

XIPHIAS Immigration

PROGRAMME BROCHURE

CORPORATE MOBILITY | UNITED KINGDOM

Sponsoring Yourself Through a UK Company — How the Skilled Worker Route Works

There is no Home Office self-sponsorship visa. A UK company holds a sponsor licence and employs its owner-director as a Skilled Worker. How it works, what it costs and how the Home Office tests it.

TIMELINE

Two stages: sponsor licence, then visa

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At a glance

COUNTRY **United Kingdom**	ROUTE **Corporate Mobility**
TIMELINE **Two stages: sponsor licence, then visa**	COMPANY STRUCTURE **UK private limited company holding a Skilled Worker sponsor licence**
OWNERSHIP **The company may be owned by the person it sponsors**	OFFICE **Real UK business operations to support a genuine role**
BANK ACCOUNT **Yes, after incorporation (subject to bank checks)**	LAST UPDATED **1 October 2026**

Overview

"Self-sponsorship" is a widely used name for a structure, not a Home Office visa. The Home Office does not use the term. It describes two separate things: a **UK company that holds a sponsor licence**, and a **Skilled Worker** visa for a person that company employs, where that person also owns or directs the company.

The Home Office does not prohibit an owner-director being sponsored by their company. It does examine the arrangement closely, and the requirements have risen. Since 22 July 2025 a sponsored role must be at **degree level (RQF 6)** and pay at least **£41,700 a year or the going rate for the job, whichever is higher**. Since 8 January 2026 the worker needs English at **B2**.

This page sets out how the structure works, what it costs in Home Office fees, how the Home Office tests it, and what makes a case viable.

How the structure works

1. **The company.** A UK private limited company is incorporated at Companies House and runs a real business.
2. **The sponsor licence.** The company applies to the Home Office for a Skilled Worker sponsor licence.
3. **The Certificate of Sponsorship.** Once licensed, the company assigns a Certificate of Sponsorship for a genuine, degree-level role.
4. **The visa.** The individual applies for a Skilled Worker visa using that certificate.
5. **Sponsor duties.** The company keeps its licence obligations for as long as it sponsors anyone.

Each step is decided on its own merits. A licence can be refused, and a visa can be refused even where a licence has been granted.

What the role must meet

- **Skill level:** RQF 6 (degree level) or above. The minimum was raised from RQF 3 on 22 July 2025, and around 180 occupations lost eligibility.
- **Salary:** at least **£41,700** a year, or the going rate for the occupation if that is higher.
- **English:** CEFR level **B2** at the visa stage, since 8 January 2026.
- **Shortage occupations:** the Immigration Salary List is being replaced by a Temporary Shortage List of about 50 medium-skilled occupations, most of them expiring at the end of 2026. New applicants in those occupations cannot bring dependants.

How the Home Office tests a company that sponsors its owner

The Home Office's published guidance addresses this structure directly.

- **Sponsor guidance Part 1, paragraph L8.8.** The Home Office considers whether "your organisation has been established, or exists, mainly to facilitate the entry or residence of a person who would not otherwise have permission to work in the UK."
- **Paragraph L8.9.** Its worked example is a foreign national who "registers a business with Companies House while resident outside the UK", where "it is considered unlikely that the company would otherwise exist if it were not for the foreign national's wish to enter the UK."
- **Paragraph SK3.7.** "If you assign a CoS for a role which is not genuine, we will refuse the worker's application and we will revoke your licence."
- **The genuine-vacancy test in the High Court.** In *R (Prestige Social Care Services Ltd) v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2025] EWHC 2860 (Admin), decided on 2 December 2025, the court confirmed that a vacancy can be found not genuine **without any finding of dishonesty**. It is enough that the role is not "appropriate to the business in light of its business model, business plan and scale."

In practice, a newly incorporated company with no trading history, no other employees and a single director-shareholder has real difficulty showing that a degree-level role paying £41,700 or more is proportionate to its scale. It can fail that test without any suggestion of dishonesty, and the consequence is both a refused visa and a revoked licence.

What makes a case viable

The cases that hold up share one feature: the business would exist, and would need the role, without the visa. In practice that means:

- **Real trading activity:** customers, contracts, revenue or committed funding, in place before the licence application.
- **A role that fits the business:** a degree-level job that the business model and plan genuinely require, at a salary the business can sustain from its revenue or funding.
- **Scale behind the role:** operations, a plan and finances that make a £41,700-plus salary proportionate.
- **A real business behind the UK company:** for example an established Indian or UAE business serving UK customers through its UK company.
- **Compliance from day one:** payroll, right-to-work checks, HR records and reporting that meet sponsor duties.

