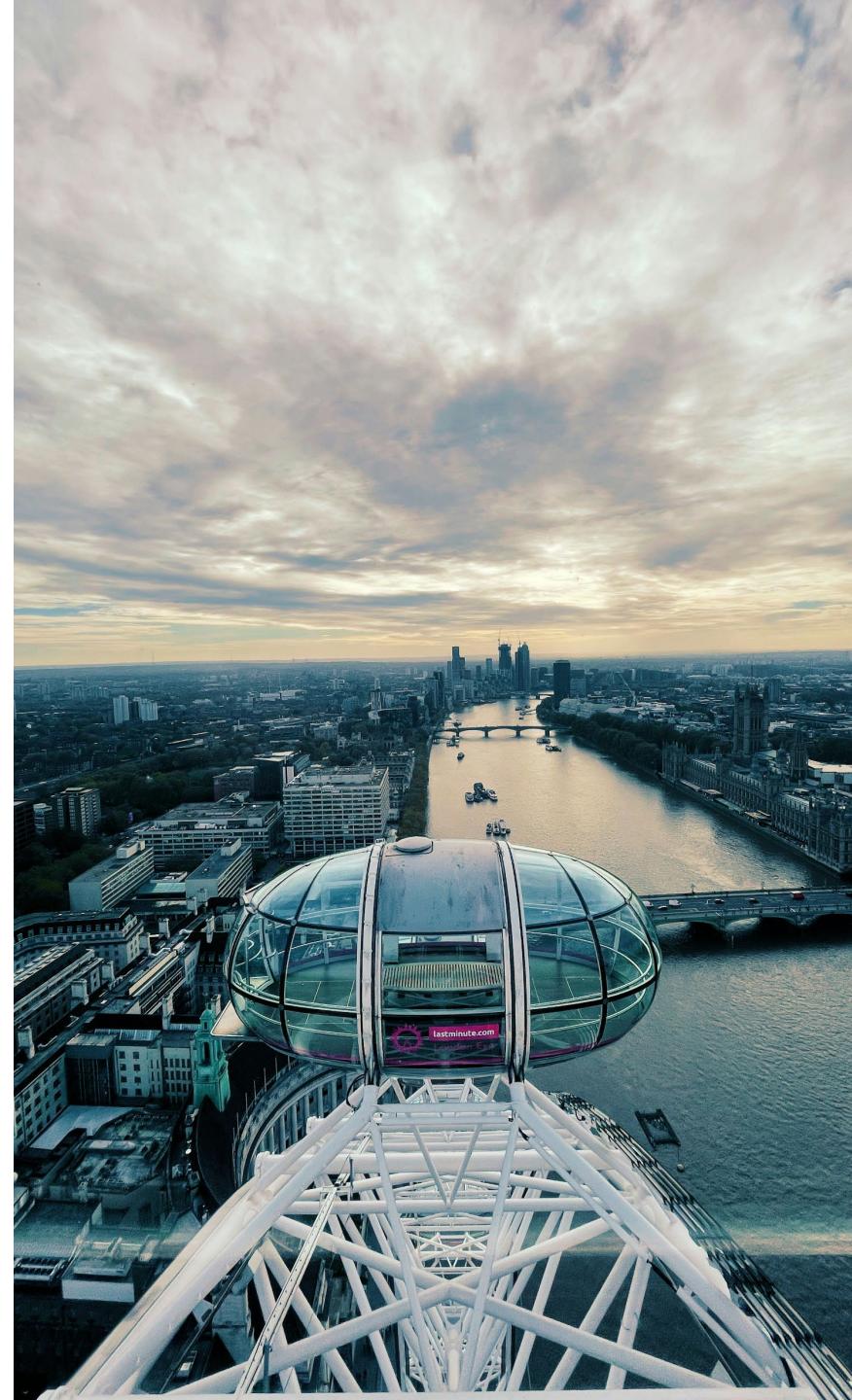
Other useful information

Good to know

- Not all visas permit study - e.g. Marriage Visitor visa and Parent of Child Student visa
- Number of hours of study: no minimum number of hours under the Standard Visitor