

Setlwork Visa sponsorship toolkit

UK CV Checklist and cover letter guide for International Students & Talents

This guide provides you with a UK-standard CV and cover letter template along with best practices to help you stand out when applying for jobs in the UK, including visa-sponsored roles. Tailor every application to match the specific job description, highlight your achievements, and use clear formatting.

General Format

- ☐ Maximum 2 pages
- ☐ No photo
- ☐ Use British English spelling
- ☐ Clean, professional font (e.g. Arial, Calibri)
- ☐ Font size between 10–12 pt
- ☐ No graphics or icons unless job-specific (e.g. design roles)
- ☐ Reverse chronological order (latest roles first)

Contact Details

- ☐ Full name
- ☐ UK phone number
- ☐ Professional email address
- ☐ LinkedIn profile (if available)
- ☐ UK location (optional, but helps)

Professional Summary

- ☐ 2–4 lines max
- ☐ Tailored to the role
- ☐ Focus on value you bring, not what you want

Work Experience

- ☐ Job title, company, location, dates
- ☐ Bullet points start with strong action verbs
- ☐ Focused on achievements, not duties
- ☐ Quantified results where possible (e.g. "Increased efficiency by 20%")
- ☐ Relevant experiences prioritised

Education

- ☐ Degree title, institution, dates
- ☐ Any relevant modules or projects

- ☐ Grades (if strong or required)

Skills Section

- ☐ Includes hard skills relevant to the role (e.g. Excel, Python, SQL)
- ☐ Soft skills shown through achievements (not just listed)

Additional Sections (if relevant)

- ☐ Certifications
- ☐ Languages
- ☐ Volunteering
- ☐ Projects or Portfolios

Final Checks

- ☐ Tailored to a specific job using keywords from job description
- ☐ Saved as PDF (unless job ad says Word)
- ☐ Consistent formatting and bullet points
- ☐ No spelling or grammar errors
- ☐ File named professionally: e.g. firstname_lastname_CV.pdf

Pro Tip

- ☐ Use the sponsor job checker on VisaMatchUK.com to tailor your CV to employers who've hired international talent before.

CV Template

Full Name

City, Postcode | Phone Number | Email | LinkedIn URL (if applicable)

Professional Summary:

A short 3–4 line summary of your background, key skills, and career goals. Example:

Recent MSc Data Science graduate with experience in Python, SQL, and data visualization. Looking to contribute analytical and problem-solving skills to a technology-focused organisation.

Work Experience:

Job Title – Company, City | Month/Year – Month/Year

- Achievement/result-focused bullet point
- Example: Led a team of 3 to deliver a software prototype, reducing processing time by 20%

Education

Degree – University, City | Month/Year – Month/Year

- Modules: X, Y, Z
- Dissertation/Project: Topic and outcome

KEY SKILLS

- Skill 1 • Skill 2 • Skill 3 • Skill 4

Certifications

- Course – Platform | Date

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Volunteering, part-time roles, leadership positions

Cover Letter Guide

- ☒ Address it to the hiring manager (or use 'Dear Hiring Manager' if unknown).
- ☒ Mention the role and where you found it.
- ☒ Explain why you're a good fit for the role and how your skills match.
- ☒ Be concise aim for 3–4 paragraphs and keep to 1 page.
- ☒ End with a strong call to action.

Cover Letter Template

Dear [Hiring Manager's Name],

I am writing to express my interest in the [Job Title] position at [Company Name], as advertised on [Job Board/Website]. With a background in [Your Field] and experience in [Relevant Skill or Project], I am excited about the opportunity to contribute to your team.

In my previous role at [Previous Company or University], I [describe one or two key achievements relevant to the job]. My skills in [Skill 1] and [Skill 2] make me a strong candidate for this role.

I am particularly drawn to [Company Name] because of [something specific about the company or role]. I believe I can add value and grow within your team.

Thank you for considering my application. I am available at your convenience to discuss this opportunity further.

[Your Name]

Interview Guide

This guide will help you prepare effectively for job interviews in the UK, including both in-person and virtual interviews. It includes a breakdown of common interview types, top questions with sample answers, and frameworks like STAR to help you answer with clarity and confidence.