XIPHIAS assesses a case against these tests before any Home Office fee is paid. Where it is not viable, we say so and look at the alternatives: the **UK Expansion Worker visa** for an overseas business that has not yet started trading in the UK and is opening its first UK branch, or the **Global Talent visa** for leaders in research, digital technology and the arts, which needs no sponsor.

Costs: official Home Office fees

Fee	Amount
Sponsor licence, small or charitable sponsor	£611
Sponsor licence, medium or large sponsor	£1,682
Certificate of Sponsorship	£525 per worker
Immigration Skills Charge, small or charitable sponsor	£480 for the first 12 months, then £240 per additional six months
Immigration Skills Charge, medium or large sponsor	£1,320 for the first 12 months, then £660 per additional six months
Visa fee, applying from outside the UK	£819 for up to three years; £1,618 for more than three years
Visa fee, applying inside the UK	£943 for up to three years; £1,865 for more than three years
Immigration Health Surcharge	£1,035 per adult per year; £776 per child under 18 per year

The sponsor licence, Certificate of Sponsorship and Immigration Skills Charge are charged to the sponsoring company. Over five years the Immigration Skills Charge comes to **£2,400** for a small sponsor and **£6,600** for a medium or large one.

Worked example. A small company sponsoring one worker for five years, with the worker applying from outside the UK, pays the Home Office: sponsor licence £611, Certificate of Sponsorship £525, Immigration Skills Charge £2,400, visa fee £1,618 and Immigration Health Surcharge £5,175 (five years at £1,035), a total of **£10,329** before the worker's salary.

Company formation, accountancy, legal and XIPHIAS professional fees are separate and are not Home Office fees.

Timeline

The structure runs in two stages, each decided by the Home Office: the sponsor licence first, then the visa. Before either, allow time to build the trading evidence that makes the case viable; this is often the longest part. XIPHIAS confirms the current processing position for both Home Office stages when we plan your case.

Family

On a degree-level role, the worker's partner and children can join as dependants. Each pays their own visa fee and the Immigration Health Surcharge of £1,035 per adult and £776 per child for each year of the visa.

Settlement

Under the current rules, the Skilled Worker route leads to **indefinite leave to remain after five years**, provided the company keeps its licence and continues to sponsor the role throughout.

As at 1 October 2026, the earned-settlement proposal in the May 2025 immigration White Paper, which would lengthen the standard qualifying period to ten years, has not been legislated. The consultation closed on 12 February 2026, and Statement of Changes HC 259 (9 July 2026) made no change to settlement periods. Separately, from 26 March 2027 the Home Office will require English at B2 for settlement on certain routes (HC 1619). XIPHIAS confirms the position for your route before you apply.

Risks

- **Refusal and revocation together.** A role found not genuine leads to refusal of the visa and revocation of the licence (SK3.7), which also affects anyone else the company sponsors.
- **No dishonesty needed.** A role can fail on proportionality to the business model, plan and scale alone (*Prestige Social Care*, 2025).
- **Salary commitment.** The company must pay at least £41,700, or the going rate if higher, for the whole period of sponsorship.
- **Rule changes.** Skill level, salary, English and fees all rose between July 2025 and April 2026. XIPHIAS checks every figure on the date we file.

Fees and rules on this page reflect the official sources listed below as at 1 October 2026.

Key benefits

- Uses the established Skilled Worker route through a UK company you control.
- Leads to settlement after five years under the current rules.
- Partners and children can join as dependants on a degree-level role.
- The same licence lets the company sponsor other skilled staff as it grows.

Requirements

- A UK company with a genuine business model, a credible business plan and the scale to support the role.
- A Skilled Worker sponsor licence held by the company.
- A genuine role at degree level (RQF 6) or above.
- A salary of at least £41,700, or the going rate for the occupation if higher.
- English at CEFR level B2.
- A Certificate of Sponsorship assigned by the company.

When this route may not fit

- A company set up mainly to obtain a visa for its owner (sponsor guidance L8.8 and L8.9).
- A role that is not appropriate to the company's business model, business plan and scale.
- A role below degree level (RQF 6), or a salary below £41,700 or the going rate.
- English below CEFR level B2.

