Attracting global talent: a pro-growth plan for UK life sciences

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Contents

About this report

To gather research for this report, EY conducted a thorough review of the UK immigration system and how it impacts the pharmaceutical industry, benchmarking UK policies against global practices working with EY immigration practitioners on the ground in over 150 countries.

In building our recommendations for a new global talent strategy for life sciences, we have been led by insight from industry leaders and academics.

EY and the ABPI engaged with key UK immigration policy stakeholders and conducted a series of workshops across the life sciences ecosystem, including key membership organisations, talent leads within major pharmaceutical companies, and representatives from academia. The aim of the workshops was to explore the most critical barriers to the attraction and retention of talent and skills.

The ABPI and EY thank all contributors and acknowledge the valuable insight and information provided during the workshops.

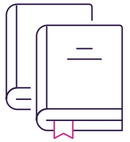
Executive summary

The UK's life sciences sector is a critical engine for economic growth, supporting over 300,000 high-skilled jobs across all four nations.[1] It includes the pharmaceutical industry, which invested £8.7 billion in R&D in 2023[2] to develop medicines and vaccines that are transformative for public health, patients, and the NHS. To attract more of this investment and achieve its goal of becoming Europe's leading life sciences economy by 2030, the UK must address the persistent and emerging skills shortages that hinder the sector's growth.

While domestic upskilling initiatives are welcome and vital steps towards realising this goal, they alone cannot meet the sector's skills needs at the pace required by the government's Industrial Strategy. Attracting global talent is therefore essential to meeting the UK's targets for life sciences investment and growth. The Life Sciences Sector Plan and Immigration White Paper have recognised this need and commit to implementing policies that will attract more of the world's top talent to the UK.

To inform and shape these policies, the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) commissioned and collaborated with EY to create this report, which evaluates the competitiveness of the UK's offer to global life sciences talent.

300,000
high-skilled jobs across the UK life sciences sector



£8.7 billion
in pharmaceutical R&D in 2023

17%
of UK private R&D investment is from the pharmaceutical industry

Executive summary: **Findings**

Recent reforms have made the Skilled Worker visa less accessible and attractive to the world's top life sciences talent and, in turn, increased the relative attractiveness of alternative routes, such as the Global Talent and High Potential Individual visas.

Despite their advantages over the Skilled Worker visa, use of the Global Talent and High Potential Individuals visas has plateaued in recent years. This stagnation risks limiting their potential to catalyse economic growth, as envisioned in the Immigration White Paper.

Compared with similar visas offered by the UK's competitors, the Global Talent visa has many strengths that help it compete for top life sciences talent. The most important strength is the visa's accelerated route to settlement. However, exceptionally high upfront costs and a widespread misperception of the visa's eligibility criteria are undermining these strengths.

The UK is not realising the full benefits of its professional talent mobility agreements, such as the UK–Switzerland agreement, and it has opportunities to expand its network of youth mobility schemes to develop and attract the next generation of life sciences talent.

Executive summary: **Recommendations**

1 Enhance the Global Talent visa's competitiveness

- Streamline the application routes to accelerate processing times.
- Publish data on application outcomes so applicants are better informed.
- Preserve its existing strengths, including the 3-year accelerated route to settlement.

2 Adopt a pro-growth approach to talent mobility

- Promote the UK's global talent offer so life sciences investors are better informed.
- Align settlement reform with the Modern Industrial Strategy's eight growth sectors.

3 Advance talent mobility in bilateral negotiations

- Streamline and create new talent mobility schemes, such as an EU-UK youth mobility scheme.
- Negotiate mutual recognition agreements for qualifications and standards.

By improving the competitiveness of its global talent offer and creating the conditions for investment and growth,[3] the government can enable the life sciences sector to create 70,000 new high-quality jobs across the UK by 2035.[4]

70,000
new high-quality jobs across the UK by 2035

1. Global talent and the UK's life sciences strategy

Global talent and the UK's life sciences strategy

The life sciences sector is a crucial growth engine for the UK economy, supporting over 300,000 jobs across all four nations.[5] The innovative treatments, vaccines, and devices developed by the life sciences sector are also vital to achieving the government's mission of building an NHS fit for the future and improving health outcomes.

The government has recognised the importance of the life sciences sector to the health and wealth of the nation by designating it as one of eight growth sectors in the Modern Industrial Strategy. This strategy includes a dedicated Sector Plan that seeks to make the UK the top life sciences economy in Europe by 2030, and the world's third-most important behind the US and China by 2035. The benefits of achieving this ambition are immense, as the life sciences sector could create 70,000 new jobs by 2035[6] if the conditions for growth are in place.

To achieve this ambition, the UK must retain and attract more inward investment into its life sciences sector. The sector already invests heavily in the UK, with the pharmaceutical industry alone investing £8.7 billion in R&D in 2023, more than any other business sector.[7] Clinical trials represent around half of the global pharmaceutical industry's R&D[8] and contribute £7.4 billion to the UK economy, support 65,000 jobs, and raise £1.2 billion of NHS revenue every year.[9] Additionally, industry investment in medicines manufacturing sustains an additional 26,000 jobs[10] and £16.4 billion of economic activity.[11]

However, the UK has lagged behind its international peers in attracting global life sciences investment. For example, the UK would have received over £1.3 billion of extra R&D investment in 2023 alone if it had matched the global investment trends of the world's top 50 pharmaceutical companies.[12] Similarly, the UK economy would be £3 billion larger every year if industry clinical trial activity returned to levels last seen in 2017[13] and £1.2 billion larger every year if life sciences foreign direct investment increased to levels comparable with Ireland.[14]

To retain and attract more of this investment, the UK must become more competitive as a destination for globally mobile life sciences businesses to invest and do business.

As an R&D-intensive and advanced manufacturing sector, access to a skilled workforce is essential to the life sciences sector's growth prospects. A country's ability to meet these skills needs is, therefore, a key driver of its global competitiveness, which is influenced by a range of operating environment factors (including tax and fiscal incentives, regulatory environment, and the adoption and reimbursement environment for innovative medicines).

Global talent and the UK's life sciences strategy

Despite outranking most of its competitor countries in training large numbers of natural science, mathematics, and statistics students,[15] the UK has consistently struggled to meet the skills needs of global life sciences investors, such as pharmaceutical companies. These skills gaps include:

- Scientific skills, such as biomedical imaging and digital pathology,[16] require advanced qualifications and, therefore, take years to develop before they enter the workforce.
- Data and digital skills, such as computational chemistry, are in high demand, with AI skills mentioned twice as often in life sciences jobs compared with the national average.[17]
- Commercialisation skills, such as Good Manufacturing Practice and business development,[18] are vital to addressing the UK's ongoing challenges in scaling up life sciences innovation.