Interview Types in the UK

- Phone screening – initial call to verify experience, interest, and availability.
- Video interviews – used by many employers (Zoom, MS Teams, etc.).
- In-person interviews – may include multiple interviewers (panel).
- Assessment centres – group tasks, presentations, or tests (common for graduate roles).

Common UK Interview Questions

Be prepared to answer these questions with structured, specific answers:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why do you want to work here?
3. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
4. Tell us about a time you overcame a challenge.
5. Where do you see yourself in five years?
6. Why should we hire you?
7. Do you require visa sponsorship? (If asked, answer confidently and explain your status.)

STAR Technique for Behavioural Questions

Use the STAR technique to structure your answers to competency-based questions:

****S**ituation** – What was the context or background?

****T**ask** – What did you need to achieve?

****A**ction** – What specific steps did you take?

****R**esult** – What was the outcome? (quantify where possible)

💬 Smart Questions to Ask the Interviewer

- Can you describe the team I'll be working with?
- What does success look like in this role?
- How do you support training and development?
- Is this role eligible for Skilled Worker visa sponsorship?

✅ Interview Preparation Checklist

- Research the company (mission, values, recent news).
- Understand the job description and required skills.
- Prepare 2–3 STAR stories in advance.
- Dress professionally (smart-casual at minimum).
- Test your tech setup if virtual.
- Print or have notes/CV accessible (but not reading from them).
- Practice your introduction and key messages.
- Prepare your questions for the employer.
- Know your visa status and how to explain it clearly.

Negotiating Visa Sponsorship with employers

SCENARIO 1: INTERNATIONAL STUDENT (On a Student Visa)

Pre Interview Preparation

- Know your term time working limits (20 hours per week) and full time holiday allowance
 - Be clear about your graduation date and eligibility for the Graduate Route
 - Prepare evidence of your course status and Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) letter
 - Check if the employer is listed as a licensed sponsor on the UK government website
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If Employer Asks: “Do You Have the Right to Work?”

Response

“Yes, I do. I am currently on a Student visa, which allows me to work up to 20 hours per week during term time and full time during holidays.

Once I complete my course, I intend to apply for the Graduate Route visa, which allows me to work full time for two years without requiring any employer sponsorship.

This means that for the initial two years after my graduation, you would not need to take any action or bear any cost to employ me.

If we discover a strong mutual fit and long term opportunity, I would be more than happy to guide your HR team through the Skilled Worker visa process later on.”

If Employer Does Not Ask

Response

“Before we finish, I would like to clarify my visa status. I am currently on a Student visa which allows part time work during term and full time during university breaks.

Upon completing my studies, I plan to transition to the Graduate Route visa, which enables full time work for two years without any sponsorship requirement or cost to an

employer.

I wanted to raise this proactively so that you feel confident in my current and future eligibility to work in the UK.”

Common Objection: “We do not sponsor students”

Response

“I completely understand. However, I want to reassure you that I am not seeking sponsorship right now.

After graduation, the Graduate Route allows me to work full time without any involvement from the employer.

If, after some time working together, we consider long term options, I would be glad to support your team in understanding the Skilled Worker route, which has become far simpler and more accessible in recent years.”

Common Objection: “We have never sponsored anyone before”

Response

“That is totally understandable. Many organisations are new to the process. The good news is that applying to become a licensed sponsor can be done online, costs just over five hundred pounds for smaller businesses, and typically takes under two months.

Once licensed, issuing a Certificate of Sponsorship is straightforward. I can provide a one page summary and even assist with preparing key documentation if that becomes necessary in future.”

Post Interview Action

- Send a thank you email including a recap of your visa timeline
 - Provide links to UK government Graduate Route guidance
 - Offer to share resources to assist HR with future sponsorship if needed
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SCENARIO 2: GRADUATE ROUTE VISA HOLDER

Pre Interview Preparation

- Have your Graduate visa confirmation or BRP ready
 - Know the expiry date of your visa
 - Prepare a simple summary of the Skilled Worker transition steps and costs
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If Employer Asks: “Do You Have the Right to Work?”