and Short-term study; however at least 10 hours of study recommended when applying for the STSV
- Visa applications are processed in hubs located in Liverpool, Sheffield and London
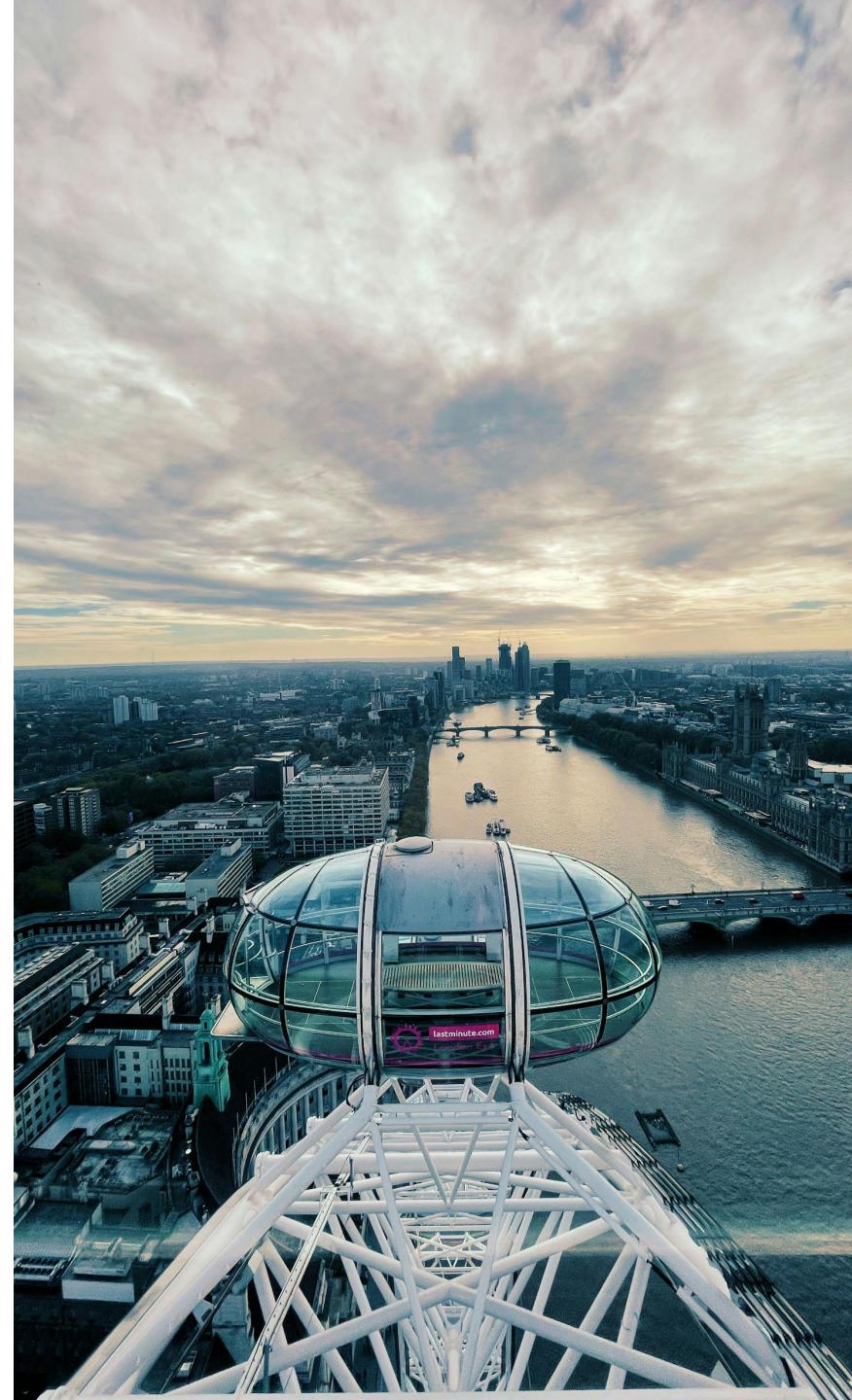
Other useful information