Crucially, these skills gaps have not been significantly narrowed since the ABPI began its biennial skills survey of pharmaceutical companies in 2018.[19] For example, scientific skills gaps, such as physiological modelling, have persisted across all ABPI surveys;[20] and data and digital skills gaps, such as machine learning, have widened due to a 7% increase in demand between 2020/21 and 2023/24.[21]

The life sciences sector welcomes the government's plans to increase investment in training through initiatives such as the Growth and Skills Levy and Lifelong Learning Entitlement, which will play a vital role in meeting the skills needs of global life sciences investors. However, given the time and resources required to develop these skills, it is highly unlikely that the government can achieve its goal of making the UK the top life sciences economy in Europe by 2030 without a coherent strategy for both domestic and global talent.

The Modern Industrial Strategy has recognised this fact, stating the government's ambition to attract more of the world's top talent to accelerate economic growth. To do so, the Immigration White Paper commits to improving the competitiveness of the UK's global talent offer. The ABPI welcomes this ambition and has commissioned this report to support its delivery.

2. The UK's offer to global life sciences talent

The UK's offer to global life sciences talent

The UK's global talent offer comprises a range of immigration routes (see Figure 1) that life sciences talent and employers can access. These include long-term routes, such as the Skilled Worker and Global Talent visas, and shorter-term routes, such as the UK-Swiss Mobility Agreement, which cater to different occupations, skills, and business needs. Additionally, some immigration routes are renewable and provide global talent (and their dependants) with a route to settlement in the UK.

While the UK's published migration statistics are categorised by role rather than employer, broader trends applicable to the life sciences sector can be identified from the data related to Professional, Scientific, and Technical Activities (see Figure 2).

Figure 1a. UK immigration routes relevant to global life sciences talent

Visa category	Description / Eligibility	Maximum Duration	Renewable	Leads to Settlement	Dependants	English Language Requirement	Review under the NPI (New Plan for Immigration)
Sponsorship required							
Skilled Worker	Primary work visa category for migrant workers relocating to the UK. Sponsored by employer to undertake a particular role	5 years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Global Business Mobility - Senior or Specialist Worker	Senior or Specialist individuals who wish to undertake a temporary assignment in the UK. The worker must already be employed by an overseas entity linked to the UK sponsoring company	9 years[22]	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Government Authorised Exchange	Individuals looking to undertake an internship, training, or research programme with an approved sponsoring company	2 years	No	No	Yes	No	No
Scale Up	Individuals looking to work in the UK for an eligible fast-growing business meeting the Scale Up definition	2 years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

The UK's offer to global life sciences talent

Figure 1b. UK immigration routes relevant to global life sciences talent

Visa category	Description / Eligibility	Maximum Duration	Renewable	Leads to Settlement	Dependants	English Language Requirement	Review under the NPI (New Plan for Immigration)
Endorsement required							
Global Talent	Available to leaders and potential leaders in specific sectors. Individuals will need to be endorsed by approved bodies in their relevant sector	5 years	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Innovator	Allows migrants to set up and run innovative business in the UK. Business plans must be endorsed by an approved body in the field	2 years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No sponsorship or endorsement required							
Graduate	Available to holders of a Student visa who have completed a UK degree	2 years[23]	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
High Potential Individual	Available to recent graduates from top global universities	2 years	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Youth Mobility Scheme	Available for young adults (up to 35 years old), from certain countries / territories	2 years or 3 years[24]	Yes	No	No	No	No
India Young Professional Scheme	Similar to Youth Mobility, but aimed at Indian nationals between 18-35	2 years	No	No	No	No	No

The UK's offer to global life sciences talent

It should be noted that global life sciences talent will be only a portion of the migration activity in Figure 2 (though a significant one, given the R&D intensity of the sector[25]). In addition, Figure 2 will not include global life sciences talent working in fields outside of R&D, such as manufacturing and business development. Nonetheless, Figure 2 suggests that the majority of global life sciences talent enters the UK via the Skilled Worker visa.

To assess the competitiveness of the UK's global talent offer for the life sciences, this report will pay particular attention to the Skilled Worker visa, the immigration routes the government is positioning as alternatives to the Skilled Worker route for top talent (namely, the Global Talent and High Potential Individual visas),[26] and the potential role of international talent mobility agreements.

Figure 2. Visas granted across Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities[27]

Visa category	Visas granted per year					
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (Q2)	Total
Worker						**58,657**
Skilled Worker	8,537	15,084	11,048	7,269	2,984	**44,922**
Skilled Worker - Health & Care	219	3,426	433	111	27	**1,149**
Global Business Mobility - Senior or Specialist Worker / ICT	2,098	3426	3,173	2,573	1,313	**12,583**
Scale-up Worker	0	0	1	1	1	**3**
Temporary Worker						**6,127**
Government Authorised Exchange (previously Tier 5)	805	1,368	1,122	1,037	874	**5,206**
Graduate Trainee (Global Business Mobility)	0	29	51	72	44	**196**
Other (including Charity Worker, Creative Worker, International Agreement, Seasonal Worker, Secondment Worker, Service Supplier, UK Expansion Worker)	98	164	192	149	122	**725**

The UK's offer to global life sciences talent

Skilled Worker visa

The Skilled Worker visa is the route most used by employers across the economy to sponsor foreign nationals to work in the UK, with 57,858 visas granted to main applicants in 2024.[28]

Eligibility is determined using a points-based system that awards applicants points if they meet specific requirements. These requirements vary based on occupation, but proficiency in English, a job offer from a sponsoring employer, and a minimum annual salary of £41,700 (as of 22 July 2025) are common baseline requirements that help applicants meet the 70-point minimum threshold for eligibility.

Employers who sponsor individuals face a range of fees, including the Certificate of Sponsorship (£525)[29] and the Immigration Skills Charge (£364 per year for charitable and small sponsors and £1,000 per year for medium to large sponsors[30]). Employers may also decide to meet the cost of fees levied on applicants, such as the Immigration Health Surcharge (£1,035 per year for adult applicants and £776 per year for child applicants[31]). These costs are typically paid upfront and can be refunded only in limited circumstances, so employers take on financial risk while the visa application is processed.

The increased use of the Skilled Worker visa after EU-exit has made it a target for past governments' efforts to reduce net immigration, which have included increasing salary thresholds and rationalising the Shortage Occupation List. These reforms made the Skilled Worker visa harder to access and significantly more expensive, in part, to discourage employers from using it as an immigration route.

