

A UK visa guide for overseas academics



UK Visas
& Immigration



There are several visa options for overseas academics wanting to visit the UK. This leaflet will help you decide which is the right option for you. Further information on visa types and how to apply is available at www.gov.uk/ukvi

Temporary worker

Academics can use the Tier 5 (Temporary Worker - Government Authorised Exchange) category if they are being sponsored by a participating organisation under an approved scheme to come to the UK:

- For work experience or training purposes; or
- To take part in an Overseas Government Language Programme; or
- To carry out collaborative research or take up a fellowship through an approved government authorised exchange scheme.

If you are issued a visa in this category, you will be granted entry for up to 12 or 24 months, depending on the purpose of the approved scheme.

You must have a certificate of sponsorship from a licensed sponsor before you can apply to come to the UK to work under these arrangements. Your work, training or research in the UK must relate to the work of your sponsor organisation.

A list of approved schemes, and their sponsoring organisations, can be found at www.gov.uk/tier-5-government-authorized-exchange

Please note that if your UK sponsor has not agreed to certify your maintenance, you must show evidence that you personally have the necessary funds.

Standard visitor (academic)

If you are not a sponsored academic, you may be eligible to apply as an 'academic visitor' under the Standard Visitor visa route if you are:

- Highly qualified within your own field of expertise; and
- Currently working in that field at an academic institution of higher education overseas (not including a private businesses);

And want to visit the UK for up to 12 months to:

- Take part in formal exchange arrangements with a UK counterpart. You should provide evidence that an exchange has been agreed by both institutions and that it will lead to a reciprocal visit by a UK academic to your home institution. Such exchanges can involve some collaborative research.
- Carry out independent research for your own purposes, if you are on sabbatical leave from your home institution. Although this independent research may include some

interaction with staff at a UK university or use of its facilities, you would not be allowed to take part in any collaborative research with UK-based academics, for example join a research group in the UK or take part in a research project hosted by the UK university.

- Take part in research, teaching or clinical practice provided this does not amount to filling a permanent teaching post. This activity only applies to medical doctors and dentists.

Further details are available at www.gov.uk/standard-visitor-visa/overview

Standard visitor (business)

If you are an academic but do not meet the above criteria, you may be eligible to apply as a 'business visitor' under the Standard Visitor visa route.

This entitles you to travel to the UK for up to six months to undertake a permitted business activity, for example:

- Attend meetings, conferences, seminars, interviews; or
- Give a one-off or short series of talks and speeches provided these are not organised as commercial events and will not make a profit for the organiser; or
- Negotiate and sign deals and contracts; or
- Attend trade fairs, for promotional work only. The visitor must not directly sell their products; or
- Carry out site visits and inspections; or
- Gather information for their employment overseas; or

- Be briefed on the requirements of a UK-based customer, provided any work for the customer is done outside of the UK; or
- Share knowledge or advise on an international project that is being led from the UK, provided the visitor is not carrying out research in the UK.

Full details about permitted business activities are available at www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-appendix-v-visitor-rules

Permitted paid engagement

Academics who are highly qualified within their field of expertise may come to the UK to do specific paid engagements for up to one month as a visitor, without having to be sponsored under the points-based system, if they are invited by a UK organisation to:

- Examine students and/or participate in or chair selection panels as part of the organisation's quality assurance processes; or
- Give lectures in their subject area, provided this does not amount to filling a teaching position for the host organisation.

Further details are available at www.gov.uk/permitted-paid-engagement-visa/overview

PhD students

If you are a PhD student who wishes to go to the UK to complete research for your thesis, you will not qualify under the routes above.

Instead, you may wish to consider applying for a

short-term study visa which is valid for up to six months. This allows you to carry out a short period of research as part of a degree course if you are studying abroad.

You can also consider applying for a Tier 4 study visa if your research is part of your PhD degree course overseas and will take longer than six months.

Further details are available at www.gov.uk/study-visit-visa/overview or www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa

Further guidance for applicants

When applying, you should detail evidence of your proposed activities, for example your research plan, information about the formal exchange under which you are travelling to the UK, or any funding arrangements through organisations such as the Newton Fund.

Those wishing to come to the UK for more than six months may also require a tuberculosis certificate.

If you have a question not answered in this leaflet or online, please visit www.gov.uk/contact-ukvi-outside-uk

