

IMMIGRATION GUIDANCE – VISITORS TO THE UK

Introduction

This Guidance is for staff and their managers who, from time to time, may wish to bring staff from Dubai or Malaysia to the UK for certain work purposes; or external visitors to the UK, for example, for giving guest lectures, undertaking collaborative research either as a visiting researcher or a visiting student from another external HEI or employer.

Not all nationalities require to obtain a visa prior to visiting the UK. The Contents Section below sets out what this Guidance covers. Please click on the appropriate heading to find out more. If you need further help or guidance to help you navigate the appropriate options, please contact the [HR Helpdesk](#)

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Who needs a visa to visit and carry out work activities in the UK?

Malaysian Nationals and European Nationals may visit for up to 6 months without a Visitor Visa but only if carrying out the duties listed under Visiting on General Business_{below}.

UAE nationals are now required to apply for an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) from 1 February 2024, if carrying out need a Standard Visitor Visa for all activities.

Note that any nationality wishing to stay in the UK for more than 6 months to undertake Academic/Research activity will need to apply for an Academic Visitor Visa.

If your nationality is not one listed above, you can check if you require a visitor visa or an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) by following this link: <https://www.gov.uk/check-uk-visa>. Then please read this Guidance to find out what steps to take according to whether or not you need to apply for a visa.

The new Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)

The Government is starting to roll out the ETA for certain nationalities in place of a Visitor Visa or for nationalities who do not currently require a Visitor Visa.

Nationals of Gulf Cooperation Council countries already need an ETA to travel to or transit through the UK. All remaining nationalities will be able to apply for an ETA from later this year through a quick and simple process using the UK ETA app.

ETA is extending in two phases:

- Eligible non-Europeans can apply from 27 November 2024 and need an ETA to travel to the UK from 8 January 2025.
- Eligible Europeans can apply from 5 March 2025 and will need an ETA to travel to the UK from 2 April 2025.

You can find further information about which nationalities may apply for an ETA now on the HR Hub at this link: [Electronic Travel Authorisation Scheme Heriot-Watt info pack.pdf](#)

Other nationalities should follow this link to see if you or your visitor will be able to apply for an ETA rather than a visa: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-an-electronic-travel-authorisation-eta>

What documents are required to visit the UK?

Regardless of whether or not you need a visa to visit the UK you must meet the Standard Visitor Eligibility Requirements, and you may be asked at the UK Border about your eligibility and the activities you plan to carry out.

In all circumstances, therefore, you must provide a valid passport or travel document. Your passport should be valid for the whole of your stay in the UK.

You may also be asked to prove:

- you're eligible for the activities you want to do
- you've arranged accommodation for your stay
- you'll leave at the end of your visit
- you're able to support yourself and your dependents during your trip (or have funding from someone else to support you)

To help with providing this evidence, in all circumstances, whether or not you need a Standard Visitor visa, your Host Manager or Head of School should be able to produce an Invitation Letter verifying the reason for the visit and that HWU UK is providing travel and accommodation costs. This should be presented at Border Control if requested.

It is also helpful to obtain a scan of the stamped passport for audit purposes so we can demonstrate that a visa was not required, and you entered the UK correctly – see the Section below [Passport Checks for Visitors on campus](#) for further information about this. If you did not need to get your passport stamped or were advised by Border Control to use the E-Gates, please retain your boarding pass to show when we carry out your passport check.

What can I do as a Visitor to the UK?

Visiting on General Business (Standard Visa)

You can find further information about this on the Government Website here <https://www.gov.uk/standard-visitor/visit-on-business>

You can visit the UK for up to 6 months for a range of business activities; the examples below would be relevant for visitors to Heriot-Watt UK Campuses:

- attend interviews, meetings, conferences and seminars
- get work-related training if you're employed overseas and the training is not available in your home country
- give a one-off or short series of talks, e.g. at a conference or as a Visiting Lecturer. You may be paid for this work if you are visiting from another HEI; if you are currently employed at HeriotWatt Dubai or Heriot-Watt Malaysia, you will continue to be paid as normal and should not receive additional payment.