"April [2024] changes to the UK Skilled Worker salary requirements mean we cannot meet our research needs, particularly outside of London. The long-term impact of this on our regional hubs is concerning."

Workshop attendee

Early data and feedback from life sciences employers suggest these reforms are having an effect. Between 2023 and 2024, the total number of Skilled Worker visas granted to main applicants fell by 11.5%, and this number is forecast to be below

The UK's offer to global life sciences talent

Figure 3. Number of Skilled Worker (formerly Tier 2) and Skilled Worker Health and Care visas granted per year (main applicant only)[33]

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (Q2)
Tier 2 (General)	15,254	17,366	18,364	19,973	24,373	36,095	27,252	464	17	11	2	
Skilled Worker							429	35,599	66,119	65,426	57,858	17,334
Health and Care							689	31,800	76,724	145,823	27,047	9,038
Total	15,254	17,366	18,364	19,973	24,373	36,095	28,370	67,863	142,860	211,260	84,907	26,372

40,000 visas in 2025 (see figure 3). For comparison, the number of Health and Care Worker visas granted to main applicants fell by 81% in the same period.[32]

These trends are likely to be amplified by changes announced in May 2025 by the current government (see box 1), which similarly aims to reduce net immigration by discouraging employers from using the Skilled Worker visa and other immigration routes.

These reforms will likely, as intended, materially reduce the attractiveness and viability of the Skilled Worker visa as an immigration route to global life sciences talent and their employers. Accordingly, the relative

Box 1. Restoring control of the immigration system: key policies

The Immigration White Paper's central goal is to ensure that "no industry is allowed to rely solely on immigration to fill its skills shortages".[34] To that end, the government has introduced several major changes to the immigration system that came into effect on 22 July 2025,[35] including:

- Restoring the Skilled Worker visa's skills requirement to graduate-level roles (RQF 6)
- Increasing the general salary thresholds for Skilled Worker visas (£38,700 to £41,700) and Global Business Mobility visas (£48,500 to £52,500)
- Ending the overseas recruitment of social care workers

The following changes are due to come into effect soon:

- Increasing the English language requirements across a range of immigration routes
- Increasing the Immigration Skills Change by 32%
- Reducing the duration of the Graduate visa from 24 to 18 months
- Reforming the route to settlement, including extending the qualifying period (for most visa categories) from 5 to 10 years and announcing plans for a contributions-based system that reduces the qualifying period, which will be consulted on in due course.

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attractiveness of alternative routes, such as the Global Talent and High Potential Individual visas, will likely increase, as these reforms will accentuate their advantages over the Skilled Worker visa (for example, neither visa requires an employer to pay the Immigration Skills Charge[36] or Certificate of Sponsorship fee).

"The Global Talent visa, to some extent, makes up for the changes that have made the Skilled Worker route inaccessible since April 2024 for certain roles."

Workshop attendee

The Skilled Worker visa will, despite the reforms, remain the highest volume working visa utilised by employers across the economy. However, we anticipate that life sciences employers will increasingly look to the Global Talent and High Potential Individual visas, thereby increasing those visas' influence on the overall competitiveness of the UK's offer to global life sciences talent. This report will, therefore, examine both visas in greater detail and how the government can better utilise them to attract top talent to the UK.

Global Talent and High Potential Individual visas

Are these visas successful?

The Global Talent visa is aimed at talented individuals who are, or have the potential to be, leaders in their field (academia and research, arts and culture, or digital technology). The visa targets specific applicants, rather than roles. Each of the visa's three fields has its own criteria to determine an applicant's eligibility based on their current or potential skills and expertise. For example,

Box 2. Myth-busting the Global Talent visa

The breadth and complexity of the Global Talent visa's eligibility criteria have contributed to 'myths' about its scope, particularly outside of academia, which comprises around 67% of visa holders.[39] For instance, many applicants can qualify for a Global Talent visa without:

- Having won a Nobel Prize (the prestigious prize route is one of many routes to endorsement)
- Working in academia (endorsement is available from Tech Nation or Arts Council England)
- A job offer (the visa is not sponsored by an employer)
- Decades of experience (emerging talent is explicitly recognised in the visa's criteria)

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applicants who apply via the academia or research field can demonstrate their eligibility by being endorsed by an endorsing body, such as the Royal Society,[37] or having won a prestigious prize.[38]

The High Potential Individual visa is aimed at graduates from top universities outside the UK who have demonstrated high academic achievement and potential for professional success. The visa, too, does not target specific roles or sectors and, like the Global Talent visa, does not require a job offer. Instead, eligibility is based on having been awarded a qualification from a university that appears on the government's list of eligible institutions.

The Global Talent and High Potential Individual visas grew rapidly after their introductions in 2020 and 2022, with the number granted rising by 444% and 66%, respectively, by 2023 (see Figure 4). Since

Figure 4. Visas granted across the Global Talent and High Potential Individual routes (main applicant only)[40]

Visa category	Visas granted per year						
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (Q2)
Global Talent[41]	794	715	1,841	2,973	4,110	3,887	1,837
High Potential Individual				1,333	2,213	1,797	941

then, however, the growth rate of both visas (across all endorsement routes) has plateaued, with the number granted in 2024 falling by 5% and 19%, respectively. Furthermore, data for the first half of 2025 indicates that the Global Talent and High Potential Individual visas are unlikely to significantly surpass their 2024 levels of uptake, suggesting this plateau may continue.

Much of the growth seen in the Global Talent and High Potential Individual visas can be attributed to the features that distinguish them from other UK visas. These advantages include lower costs for employers and greater flexibility for visa holders. For example, unlike the Skilled Worker visa, the Global Talent visa is non-sponsored, meaning visa holders are not tied to a specific employer and can work in the UK for up to five years as an employee, as self-employed, and/or as a director of a company. Research commissioned by the Home Office found that this flexibility was the leading reason why 66% of Global Talent visa holders applied for the scheme.[42] The High Potential Individual visa is even more flexible because it does not require a sponsor or endorsement, which was the most cited reason for applying for it.[43]

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Yet despite their increasingly accentuated advantages over the Skilled Worker visa, uptake of the Global Talent visa and the High Potential Individual has plateaued.

Why has the Global Talent visa plateaued?

There are two possible factors at play.

Firstly, uptake of the Global Talent visa has been concentrated in academia. A government survey conducted in 2024 found that "the most common way in which visa holders had heard about the Global Talent visa was through their university or institution (27%), followed by their professional network (23%)".[44] This suggests that academia has been effective at promoting and using the Global Talent visa to retain critical talent in the UK. However, this uptake may now have reached a point of saturation from which further growth is much harder to realise without increasing uptake from other types of employers, such as companies.