Good to know

Common Travel Area (CTA) between the Republic of Ireland and the UK

- Removes the border between the UK and Ireland
- Non-visa nationals arriving from Ireland are automatically allowed to stay in the UK for six months
- Students cannot travel to Ireland if they want to obtain a new visa

Other useful information

Good to know

- Long-term visa holders: should not use the visa to complete a course that is longer than six months

- Non-visa national students who are extending after six months can be questioned by Border Force Officers and may not be allowed to re-enter
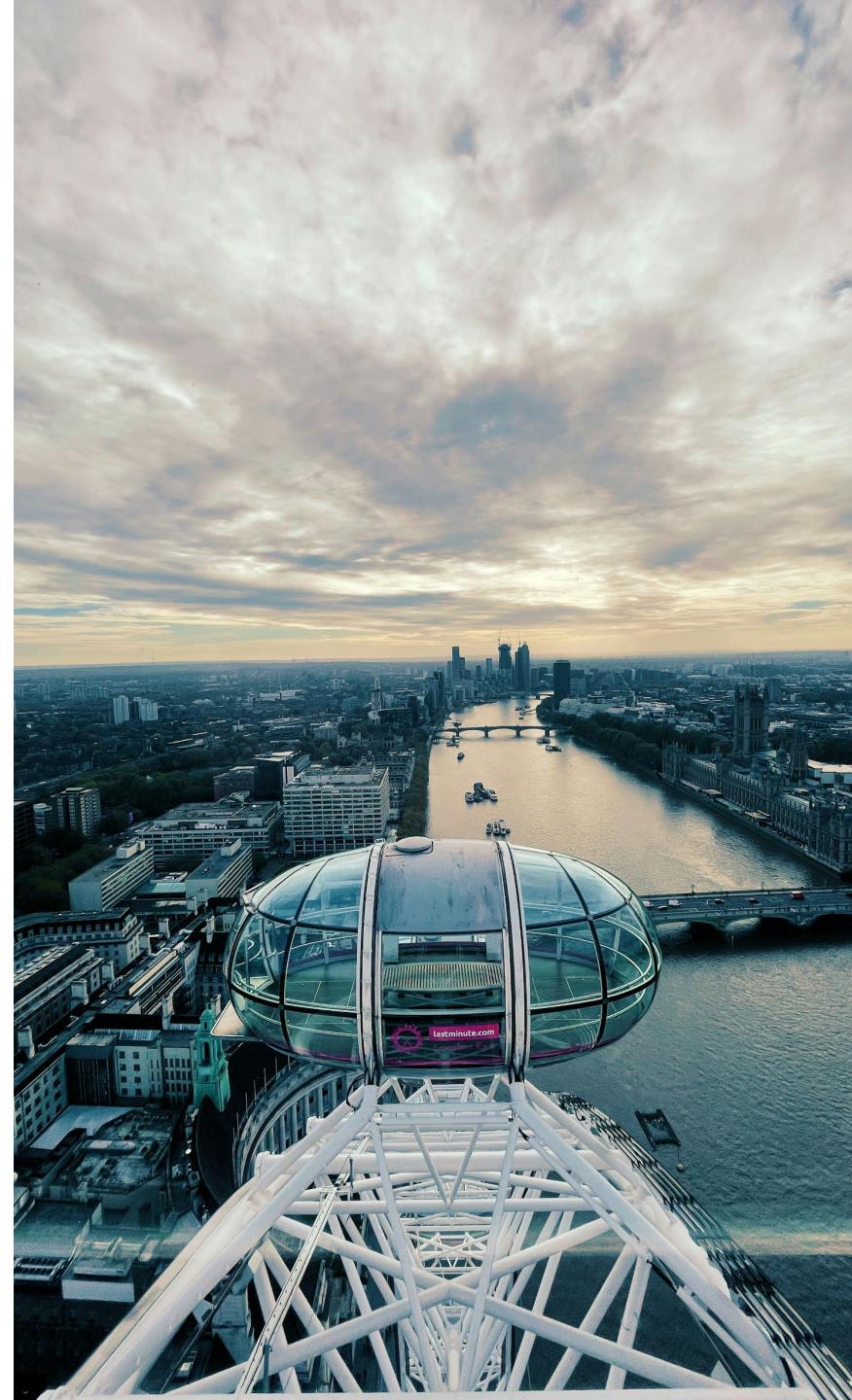
Essential resources

