

Global Mobility: How UK Employers Tackle Immigration and Compliance Shifts



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Since Brexit, the UK's employment law and immigration framework have undergone significant transformation, prompting both employers and advisers to rethink their strategies and responses. The requirement for a greater proportion of the workforce to hold visas has elevated sponsor licence compliance, fee management, and right to work requirements to central pieces of HR strategy for international businesses. In this shifting environment, immigration advice to organisations has become not just technical, but also highly strategic and tailored. This means working closely with employers to anticipate policy changes, build resilience against regulatory shifts, and monitor new compliance risks. The pace and complexity of legislative updates have led HR professionals and advisers to emphasise agile workforce planning and contingency measures that can absorb future rule changes with minimum disruption. Against this backdrop, employers are grappling with a range of pressing global mobility issues, from escalating costs and heightened compliance demands, to digital verification challenges and the strategic recruitment of international talent, which are explored in depth below.



Increase to Immigration Fees

One of the most pressing issues in recent years has been the increase in UK immigration fees and sponsorship costs. Employers are grappling with fee hikes, a 7% visa fee increase in April 2025, a 66% jump in the Immigration Health Surcharge in February, and a further 32% rise in the Immigration Skills Charge projected for next year.



Maintaining a Sponsor Licence

Coupled with these rising costs, the administrative burden of maintaining a sponsor licence remains substantial. Organisations are required to maintain meticulous records and report changes through the Sponsorship Management System, with compliance being more closely scrutinised than ever. Non-compliance may lead to licence suspension or hefty penalties. To cope, employers are rethinking workforce plans, splitting costs with employees where permitted and ensuring contractual clarity around fee recovery policies. Additionally, many are now delegating sponsorship responsibilities to legal experts, reflecting a growing need for specialised support as regulations evolve. There is also a trend toward limiting sponsorship to critical vacancies and exploring alternative visa routes to reduce dependence on sponsorship and improve workforce flexibility.



Introduction of mandatory digital ID cards

The government's plan to introduce mandatory digital ID cards is unlikely to fundamentally alter compliance procedures, given that digital verification is already standard for non-UK and Irish nationals. However, some practical challenges remain, primarily the absence of a physical document as a backup in case of technical difficulties with the eVisa system. This gap can have far-reaching implications, affecting not just employment verification but also access to welfare services, housing, and travel. For a successful transition, the digital system must be robust, accessible, and reliable for all stakeholders.



Elimination of visa fees for elite global talent

There is speculation about the impact of proposals to eliminate visa fees for elite global talent. Sectors like technology, which depend heavily on high-skilled migrants, stand to benefit substantially. The Global Talent visa is already popular due to its flexibility and its pathway to settlement for recognised sector leaders. Removing visa fees would make the UK even more attractive for international talent, helping employers stay competitive globally and streamlining the recruitment of top candidates in critical sectors.

This is a particularly salient point given shifts in US immigration rules that have increased costs and complexity for skilled migrants.



Cross-border employment

Cross-border employment transitions remain a legal minefield for businesses. Each country operates its own complex regime of immigration and employment regulations, with significant variations in eligibility criteria, sponsorship obligations, document requirements, and approval timeframes. Delays and unpredictable processes can disrupt business plans and employee mobility. Failure to anticipate country-specific laws and meet legal timelines may result in penalties, revocation of work permissions, or loss of essential personnel. It is imperative that employers invest in multi-jurisdictional expertise and plan for a range of regulatory contingencies.

In response to global shifts in immigration policy, companies must continuously review and adapt workforce planning strategies. This entails regular monitoring of regulatory updates, integrating ongoing sponsor licence reviews and right to work compliance into HR routines, and developing alternative talent pipelines to prevent over-reliance on sponsored workers. Proactive contingency planning, comprehensive HR training, and specialist advice are essential in maintaining operational flexibility and compliance. As immigration remains highly political and subject to swift change, these strategies will help organisations remain resilient and well-positioned to navigate UK and international employment challenges.



Conclusion

The post-Brexit landscape demands that employers and advisers remain vigilant, nimble, and strategic in managing immigration and employment law risks. By responding proactively to rising costs, more rigorous compliance expectations, and evolving digital verification processes, organisations can attract and retain talent while safeguarding themselves against future regulatory disruptions. Continual adaptation, through planning, expert support, and investment in compliance, will be the cornerstone of success in the years ahead.

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