> "One issue with the Global Talent Visa is that it is not well advertised."
>
> Workshop attendee

Secondly, an issue commonly raised by stakeholders in the roundtables organised for this report is that many potential applicants perceive the Global Talent visa's eligibility criteria as inaccessible (see box 2). This perception may have also contributed to the Global Talent visa's concentration in academia (67% of visa holders are in academic roles[45]), and it is discussed in detail in chapter 3.

Given the importance of discovery science and pre-clinical research to the UK's competitiveness in life sciences, the Global Talent visa's success in attracting world-class academic talent is welcome and aligns with the policy's strategic purpose.

> "Attracting [...] international talent is vital for a thriving research environment that benefits patients across the UK."
>
> Workshop attendee

However, the Global Talent visa's success is at risk of being restricted by a prevailing perception that the visa is accessible only to the most prestigious global talent, such as the winners of notable academic awards like the Nobel Prize. This is restricting its uptake outside of academia, limiting its potential to attract the world's top talent to the UK and contribute towards the government's goal of making it Europe's top life sciences economy by 2035.

Therefore, it is encouraging that the government's Industrial Strategy, Life Sciences Sector Plan, and

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Immigration White Paper all recognise the vital contributions of global talent in achieving its goals for economic growth and population health. In particular, the commitment in the Immigration White Paper to streamline the Global Talent visa and increase its uptake[46] is a welcome recognition that this risk requires decisive government action.

Why has the High Potential Individual visa plateaued?

These factors contributing to the stalled growth of the Global Talent visa do not apply to the High Potential Individual visa, as its eligibility criteria are not perceived as so restrictive and most of its visa holders work outside of academia. A different government survey from 2024 showed that 49% of High Potential Individual visa holders in employment work in professional occupations, rising to 89% among visa holders in employment with a doctorate.[47] Furthermore, just 13% of High Potential Individual visa holders in employment work in education, which includes those working outside of Higher Education providers such as universities.[48]

That a far greater proportion of High Potential Individual visa holders are exposed to the private labour market, compared with Global Talent visa holders, may help to explain its decline in uptake. Of the High Potential Individual visa holders surveyed, 17% were still looking for work as of mid-2024.[49] In addition, 24% of all High Potential Individual visa holders were not doing what they had planned to do when applying for the visa, and of these people: 47% reported issues finding work; 34% found work but at a lower pay level than expected; and 33% found work but at a lower skill level than expected.[50]

Given the survey's timing, it is probable that most of the surveyed visa holders acquired their High Potential Individual visa before 2024, when it was growing rapidly in uptake and sentiment about the UK economy was higher.[51] Therefore, instead of its reputation or criteria, a more likely cause of the High Potential Individual visa's stalled growth is that potential applicants were deterred by growing pessimism about the UK jobs market.

The High Potential Individual visa's status as a short-term visa, with a duration capped at two years (or three for PhD holders), compounds the challenges arising from declining economic sentiment. The visa cannot be extended, and time spent on it does not lead to permanent residence, so visa holders pursuing longer-term work in the UK must switch to another visa category after their visa term ends. Nearly half (44%) of surveyed High Potential Individual visa holders choose not to do this, stating they do not plan stay in the UK after their visa expires.[52] Therefore, the visa's brief duration reinforces the likelihood that near-term perceptions of labour market conditions have a direct and impact on global talent's use of the High Potential Individual visa.

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Consequently, while the government's commitment[53] to increase uptake of the High Potential Individual visa is welcome, it is likely that raising confidence in the UK economy will have a greater impact on uptake than reforming the visa itself. In particular, improved sentiment among graduates of the world's top universities about their employment opportunities in the UK's growth sectors, such as life sciences, will be crucial to boosting uptake. Of course, expanding the visa's criteria will enlarge the pool of potential applicants and help to increase uptake (especially among graduates of universities outside the United States, which comprise 58% of visa holders[54]), but this reform is not as urgent or as likely to be as impactful on the UK's offer to global life sciences as reforming the Global Talent visa.

Mobility agreements

Global talent can also access a range of mobility agreements, such as the India Young Professional Scheme and youth mobility schemes, to live and work in the UK temporarily.

For instance, the UK–Switzerland Services Mobility Agreement (SMA) allows UK professionals to work in Switzerland for up to 90 days without the need for a work permit. In return, Swiss professionals can fulfil contracts in the UK by obtaining the Service Supplier (Global Business Mobility) visa.

Since its introduction in January 2021, more than 4,000 UK professionals (primarily business consultants, IT professionals, and engineers) have used the SMA to offer their services in the Swiss market.[55] In contrast, uptake of the Service Supplier

4,000+

UK professionals used the SMA

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(Global Business Mobility) visa has been low, with just 221 granted since its introduction.[56] This low level of uptake likely reflects the SMA's inability to meet the talent needs of UK employers, including the life sciences sector, as talent required for longer than 6 to 12 months is better served by other immigration routes, such as the Skilled Worker visa. Yet this is a missed opportunity for bilateral talent mobility and UK competitiveness, and the government could negotiate improvements to the SMA in future talks with Switzerland.

The UK's network of youth mobility agreements has much higher uptake than schemes like the SMA. Under these agreements, adults up to the age of 30 or 35 can apply for a sponsor-free visa to live and work in the UK for up to 2-3 years.[57] The UK granted 24,437 of these Youth Mobility Scheme visas to global talent across 13 countries in 2024, including key life sciences peers such as Australia, Canada, and Japan.[58] The visa's minimal eligibility criteria (other than age) provide life sciences employers with a highly flexible route to recruit early-career talent.

This flexibility was a key reason why, in April 2024, the European Commission proposed a youth mobility agreement between the UK and the European Union (EU) that would allow 18- to 30-year-olds to apply for a visa lasting up to 4 years.[59] This proposal remains under discussion between the UK government, which initially rejected it, and the European Commission. In particular, the question of whether the proposed visa would have an annual cap remains unresolved at the time of writing and is a critical bottleneck to finalising an EU-UK youth mobility scheme.

24,437
youth mobility scheme visas granted by the UK in 2024

3. Is the Global Talent visa competitive?

Is the Global Talent visa competitive?

To answer this question, Figure 5 provides a comparative analysis of immigration routes that are competing with the UK's Global Talent visa to attract and recruit the world's top life sciences talent. This analysis is then used to determine the Global Talent visa's relative competitiveness across different elements of these immigration routes, such as their breadth of eligibility criteria and speed of visa processing, which informs the report's later recommendations for how the government should improve the Global Talent visa's competitiveness in order to attract more of the world's top life sciences talent to the UK.

