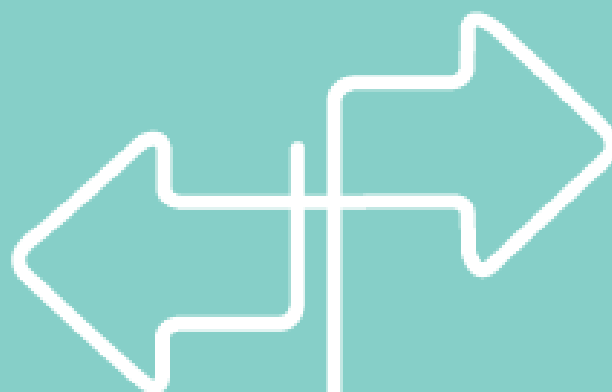


OVERSEAS STUDENTS TO EMPLOYEES

GUIDANCE



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Introduction

When looking to recruit a diverse team within NHS Finance, finance teams may choose to attend careers fairs at local universities. Due to the number of students that may be overseas students, studying in the UK on a student visa, a question may be whether the team are willing to sponsor employees.

As always, your first place to gain any information should be your organisations HR team, but if you want to find out more about the process, here is a signpost to resources and tools that you can use to find out more.

Who needs a visa?

If the student is not a UK national and is currently studying in the UK under a student visa, then they will need a visa to work. See the Gov.uk website: UK Visas and Immigration section for more information [here](#). Individuals can also check for themselves whether they need a visa [here](#).

What type of visa will be needed?

As a graduate, the student can apply for a graduate visa, which gives the individual permission to stay in the UK for at least 2 years after successfully completing a course in the UK (3 years if studies are at PHD or Doctoral level). The student must be in the UK when they apply, and further criteria apply which can be found [here](#).

The visa starts from the date the application is approved and the end date cannot be extended, however the individual can switch to a different visa. Individuals can apply for a graduate visa without a job offer.

The two popular work visas are the [Health and Care Worker visa](#) and the [Skilled Worker visa](#).

Check with your HR department as to the ONS code of the job description that would be relevant to a graduate, and then check the list of codes that fall under the Health and Care Worker visa to see if the role is an eligible health job. If not, any job roles will need to be checked against the skilled worker visa.

What is a skilled worker visa?

A Skilled Worker visa allows an individual to come to or stay in the UK to do an eligible job with an approved employer. The individual must have a confirmed job offer before they apply for a skilled worker visa, and to qualify they must:

- work for a UK employer that's been approved by the Home Office
- have a 'certificate of sponsorship' from the employer with information about the role offered in the UK
- offered a job that's on the list of eligible occupations
- be paid a minimum salary - how much depends on the role

The individual must also be able to speak, read, write and understand English.

The visa lasts up to 5 years and can be extended. The individual will need to apply to extend or update the visa when it expires or if they change jobs or employer. They can apply for a visa up to 3 months before the day they are due to start work. This date will be listed on the certificate of sponsorship.

Is my organisation licensed to be able to sponsor employees and provide a certificate of sponsorship?

There is a Home Office approved employer list that can be accessed [here](#). This lists all organisations that are currently approved and able to issue a Certificate of Sponsorship to an employee. You can also check the adverts that have been recently sent out by your organisation.

If your organisation is approved, they may include the following within any recruitment adverts:

"Applications from job seekers who require current Skilled worker sponsorship to work in the UK are welcome and will be considered alongside all other applications."

If your organisation is not approved, they may include the following within the recruitment adverts that are posted:

"We do not offer a Certificate of Sponsorship, any applications which require sponsorship will not be considered."

My organisation is licensed, is the answer then yes, we can sponsor an employee to work within our finance department?

Not necessarily. The job that the individual is applying for must also be on the list of eligible occupations and meet with specified salary thresholds, which includes entry level allowances.

Under the skilled worker visa, the following occupation code headings may apply:

2421 - relates to qualified accountants and can include studying accountants

3537 – relates to accounting technicians.

Once you have a job description that you think would be suitable for a recently graduated candidate it would be worth checking with your HR department as to whether they feel that the role would fit within an eligible occupation code and meet with the specified salary thresholds. Details of the ONS occupation codes can be found [here](#). Eligible occupations under the skilled worker visa can be found [here](#).

What is the minimum salary of a role?

The minimum salary for the type of work that the individual will be doing is whichever is the highest out of the following 3 options:

- The relevant minimum salary threshold for the visa route.
- The applicable hourly rate requirement.
- The occupation's going rate for the type of work being undertaken

You can check the going rate for eligible occupations [here](#).

For Occupation Code 2421 - Chartered and certified accountants, the going rate as at Aug 2026 is £34,440 per year (£17.66 per hour). For Occupation Code 3537 - Financial and accounting technicians, the going rate is £34,090 (£17.48 per hour). As a recent graduate and if the role includes professional training, the role can pay between 70% and 90% of the usual going rate of the salary. Check with your HR team for eligibility.

If eligible, this then allows for entry at the Agenda for Change Band 4 level.

What if the student says that they will have a graduate visa?

The graduate visa is more straight forward (although the graduate will need their education provider to confirm that they have successfully completed their studies, the course needs to be eligible and they need to have studied for a certain period of time) but as this is only valid for stays of 2 years, HR departments would need to be consulted re appointing an individual with a visa that lasts for 2 years (or 3 if their studies were at post grad level) to a substantive post.

Speak with your HR department to see if they would be accepting of a graduate visa with the caveat that within the 2 years the individual would need to apply to convert to a skilled worker visa.

Is there a cost to sponsoring an employee?

Yes, there is a cost to the organisation of initially setting up as an approved employer, and then a charge will be incurred each time a Certificate of Sponsorship is issued. There is also a cost to the employee who will need to:

- pay the application fee - the standard fee ranges from £819 to £1,865 depending upon individual circumstances
- pay the healthcare surcharge for each year of their stay (if skilled worker visa not Health and Care worker visa) - usually £1,035 per year
- have enough personal savings to support themselves initially - usually need to have at least £1,270 available to cover the first month (unless exempt) (*all quoted rates as at Aug 2026*)

Check with your HR team re your organisational policy, as organisations can choose to cover the individuals cost within the first month, and that must be stated on the certificate of sponsorship under the 'sponsor certifies maintenance' section, under 'Additional data'.

There is a lot of information to work through, and therefore we would always advise that you seek support from your HR team, who may have experience of this in relation to clinical colleagues and difficult to recruit to roles. On the positive side, once you have looked into this and established a process for graduate entry level jobs, you will be able to refer to this when at careers fairs and hopefully we will be able to attract diverse, talented individuals into the NHS Finance family.