Response

“Yes, I currently hold a Graduate Route visa which allows me to work full time in the UK for two years following the completion of my degree.

This visa requires no sponsorship and no action on the employer’s part. I am fully eligible to start work immediately.

If we both see this as a long term opportunity, I would be happy to support your HR team with a seamless transition to the Skilled Worker visa before the end of my current visa.”

If Employer Does Not Ask

Response

“Just to clarify, I am on the Graduate Route visa, which means I can work full time without any need for sponsorship or legal responsibility on the employer’s part.

It is valid for two years, and I am fully eligible to contribute without restrictions. If a long term opportunity arises, I can guide your team through the Skilled Worker route later.”

Common Objection: “What happens when your Graduate visa ends?”

Response

“That is a great question. My Graduate visa is valid until [insert date], and I intend to apply for a Skilled Worker visa well before it expires.

As a new entrant, the salary requirements and fees are lower. The entire process is

straightforward and can be managed smoothly. I can provide a clear plan and timeline to ensure your HR team is prepared with no surprises.”

Common Objection: “We have never sponsored before”

Response

“I appreciate your honesty. Many employers are unfamiliar with the process until they explore it for the first time. Sponsorship is now simpler than it used to be.

There is no need for the resident labour market test and most tasks are completed online. I have a summary I can send to your HR team outlining the steps, timeline, and cost in one easy to read document.”

Post Interview Action

- Reiterate your Graduate visa timeline in your follow up message
 - Include sponsorship support resources
 - Offer to create a tailored action plan if needed
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SCENARIO 3: SKILLED WORKER VISA HOLDER (Switching Employers)

Pre Interview Preparation

- Confirm if the prospective employer is a licensed sponsor
 - Gather your current Certificate of Sponsorship and job code
 - Understand the visa switch process so you can guide them clearly
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If Employer Asks: “Do You Have the Right to Work?”

Response

“Yes, I currently hold a Skilled Worker visa through my current employer. To join your team, I would need a new Certificate of Sponsorship from your organisation so I can update my visa with the Home Office.

I have gone through this process before and I can manage most of the transition myself, while ensuring your HR team is supported with clear instructions and documentation.

The switch is fully compliant and would not disrupt my ability to begin work promptly.”

If Employer Does Not Ask**Response**

“Just so you are aware, I am currently working in the UK under a Skilled Worker visa. If I am selected for the role, I would need your organisation to assign a new Certificate of Sponsorship so that I can transfer my visa.

This is a standard process and I would provide everything required to make it as smooth as possible for your HR team.”

Common Objection: “Sponsorship sounds expensive and complex”**Response**

“I completely understand that concern. However, the actual sponsorship costs are quite manageable. For example, issuing a Certificate of Sponsorship costs under two hundred pounds.

There may also be an immigration skills charge depending on company size, but these costs are often far less than the expense of replacing and training a new hire.

I would handle the visa process myself and make sure your team is supported throughout, with no disruption to work.”

Common Objection: “We are not familiar with the process”**Response**

“That is understandable. Many businesses only start sponsoring when they realise the value of retaining skilled talent. I can provide a step by step sponsorship guide, checklist, and official Home Office links to help your HR team feel confident and informed.

This would be a one time setup that could open access to a diverse talent pool long term.”

Post Interview Action

- Thank the interviewer and explain the next steps in visa transfer
- Share a link to the Skilled Worker visa process page
- Attach a simple checklist of what the HR team would need to do

LinkedIn & Networking Toolkit for International Job Seekers (UK)

This toolkit will help you optimise your LinkedIn profile and build a professional network in the UK. Whether you're looking for visa sponsorship, graduate jobs, or startup roles, strategic networking can unlock hidden opportunities.