Figure 5. International comparison of visas targeting global life sciences talent

Visa	Description	Eligibility criteria	Processing time	Cost	GBP equivalent (approx.)	Visa length	Extendable	Time counts towards settlement	Accelerated route to settlement	Allows dependants
United Kingdom Global Talent Visa	For individuals recognised as leader or potential leader in one of the following fields: • Academia or research • Arts and culture • Digital technology	• Awarded an eligible award in qualifying field • An eligible job offer as an academic or researcher • An individual fellowship • A research grant that is approved by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)	2-5 weeks (endorsement) 3-8 weeks (visa processing)	Endorsement: GBP 524 Visa: GBP 192 Immigration Health Surcharge: GBP 1,035 (per year applied for)	GBP 3,821 (3 years) GBP 5,891 (5 years)	Up to 5 years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Is the Global Talent visa competitive?

Figure 5. International comparison of visas targeting global life sciences talent

Visa	Description	Eligibility criteria	Processing time	Cost	GBP equivalent (approx.)	Visa length	Extendable	Time counts towards settlement	Accelerated route to settlement	Allows dependants
 Australia National Innovation Visa	For individuals with an internationally recognised exceptional achievement	• Recognised records of exceptional achievement • Approved nominator • Health requirement and character requirements • No debt to the Australian government • Sign Australian values statement	Up to 11 months	AUD 4,840	GBP 2,360	Permanent	Permanent	Yes	No	Yes
 Belgium Researchers	For individuals who will conduct research at a recognised institution in Belgium	• Obtain authorisation for research by recognised research organisation • Have the required qualification certificate or degree • Have an offer of employment with a Belgian research institute, that's recognised by the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office	4-8 weeks	EUR 350 (depends on length of stay)	GBP 295	3 years	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
 Canada Global Skills Strategy	For high-skilled workers who will contribute to the Canadian economy in a variety of industries including Tech	• Skilled work experience • Education requirements • Job offer under qualified occupation	Up to 6 months	CAD 1,040	GBP 560	3 years	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Is the Global Talent visa competitive?

Figure 5. International comparison of visas targeting global life sciences talent

Visa	Description	Eligibility criteria	Processing time	Cost	GBP equivalent (approx.)	Visa length	Extendable	Time counts towards settlement	Accelerated route to settlement	Allows dependants
 People's Republic of China China Talent Visa	Issued to foreign high-level personnel and much-needed highly talented people	• Achievements in professional fields recognised internationally, including Nobel Prize winners • Scholars from Academy of Science or Academy of Engineering in foreign countries, • Professors and vice professors taking a position in the world's top 200 universities	2-3 weeks	No cost	NA	180 days duration of stay for one time entry (multi entry visa 5-10 years)	Yes	Yes	Yes (in some regions)	Yes
 Germany Research Permit	A residence permit for researchers conducting academic work in Germany	• Offer of employment from a recognised research institution • Have either a PhD or qualification that will allow you to start a PhD programme • A hosting agreement with a recognised research institution • Sufficient funds • Health insurance	6-12 weeks	EUR 100-200	GBP 145	Usually 1 year (aligned with research contract)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
 France Talent Chercheur	For individuals who come to France for a recognised research institution	• Coming to France to conduct research or teach at the university level • An agreement with the institution for no more than 4 years • At least a master's degree	3 to 8 weeks	EUR 269	GBP 225	3 years	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Is the Global Talent visa competitive?

Figure 5. International comparison of visas targeting global life sciences talent

Visa	Description	Eligibility criteria	Processing time	Cost	GBP equivalent (approx.)	Visa length	Extendable	Time counts towards settlement	Accelerated route to settlement	Allows dependants
 Italy Residence Permit for research	For individuals who will conduct research at a recognised institution in Italy	• Signed hosting agreement with an authorised research organisation • Either a PhD or a qualification that will allow an individual to start PhD study	2-4 months	EUR 116	GBP 100	1 year	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
 Japan Highly Skilled Professional Visa	Working visa aiming to attract highly skilled professionals to come to work in Japan	Individuals performing: • Advanced academic research activities: research or education based on contract with public or private organisations in Japan • Advanced specialised/technical activities: natural sciences or humanities • Advanced business management activities	2 to 4 weeks	JPY 4000	GBP 20	5 years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
 Netherlands Scientific Research Residence Permit	For highly skilled individuals who want to engage in research activities	• Working as a paid scientific researcher or doctoral candidate • Work as an unpaid research or doctoral candidate • Have a higher education degree required for PhD study • Have a Dutch employment contract or hosting agreement with the research organisation	2-8 weeks	EUR 243	GBP 205	Valid for the length of job contract (up to 5 years)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Is the Global Talent visa competitive?

Figure 5. International comparison of visas targeting global life sciences talent

Visa	Description	Eligibility criteria	Processing time	Cost	GBP equivalent (approx.)	Visa length	Extendable	Time counts towards settlement	Accelerated route to settlement	Allows dependants
 Poland Temporary Residence Permit for Scientific Research	For individuals who want to go to Poland and conduct scientific research	• At minimum, master's degree that allows you to start a PhD • Hosting agreement with an approved research organisation in Poland	2-4 months	PLN 340	GBP 70	3 years	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
 Republic of Korea E3 research	For individuals who want to seek to engage in high technology research and development	• Degree certificate of documents proving professional experiences • Documents related to the inviting institution/company • Employment contract	2-6 weeks	KRW 60,000	GBP 30	1 year	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
 Spain Researcher visa	For researchers who want to engage in training, research and development and innovation	• Documentation to prove professional qualifications for the role • Sufficient financial resources • Must be in the following role: research staff, scientific and technical staff who carry out scientific research, development and technological innovation, teaching staff hired by universities, higher education and research bodies or institutions	10 days	EUR 80	GBP 65	1 year	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Is the Global Talent visa competitive?

Figure 5. International comparison of visas targeting global life sciences talent

Visa	Description	Eligibility criteria	Processing time	Cost	GBP equivalent (approx.)	Visa length	Extendable	Time counts towards settlement	Accelerated route to settlement	Allows dependants
 United Arab Emirates Golden Visa for Global Talent	For top talent to live and work in the UAE while enjoying exclusive benefits	• Hold an elevated or directorial role in the company • At minimum undergraduate degree from an accredited university • Hold current position for the last 5 years • Earn at least AED 30,000 annually (expected to increase to AED 50,000) • Have a valid work contract • Have to secure their certificate of equivalency	Up to 8 weeks	AED 2,800	GBP 590	10 years	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
 United States of America O-1 Temporary Visa	For individuals with extraordinary ability in sciences, arts, education, business or athletics, or has demonstrated a record of extraordinary achievement	• Petitioner - a US agent, employer or foreign employer through a US agent must file for Form-129 for applicant • Written advisory opinion from a peer group/individual with extraordinary achievements in the same field • Contract between the beneficiary and the petitioner • Demonstrate a level of expertise	6 to 7 months	USD 460	GBP 355	Up to 3 years	Yes	No	No	No

Is the Global Talent visa competitive?