Essential resources

- [What visa do I need?](#)

- [Standard Visitor visa caseworker guidance](#)

- [Short-term study visa caseworker guidance](#)

- [List of visa nationals](#)

- [List of ETA (non-visa) nationals](#)

- [Apply for an ETA online](#)

- [Apply using the ETA App](#)

- [French school group travel](#)
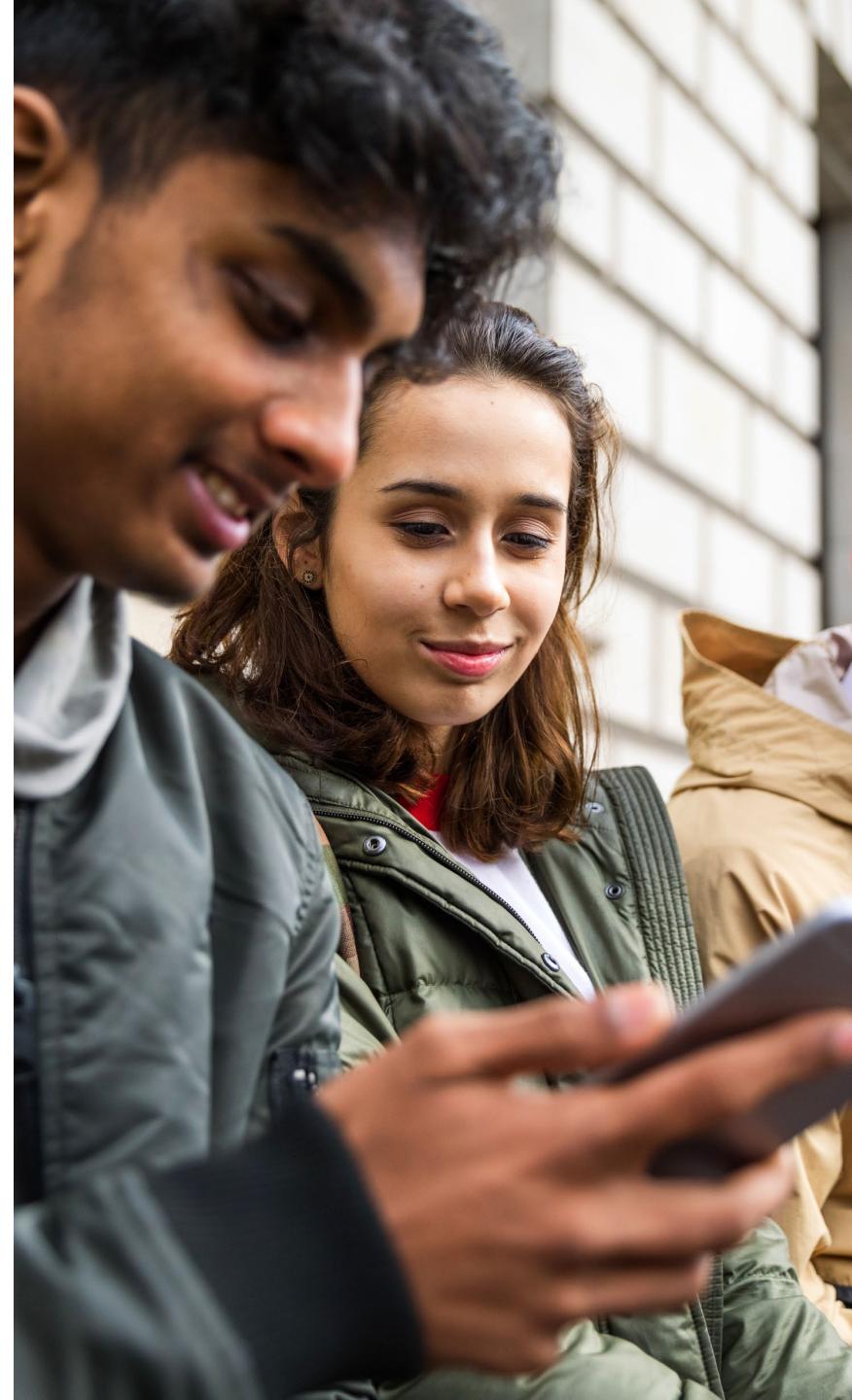
Essential resources

- UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA)

- How students can obtain a share code

- Creating a UKVI account

- Immigration rules

- Appendix Finance

- eVisa correction

- Pre- action protocol (Review of visit visa refusal)
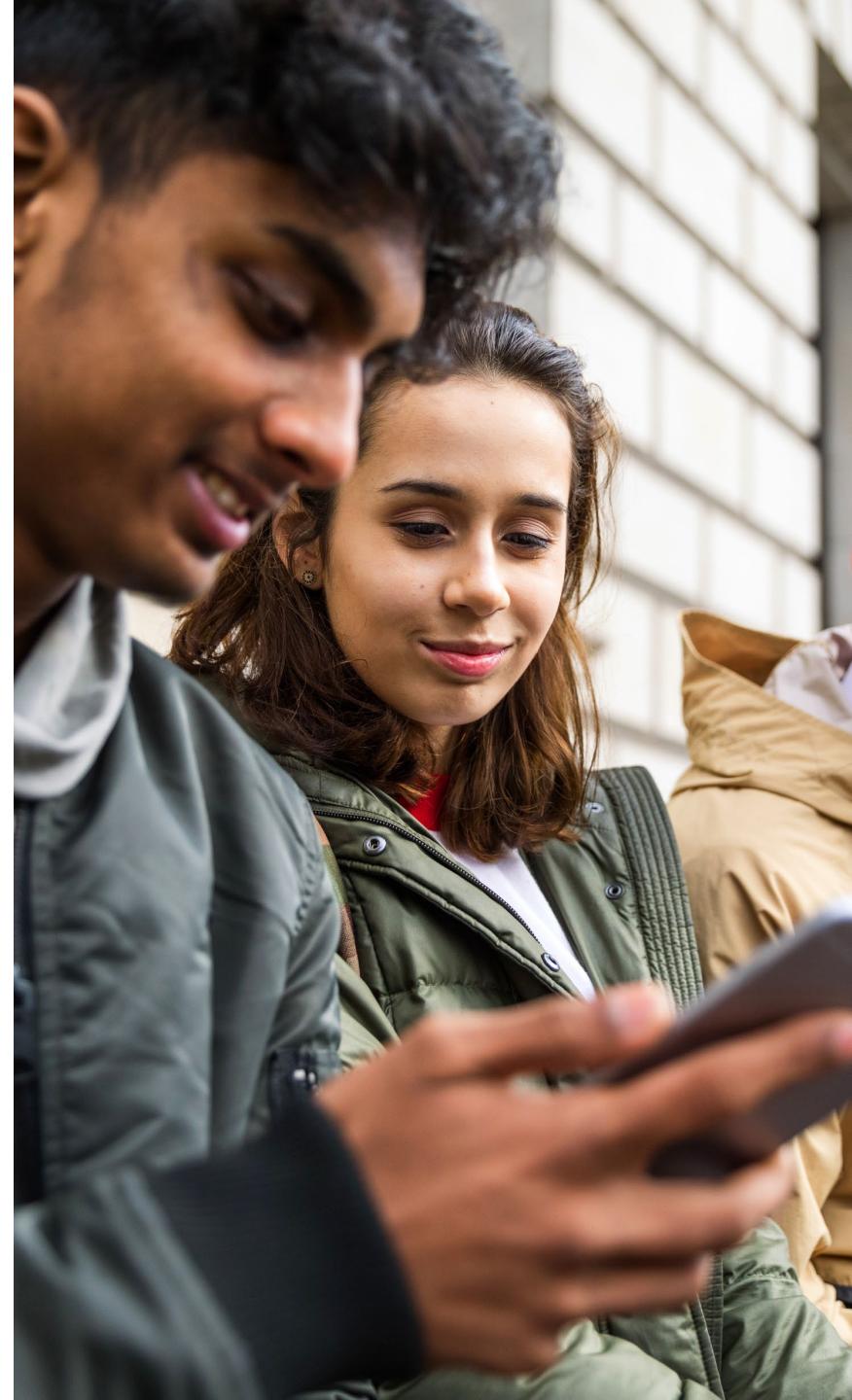
Any questions?