How the process works

1. **Test viability first**
   Assess the business model, plan and scale against the Home Office's genuineness tests before paying any fees.

2. **Incorporate and build the business**
   Register the UK company and put real trading activity, funding and staff in place.

3 **Apply for the sponsor licence**
The company applies to the Home Office (£611 small or charitable sponsor; £1,682 medium or large).

4 **Assign the Certificate of Sponsorship**
The company assigns a Certificate of Sponsorship (£525) for a genuine RQF 6 role paying at least £41,700.

5 **Skilled Worker application**
The worker applies with B2 English and pays the visa fee and the Immigration Health Surcharge.

6 **Sponsor compliance**
The company meets its sponsor duties throughout, towards settlement after five years.

Keeping the structure compliant

- Pay the sponsored salary through UK payroll, at or above the required level, for the whole period of sponsorship.
- Keep sponsor records up to date and report changes to the Home Office as the licence requires.
- Grow the company's trading activity, customers and staff; the Home Office looks at the role against the business's scale.
- Keep Companies House filings, accounts and HMRC registrations current.
- Plan towards settlement after five years under the current rules.

Document checklist

The company

- Certificate of incorporation and company records
- Business plan and financial projections
- Evidence of trading: contracts, customers, invoices or committed funding
- Organisation chart showing where the role sits in the business

The worker

- Valid passport
- Degree certificate and evidence of the skills the role needs
- English language evidence at CEFR level B2
- Employment contract at or above £41,700, or the going rate if higher

Dependants

- Marriage or partnership evidence
- Children's birth certificates

Questions clients ask

Is there a UK self-sponsorship visa?

No. The Home Office has no route by that name. The term describes a structure: a UK company that holds a sponsor licence employs its owner or director under the Skilled Worker route.

Can a company sponsor its owner-director?

The Home Office does not prohibit it. It does test whether the company exists mainly to bring that person to the UK (sponsor guidance L8.8 and L8.9) and whether the role is genuine (SK3.7).

What salary must the company pay?

At least £41,700 a year, or the going rate for the occupation if higher, for a role at degree level (RQF 6) or above.

What are the Home Office fees?

Sponsor licence £611 (small or charitable sponsor) or £1,682 (medium or large); Certificate of Sponsorship £525; Immigration Skills Charge £480 or £1,320 for the first 12 months; visa fee from £819 to £1,865 depending on length and where you apply; Immigration Health Surcharge £1,035 per adult per year.

Does it lead to settlement?

Yes. Skilled Worker leads to indefinite leave to remain after five years under the current rules, provided the company keeps its licence and continues to sponsor the role.

What makes a case succeed?

A business that would exist without the visa: real trading activity, customers or contracts, funding, and a role proportionate to the business model, plan and scale.

Are there alternatives?

Yes. An overseas business opening its first UK branch can send a senior employee on the Expansion Worker route, and leaders in research, digital technology or the arts can apply for Global Talent without a sponsor.

Important notes

- There is no Home Office visa called self-sponsorship. The visa is a Skilled Worker visa, and the company is a licensed sponsor.
- Settlement periods are unchanged as at 1 October 2026: the ten-year earned-settlement proposal from the May 2025 White Paper has not been legislated, and Statement of Changes HC 259 (9 July 2026) made no change to settlement periods.
- From 26 March 2027, English at B2 will be required for settlement on certain routes (HC 1619). XIPHIAS confirms the position for your route before you apply.
- The Temporary Shortage List covers about 50 medium-skilled occupations, most expiring at the end of 2026; new applicants in those occupations cannot bring dependants.

Official sources: GOV.UK — Skilled Worker visa; Immigration Rules — Appendix Skilled Worker; Home Office — Workers and Temporary Workers: guidance for sponsors, Part 1 (apply for a licence); Home Office — Workers and Temporary Workers: guidance for sponsors, Part 2 (sponsor a worker); Home Office — Immigration and nationality fees; GOV.UK — Immigration Skills Charge; GOV.UK — Immigration Health Surcharge; The National Archives, Find Case Law — R (Prestige Social Care Services Ltd) v SSHD, 2025 EWHC 2860 (Admin); House of Commons Library — CBP-10267.



XIPHIAS Immigration

NEXT STEP

Plan your United Kingdom application with our Dubai team

Tell us about your profile, family and timeline. We will confirm whether **Sponsoring Yourself Through a UK Company — How the Skilled Worker Route Works** fits, set out the full cost in writing and manage the application with you from start to finish.

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