Number of visas issued

The uptake of different countries' visas, which have differing eligibility criteria, provides only a limited view of their respective competitiveness. Additionally, most of the visas in Figure 5 do not provide data on how many visas are issued each year.

However, we can yield some insights on competitiveness from those visas that do provide this data (see Appendix 1). For instance, the Global Talent visa (4,110 visas issued in 2023) is closest in volume to the visas offered by France (4,650 in 2023) and Republic of Korea (5,800 in 2023). In terms of applications and Expressions of Interest (EOI), the Global Talent visa likely surpasses Australia's visa (which received around 1,880 EOIs as of December 2024) but probably lags behind Canada's (which received 22,120 applications in 2021 alone).

This data suggests that the Global Talent Visa could attract more talent to the UK, possibly reaching levels comparable to France's Talent Chercheur visa, if it became more competitive and addressed the factors that have limited its growth, including underutilisation outside of academia and myths about its accessibility. To better understand how the government can make the Global Talent visa more attractive to global life sciences talent, the rest of this section provides a qualitative analysis of its strengths and weaknesses relative to its competitors.

Eligibility criteria

At first glance, the Global Talent visa's eligibility criteria are broader and more flexible than those of its competitors. Applicants can apply either as an exceptional leader in their field or as a potential future leader showing exceptional promise. This flexibility makes the Global Talent visa accessible to both established professionals and emerging talent in the life sciences sector.

The Global Talent visa's evidential requirements are similarly flexible. For example, in the research and innovation fields, applicants can apply to receive endorsement via a job offer, individual fellowship, research grant or (in the absence of these) successful submission to a peer review by the applicable endorsing body.[60] Applicants can also receive endorsement by winning a specified prestigious prize,[61] though the volume of these applications is significantly smaller than those using the aforementioned routes. This flexibility allows global life sciences talent to apply for a Global Talent visa without a confirmed job offer or research grant, expanding the pool of potential applicants and facilitating cross-sectoral exchanges, such as moving from academia to industry.

Is the Global Talent visa competitive?

While the eligibility criteria of the Global Talent visa's competitors vary from visa to visa, there are overarching differences that demonstrate the UK's route has a competitive advantage over them:

- Australia's National Innovation visa and the United States' O-1 visa also target life sciences talent with exceptional achievements, but applicants for either must have a nominator or petitioner (such as an employer). In contrast, Global Talent visa applicants can apply without endorsement if they have received a prestigious award specified by the UK government.
- The visas offered by Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands require applicants to meet a baseline of formal education (such as a master's degree or PhD) and have a job or research position offered at an eligible research organisation. In contrast, Global Talent visa applicants can apply without postgraduate education if they go through the digital technology route.
- The United Arab Emirates' Golden Visa for Golden Talent does not require applicants to have a postgraduate education or work for a research organisation, but its salary requirement may pose a barrier to emerging life sciences talent. In contrast, Global Talent visa applicants do not need to meet a minimum salary threshold (a key differentiator from the Skilled Worker visa), though they must possess sufficient funds to pay fees like the Immigration Health Surcharge.

However, despite this supposed flexibility, stakeholders from across the life sciences sector reported that the eligibility criteria of the Global Talent visa are a key shortcoming of the UK's offer.

> "The current qualifying criteria is holding back the usability of the route."
>
> Workshop attendee

The complexity and inaccessible language of the eligibility criteria are of particular concern because, according to some stakeholders involved in endorsing Global Talent visa applicants, it leads to a substantial proportion of applicants to apply via the peer review process. One potential explanation for this trend is that applicants fear they will fail to qualify via the visa's other routes (due to the myths described in box 2) and perceive the peer review process as a more flexible and lower-risk route, despite evidence from other stakeholders stating the peer review carries a higher risk of rejection.

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This is problematic as peer-reviewed applications are resource-intensive for endorsing bodies and take longer to administer than the other routes. Overreliance on peer review, as reported by endorsing bodies, contributes to delays in visa processing times and reduces the Global Talent visa's efficiency as an immigration route.

This problem is exacerbated by the lack of more precise data on the success rates of the Global Talent visa's three different fields and their varying routes to endorsement, which are currently aggregated. Providing this data could address the information failure described above and better inform potential applicants. It could also help endorsing bodies learn from other fields and endorsing bodies, facilitating the exchange of best practices that improve the administration of the Global Talent visa.

Expanding the number of endorsing bodies is not a straightforward solution to streamlining the visa. The work required to operate as an endorsing body is substantial and complex, and the role is a voluntary position, meaning this additional workload is not accompanied by extra financial aid. Consequently, the immigration system's capacity to make endorsement decisions for the Global Talent visa is constrained in terms of both volume and range of applications.

An example of this limited range is the Global Talent visa's digital technology route. While this route may allow some non-academic life sciences talent, such as machine learning experts, to apply for the visa, its explicit exclusion of applicants with "experience of managing large corporate teams"[62] will prevent a sizeable proportion of life sciences talent from doing so. This limitation is particularly restrictive for talent with experience working in the pharmaceutical industry, which is predominantly

"Assessing peer-review endorsements is an intensive process for endorsers."

"We don't have access to data on the success of applications from endorsements."

"Operating as an endorser is a voluntary position, and it can be difficult to balance the requirements for smaller organisations."

Workshop attendees

Is the Global Talent visa competitive?

composed of large multinational companies, and risks deterring C-suite and other roles that could improve the UK's ability to scale up and commercialise life sciences innovations.

In summary, the visible flexibility of the Global Talent visa should push it far ahead of its narrower-scoped competitors, but its complexity contributes to a widespread perception of it being inaccessible, limiting its uptake outside of academia and resulting in an immigration system that is slower than it needs to be. Streamlining the Global Talent visa's eligibility criteria, without diluting its purpose of attracting the very best to the UK, will be critical to achieving the government's ambitions for the visa, as set out in the Immigration White Paper. Steps to accomplish this and other improvements to the Global Talent visa's competitiveness are outlined in the report's recommendations.

