



SHEPHERD+ WEDDERBURN

HANDY GUIDE

Immigration in sport

Our immigration experts are well-equipped to advise sports clubs, sports organisations and sportspeople. Whether it's long-term strategy or just a one-off immigration issue, our team can help. Some of the typical areas we advise on include:

- International Sportsperson visas for professional sportspeople and coaches (and guidance for the families of sportspeople);
- Skilled Worker visas for ancillary staff;
- Sportsperson and Skilled Worker sponsor licence acquisition, maintenance and compliance; and
- Undertaking sport and esports activities in the UK as a visitor.

International Sportsperson visas

All non-British non-Irish sportspeople and coaches need an International Sportsperson visa to work professionally in the UK. Sportspeople and coaches must first be 'sponsored' by their respective club or organisation. Sponsorship is only given to applicants endorsed by their respective governing body, and each endorsing body will set different criteria for sponsorship.

For example, Football Association (FA) is the endorsing body for football players in England. The FA endorsement criteria are points-based. Players need to score at least 15 points in the following categories to secure an endorsement:

- International appearances and FIFA ranking;
- Domestic club appearances;
- Continental club appearances;
- Final league position of the player's last club;
- Continental progression of the player's last club;
- League quality of the player's last club.

Our immigration team can advise your organisation on the requirements for International Sportsperson sponsorship, help with the assignation of Certificates of Sponsorship, and support your international talent through their visa applications.

Skilled Worker visas

Like sportspeople, non-playing staff that are not British or Irish will likely need to be sponsored in order to work in the UK, unless they have another visa. The UK's flagship work visa is the Skilled Worker visa.

For an individual to apply for a Skilled Worker visa, they must first be sponsored by a licensed employer. Skilled Workers can only be sponsored to work in certain roles outlined on the Government website in [Appendix Skilled Occupations](#).

They must also be paid a minimum salary that is dictated by the role they are sponsored for. Under the current rules in place prior to Spring 2024, most Skilled Workers must be paid the higher of either £26,200 or the “going rate” for that job. Going rates are specified alongside the long list of occupations in Appendix Skilled Occupations. From Spring 2024, this will rise to the higher of either £38,700 or the going rate.

We regularly assist sponsors across all sectors with advice on Skilled Worker sponsorship and guide new recruits through the visa application process.

Sponsor licences

Organisations recruiting international sportspeople, coaches or ancillary staff must first obtain a sponsor licence. To sponsor playing or coaching staff organisations must first make sure their organisation has an endorsement from their sport’s Governing Body approved by the Home Office.

Having a licence in place ensures you can respond quickly to international recruitment needs. Even if you do not intend to recruit now, it is prudent to get a sponsor licence in place so you can act quickly in future when you identify an international candidate for a particular role.

Our immigration team can advise on the requirements and process for obtaining an International Sportsperson or Skilled Worker sponsorship. We can help with the preparation and submission of the sponsor licence application to the Home Office, and if your sponsored licence visa application is refused, our expert immigration solicitors can also provide advice and guidance.

We also regularly assist current sponsor licence holders with sponsor duties compliance. Read about sponsor licence refusals and compliance [here](#).

Sport and esports activities on UK visitor visa

While visit visas are generally used for holidays, and have a general prohibition on working in the UK, sports competitors can enter the UK on a visit visa to undertake the following permitted activities:

- Participating individually or as part of a team in a sports tournament or event
- Making personal appearances and undertaking promotional activities
- Taking part in trials, provided this is not in front of a paying audience
- Taking part in short-term training provided they are not paid by a UK sporting body, and
- Joining an amateur team or club to gain experience in a particular sport, if they are an amateur in that sport.

Although the visit visa generally prohibits receiving payment from UK sources, there is an exception to allow sportspeople to receive and reasonable expenses to cover the cost of their travel and subsistence. UK immigration law does not allow sportspeople to receive additional payments for appearing at events, unless they have been invited to the UK by a ‘sports organisation, agent, or broadcaster based in the UK’.

Esports players travelling to the UK can also participate in esports competitions on the UK visitor visa. Players that have been invited to the UK by a ‘creative organisation, agent or broadcaster based in the UK’ can be paid for appearing and performing at events. Competitors who expect to receive these payments will need to obtain a letter from the organisation inviting them to the UK, and visa nationals must provide the letter as supporting evidence with their visa application.

Our immigration team can advise on visitor visa eligibility and requirements for overseas players and competitors. We also regularly assist with the preparation and submission of visitor visa applications.

Key contacts



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