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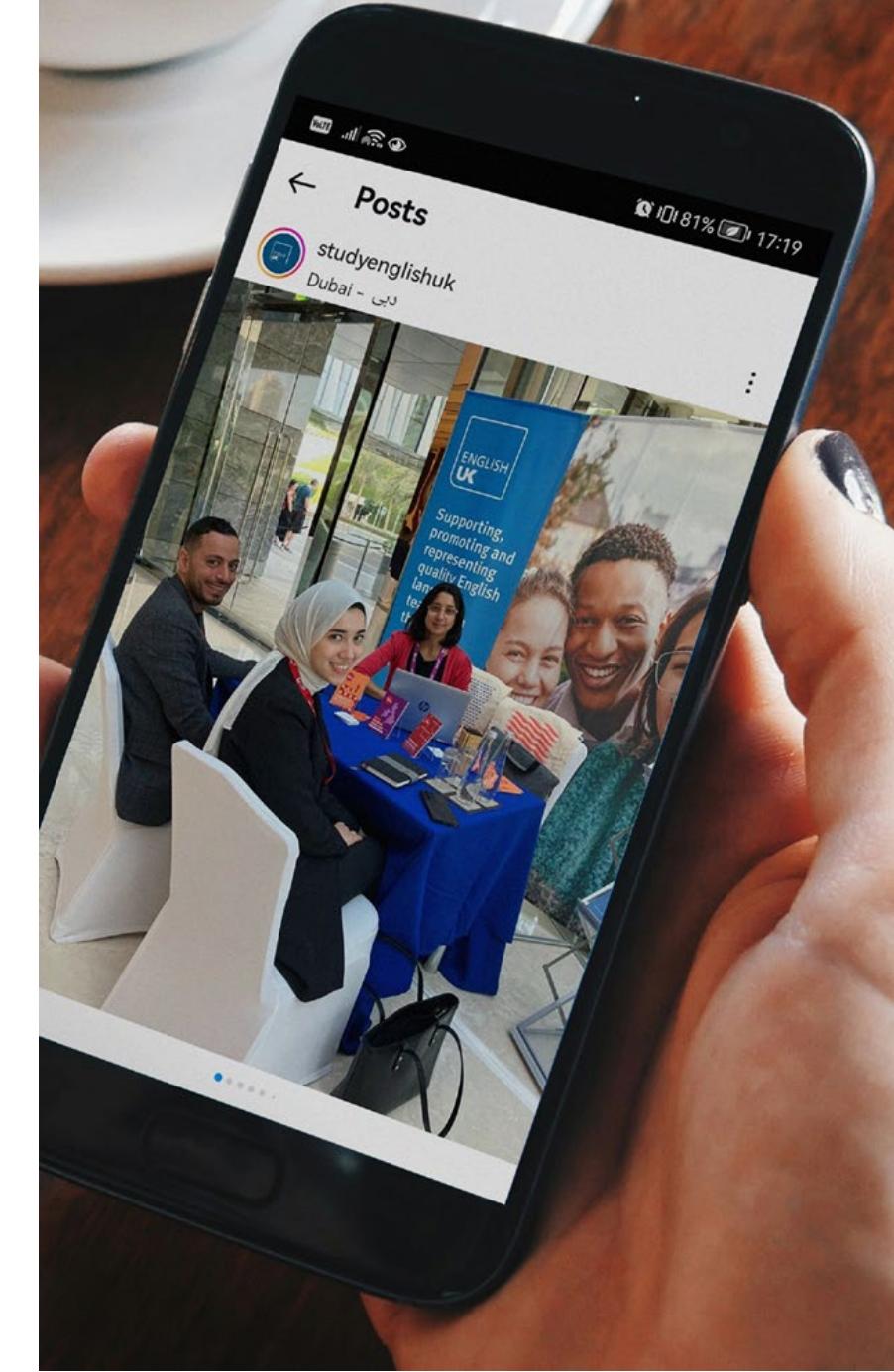
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