Processing time

Applicants for the Global Talent visa can encounter processing times ranging from 5 to 13 weeks. This sizeable level of variability is due, in part, to the inefficiencies described above, as well as differences between the different application routes:

- Applications based on receipt of a prestigious prize can bypass the first stage (endorsement), thereby reducing the total application process by 2 to 5 weeks.
- Applications based on endorsement go through the first stage and are typically processed within 2 weeks of submission, allowing them to proceed to the second stage. However, for endorsement-based applications requiring a peer review, processing times are extended to approximately 5 weeks[63] to allow for the additional evidence to be processed.[64]

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- Applications that reach the second stage can face varying processing times depending on whether the application is inside (up to 8 weeks) or outside of the UK (up to 3 weeks).
- All of these timeframes are also indicative and subject to change, which introduces further scope for variable and unpredictable processing times.

When compared with its competitors, the Global Talent visa's processing time is middle of the range. Spain (10 days), Japan (2-4 weeks), and China (2-3 weeks) are the fastest immigration routes open to global talent, far outpacing the UK's typical range of 5-13 weeks (or 3-8 weeks with a prize). However, the UK is much faster than the United States (6-7 months) and Australia (up to 11 months), both of which are major competitors in clinical trials[65] and other fields of life sciences research.

Cost

The cost of applying for a visa, alongside additional levies such as health insurance fees, is a major consideration for top global talent when deciding where to emigrate. Cost can be particularly influential when attracting life sciences talent into the university and research charity sectors, where salaries are lower compared with industry, as these costs consume a greater portion of their income.

The Global Talent visa is the most expensive of the visas assessed in this report, costing around £3,821 (3 years) or £5,891 (5 years) for one applicant with no dependants. This cost includes recent increases in the Immigration Health Surcharge,[66] which is paid in full and upfront when applying for the visa.

For comparison, Australia's National Innovation visa (the second-most expensive visa) is only 61% of the cost of a 3-year Global Talent Visa and has the added benefit of being permanent. The vast majority of competing visas operate with far lower application costs, ranging from the United Arab Emirates (approximately £590) to Japan (approximately £20).

Therefore, the Global Talent visa's application fees and the Immigration Health Surcharge make the UK's offer to global life sciences talent decidedly less competitive, particularly talent working outside of industry. Policymakers should gather more evidence on how these costs discourage the world's top global talent from working in the UK and, in turn, impede delivery of the government's growth agenda.

Visa duration and extendibility

Unlike its competitors, the Global Talent visa offers multiple visa durations: 3 years and 5 years. Not only is this more flexible, but it is also more

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generous. Of the 14 comparator visas, only China (5-10 years), the United Arab Emirates (10 years), and Australia (permanent) offer visas that can last longer than the Global Talent visa. In contrast, four visas (Germany, Italy, Republic of Korea, and Spain) last just 1 year. Therefore, the Global Talent visa holds an advantage over most of its competitors, offering both flexibility for shorter-term contracts and longer-term stability for global talent.

Lastly, all the visas assessed in this report are extendable. As a result, extendibility has effectively become a global standard that visas must meet to successfully compete for the world's top talent.

Settlement and dependants

Like visa extendibility, the ability to use time spent on a visa aimed at global talent to permanently settle in a country has become a widespread norm, though not a universal one.

The Global Talent visa is highly competitive in this regard, offering an accelerated route to settlement in 3 years[67] instead of 5 years. Of the 14 comparator visas, only three offer an accelerated route to settlement: China's Talent Visa (3 years instead of 5 years, but only in certain regions);[68] Germany's Research Permit (4 years instead of 5 years);[69] and Japan's Highly Skilled Professional visa (1 year instead of 10 years, using a points-based system).[70] Not only does this make the Global Talent visa more competitive than visas offered by countries that do not offer an accelerated route to settlement, such as Canada and Australia, but it also puts it far ahead of the United States' O-1 visa, which does not provide any route to settlement.

The importance of the Global Talent visa's accelerated route to settlement cannot be overstated, as it plays a major role in drawing top talent to the UK despite the visa's competitive weaknesses, such as its high cost. For instance, a government survey conducted in 2024 found that 95% of Global Talent visa holders intended to apply for settlement in the UK once eligible.[71] The accelerated route will become even more attractive after the minimum time requirement for settlement increases from 5 to 10 years, as outlined in the Immigration White Paper. Therefore, it will be a vital lever to attracting the global talent necessary to deliver the government's growth ambitions, and preserving accelerated settlement will be vital to ensuring the Global Talent visa remains competitive.

Finally, all the visas assessed in this report allow applicants to bring dependent family members, creating an additional norm that visas targeting the world's top talent must meet to be competitive.

Is the Global Talent visa competitive?

Overall competitiveness

This report's findings show that, despite its strengths, the Global Talent visa attracts less talent than similar visas offered by the UK's competitors and has the potential to be more competitive.

The Global Talent visa's accelerated route to settlement is arguably its greatest advantage, putting it ahead of nearly all 14 comparator visas, and upcoming reforms could strengthen it even further. The visa's flexible duration, extendibility, and support for dependants are also key strengths, as they ensure the UK's global talent offer keeps pace with those of its competitors. Similarly, the visa's processing time is adequate, neither faster nor slower than most of its competitors, but could be more competitive if its processes were streamlined.

However, these strengths are undermined by the Global Talent visa's two competitive weaknesses, which threaten the government's ambition to "promote growth [by] ensuring that the very highly skilled have opportunities to come to the UK and access our targeted routes for the brightest and best global talent":[72]

1. The visa's eligibility criteria do not meet the needs of industry or endorsing bodies, as their complexity contributes to a misperception of the visa's accessibility and inefficiencies in the immigration system, making the criteria's flexibility a competitive liability and not a strength.
2. The visa's high up-front costs reduce its competitiveness relative to equivalent visas in peer nations, especially when targeting top life sciences talent with dependants, as this multiplies the financial burden of fees such as the Immigration Health Surcharge.

Without government intervention, these weaknesses will continue to constrain uptake of the Global Talent visa, despite the government's Immigration White Paper placing the visa at the heart of its plan to boost economic growth by attracting top talent to growth sectors like the life sciences.

4. Recommendations

Recommendations

Improving the competitiveness of the UK's offer to global life sciences talent, which is vital to achieving the government's ambitions for sector growth, does not need to come at the expense of the government's manifesto pledge to lower net immigration and balance day-to-day spending. Instead of proposing widespread reforms to the immigration system or expensive cuts to fees, this report sets out targeted and low-cost recommendations across three domains of the UK's global talent offer:

Recommendation 1: Enhance the Global Talent visa's competitiveness

Streamline the application routes

The Global Talent visa's application routes and their differing eligibility criteria are overly complex, resulting in too many applicants applying via the resource-intensive peer review process out of fear they will fail to qualify via more efficient processes. Consequently, the visa's delivery is less efficient than it should be, leading to slower processing times than those offered by many competing visas.