LinkedIn Profile Optimisation Checklist

- Profile photo: Clear, professional headshot with a smile.
- Headline: Include your role/field and a value proposition (e.g., 'MSc Data Science Graduate | Python & SQL | Open to Sponsorship').
- About section: 3–5 sentences summarising who you are, your skills, and career goals.
- Experience: Add relevant work, internships, or volunteering with bullet points.
- Education: Include degree, university, and years.
- Skills: List at least 6–10 relevant skills. Ask for endorsements.
- Open to Work: Enable this for recruiters and set job preferences.
- Custom URL: e.g., linkedin.com/in/yourname

LinkedIn 'About Me' Summary Sample

Here's a strong example of a LinkedIn summary for an international student seeking sponsorship:

MSc Computer Science graduate with hands-on experience in full-stack development and data analysis. Skilled in Python, JavaScript, and SQL. I recently led a team project to build a web app for student mental health support, which improved resource access by 60%. Passionate about tech-for-good and eager to contribute to a dynamic development team.

LinkedIn Outreach Message Templates

To Alumni or Fellow International Graduates

Hi [Name],

I noticed you're an alumnus of [University] and are working in [industry/role]. As a current international student exploring career options in the UK, I'd love to connect and learn more about your journey. Any tips or insights would be truly appreciated!

To Recruiters

Hi [Name],

I came across your profile while exploring opportunities in [industry/role]. I'm currently on a Graduate Visa and seeking a role where I can contribute and grow long-term. Would love to hear if you're hiring or open to connecting.

To Hiring Managers (After Applying)

Hi [Name],

I recently applied for the [Job Title] role at [Company]. I'm really excited about the opportunity and wanted to briefly introduce myself here as well. Happy to provide more information or connect further!

Networking Tracker – Suggested Spreadsheet Columns

- Contact Name
- Company
- Role
- LinkedIn URL
- Date Contacted
- Type of Message Sent (alumni, recruiter, etc.)
- Response Received
- Follow-Up Date

Motivation and Mindset

Staying motivated during your job search, especially as an international candidate can be challenging. This toolkit provides strategies, reflection prompts, and resilience-building techniques to help you stay positive, focused, and persistent.

The CAN Strategy: What You CAN Control

When overwhelmed, focus on what you CAN control:

- ****C**** – Consistently connect with people and build networks
- ****A**** – Acquire skills and experience
- ****N**** – Negotiate constantly for opportunities

Weekly Job Search Journal Prompts

- What progress did I make this week that I'm proud of?
- What challenges did I face and how did I handle them?
- What did I learn about myself through this process?
- Who can I reach out to or learn from next week?
- What's one thing I can celebrate today?

Rejection Resilience: How to Bounce Back

- Rejection is not personal—it's about fit, timing, or internal decisions.
- Every 'no' brings you closer to the right 'yes'.
- Ask for feedback when possible; use it to improve.
- Keep a 'wins folder' with positive feedback, achievements, and milestones.
- Talk to peers or mentors. You are not alone.

Daily Motivation & Mindset Tracker (Example Format)

- Date
- Mood (1–5 scale)
- Top 3 priorities
- Gratitude of the day
- Inspirational quote/mantra
- Reflection: What did I learn today?

Quotes to Keep You Going

- “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts.” – Winston Churchill
- “You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.” – Wayne Gretzky
- “Sometimes rejection is redirection.”

- “Don’t watch the clock; do what it does. Keep going.” – Sam Levenson
- “Everything you’ve ever wanted is on the other side of fear.” – George Addair

Visa Sponsorship – Official UK Government Links

Skilled Worker Visa (General Info & Application)

- [Skilled Worker visa overview](#)
(Main guide for candidates, requirements, documents, fees, and eligibility)

Sponsoring an Employee (Employer Side)

- [UK visa sponsorship for employers](#)
(How to apply for a sponsor licence and responsibilities)

Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS)

- Assigning Certificates of Sponsorship
(Steps and conditions for issuing CoS)

Immigration Skills Charge

- Immigration Skills Charge guidance
(Fees and exemptions for employers sponsoring workers)

Skilled Worker Visa Fees

- Visa fees for Skilled Worker visa
(Application costs for different durations and job roles)

List of Approved UK Visa Sponsors

- [Register of licensed sponsors \(Skilled Worker\)](#)
(Downloadable Excel sheet to check if an employer can sponsor you)