Streamlining the Global Talent visa's application routes, such as by merging routes together and adding greater flexibility to their eligibility criteria, should reduce the complexity faced by applicants. In turn, this change should make it easier for applicants to select the application route that is right for them, reducing reliance on the slower peer review process and accelerating the visa's average processing times. Streamlining would also align with the government's commitment to make the Global Talent visa "simpler and easier for top scientific and design talent to use".[73]

A recent agreement between the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)[74] is a practical example of this streamlining. Specifically, UKRI has made it simpler for AMRC member charities to register as endorsed research funders, allowing recipients of their research grants to apply for the Global Talent visa without using the lengthy peer review process. The Home Office, in partnership with UKRI, could explore applying the lessons learned from the AMRC-UKRI agreement to other parts of the life sciences sector, plus the seven other growth sectors. For example, allowing members of trade associations in R&D-intensive sectors to fast-track the endorsement of applicants with a job offer could increase industry's uptake of the Global Talent visa.

Publish data on application outcomes

Another factor that contributes to the inefficient delivery of the Global Talent visa is the lack of published data on applicants' success rates, which contributes to the complexity faced by applicants and their reliance on the peer review process. Applicants would be better informed of the visa's

Recommendations

application routes if they could view this data (in aggregate), and it could also persuade more of them to apply via more efficient endorsement routes, such as the job offer route.

Developing a public dashboard on Global Talent visa application outcomes across the three fields and their endorsement routes would achieve this effect. Furthermore, this dashboard would progress the Industrial Strategy's commitment to "continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness"[75] of government policymaking.

Preserve the Global Talent visa's existing strengths

To ensure the UK's offer keeps pace with its competitors, the government must preserve the Global Talent visa's competitive strengths while it reforms the wider immigration system.

Specifically, the Global Talent visa's 3-year accelerated route to settlement and flexible and extendible duration, and support for talent to bring their dependants with them must not be diluted or removed.

Recommendation 2: Adopt a pro-growth approach to talent mobility

The Global Talent visa is just one element of the UK's offer to global life sciences talent. Providing employers and global talent with greater awareness and understanding of the UK's immigration routes is vital to making its offer more competitive. Additionally, reducing the immediate upfront costs to applicants would address a persistent and high-profile weakness in the UK's global talent offer.

Promote the UK's global talent offer

If the government wants to achieve its ambition to "double the number of workers that an overseas business can send to the UK with the aim of establishing a presence in the UK",[76] it must ensure that industry understands the immigration routes available. Therefore, a government campaign of industry engagement, ranging from UK-based SMEs to globally headquartered multinational companies, should be implemented to promote these routes. Particular focus should be placed on the Global Talent and High Potential Individual visas, which could include providing clearer guidance on their purposes and eligibility criteria. Furthermore, the government could work with trade associations, such as the ABPI, and cross-departmental bodies, such as the Office for Life Sciences and the Office for Investment, to disseminate this campaign.

Recommendations

Align settlement reform with the growth agenda

In addition to retaining the Global Talent visa's accelerated route to settlement, the government should consider how reform of settlement could impact the attractiveness of other immigration routes targeting the world's top talent and any knock-on effects on growth. For instance, the government could accelerate the route to settlement of Skilled Worker visa holders and their dependants if they work in one of the Modern Industrial Strategy's eight growth sectors, which would maintain the route's competitiveness while remaining aligned with the shift to a points-based settlement model.

Recommendation 3: Advance talent mobility in bilateral negotiations

Finally, as the government progresses negotiations with Switzerland, the European Commission and European Union, and other countries or trading blocs, it should explore and pursue opportunities to enhance the mobility of global life sciences talent. This could include: establishing or streamlining talent mobility schemes, such as an EU-UK youth mobility scheme; agreeing mutual recognition of standards and qualifications in regulated roles, such as Qualified Persons involved in batch release for medicines; expanding the range of temporary work visas targeting the eight growth sectors, such as life sciences; and considering practical barriers to talent mobility, such as expanding the use of eGates in airports, in future negotiations.

Appendix 1: International comparison of visas targeting global life sciences talent (visas granted)

Appendix 1

Appendix 1: International comparison of visas targeting global life sciences talent (visas granted)

Country	Visas granted
United Kingdom – Global Talent Visa	2021: approx. 1,841 visas issued 2022: approx. 2,973 visas issued 2023: approx. 4,110 visas issued 2024: approx. 3,882 visas issued These statistics are inclusive of all Global Talent streams, as no detailed statistics are available breaking down these numbers by stream.
Australia – National Innovation Visa	4,000 visas were allocated to the Global Talent Visa, with which the National Innovation visas granted in 2024/25 will be counted within this allocation. As of December 2024, approx. 1,800 Expression of Interest forms had been submitted for the NIV, with only 10 visas issued.
Belgium – Researchers	No accurate information available.
Canada – Global Skills Strategy	22,120 applications processed (2021 only available data).
People's Republic of China – China Talent Visa	No accurate information available.
Germany – Research Permit	No accurate information available.
France – Talent Chercheur	In 2023, France issued approximately 4,650 visas under the 'scientific/skills and talent' category, representing an 11.9% increase compared to 2022.
Italy – Residence Permit for research	No accurate information available.
Japan – Highly Skilled Professional Visa	No accurate information available
Netherlands – Scientific Research Residence Permit	No accurate information available
Poland – Temporary Residence Permit for Scientific Research	No accurate information available
Republic of Korea – E3 research	January to October 2022: approx. 3,500 E-3 visas issued January to October 2023: approx. 5,800 E-3 visas issued
Spain – Researcher visa	No accurate information available
United Arab Emirates – Golden Visa for Global Talent	2021: approx. 47,150 visas issued 2022: approx. 79,617 visas issued 2023: approx. 158,000 visas issued
United States of America – O-1 Temporary Visa	2021: approx. 7,295 visas issued 2022: approx. 19,100 visas issued 2023: approx. 18,994 visas issued

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About the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry

The ABPI exists to make the UK the best place in the world to research, develop and access medicines and vaccines to improve patient care.

We represent companies of all sizes which invest in making and discovering medicines and vaccines to enhance and save the lives of millions of people around the world.

In England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, we work in partnership with governments and the NHS so that patients can get new treatments faster and the NHS can plan how much it spends on medicines. Every day, our members partner with healthcare professionals, academics and patient organisations to find new solutions to unmet health needs.

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