Visiting as an Academic/Researcher on a Standard Visa

If you are an Academic or Researcher from an academic institution overseas visiting for up to 6 months, in addition to the activities listed above, you can also:

- take part in formal exchange arrangements with UK counterparts
- carry out research, collaborate, gather information and facts, or conduct research, either for a specific project which directly relates to your employment overseas, or independently

If you wish to visit as an academic for more than 6 months you will need to apply for a Standard Academic Visitor Visa regardless of your nationality.

In addition, you must also satisfy these additional eligibility requirements by proving that you are:

- highly qualified in your field of expertise - this will usually mean you have a PhD or higher
- currently working in that field of expertise at an academic institution overseas • not filling a permanent teaching post in the UK
- visiting to do research or a formal exchange.

Permitted Paid Engagements

This Visa Route is now part of the Standard Visitor route. It is for short-term visits up to 6 months but you must do the engagement in the first month. This route is for those invited as an expert in their profession by a UK-based organisation. This includes, for example,

- giving a lecture or series of lectures about your area of expertise;
- examining or assessing students;
- chairing or taking part in selection panels.

External Examiners would be able to apply for this visa if they are required to visit the UK to examine or assess students.

You must be able to demonstrate that you are highly qualified in your area of expertise, for example, by providing examples of your published work or evidence of lectures already given.

Further information about this type of visa may be found at this link:

<https://www.gov.uk/standard-visitor/paid-engagement-event>

EU Nationals do not need a visa to undertake Permitted Paid Engagement Work, but when you arrive in the UK, ideally, you should go to a Border Control Officer to get a stamp in your passport rather than using the E-Gates, though some Border Control Officers may allow you to pass through the E-Gates regardless, as an EEA Citizen. Having a stamp in your passport gives evidence at future checks that you are here to do the activities you came to the UK to do but if you are not provided with a stamp, the Invitation Letter referred to above will also provide the evidence you need.

Visiting as a Student from another HEI overseas

If you are a student at another HEI and you wish to visit Heriot-Watt University to undertake research as part of your ongoing studies you may be able to do so for up to 6 months in certain circumstances. You would need to provide confirmation from your overseas provider that the research or tuition is part of or relevant to the course you are undertaking overseas. The [International Student Advice](#) Office should be able to give you further advice.

Tier 5 Government Authorised Exchange Sponsorship (GAE)

If you have a student, post-doc or academic coming from another university, the individual is likely to need to be sponsored by Heriot-Watt under the Tier 5 GAE visa if

- they will be undertaking research or work experience activities for more than six months at Heriot-Watt
- they are being funded from their home HEI or their Government

If you wish to bring someone to Heriot-Watt who meets the above criteria, you should first contact your local School Research Support Team or complete the online form at this link [Visiting Scholar Application Form \(office.com\)](#):

ATAS requirements

If you are visiting the UK to carry out certain research, either as part of your studies or as part of research you are employed or are visiting to undertake, you may also need an ATAS Certificate. For further information about whether you need this and how to apply, please see this [ATAS Guidance](#).

You must apply for the ATAS Certificate before applying for the Visitor or Tier 5 GAE Visa; please also note that ATAS certificates may take weeks or even months to process so please plan your trip carefully and do not book travel or accommodation until you have received the certificate.

Applying for a Visitor Visa

Timings and costs

The earliest you can apply for a Visitor Visa before you travel to the UK is 3 months before you travel. It's currently taking 4 weeks on average to get a decision on Standard Visitor visas, but these times can vary significantly. [Find out visa decision waiting times](#)

If you are visiting to study or undertake research you must apply for the ATAS Certificate before you apply for the Visitor Visa so that your Visitor Visa does not expire before your ATAS Certificate is approved. See the section above on [ATAS requirements](#) for further details.

The cost of a Standard Visitor Visa (including if you are visiting to carry out Permitted Paid Engagements) of up to 6 months is £115.

If you are visiting as an Academic for more than 6 months but less than 12 months, the cost is £200.

This cost can be claimed through expenses if you are an employee of Heriot-Watt University and travelling on university business.

Documents and information you'll need

You must have a passport or travel document that is valid for the whole of your stay in the UK. There must be a blank page in your passport for your Standard Visitor visa.

You'll need to provide the following information in your online application:

- the dates you're planning to travel to the UK
- where you'll be staying during your visit
- how much you think your trip will cost
- your current home address and how long you've lived there
- your parents' names and dates of birth (if known)
- how much you earn in a year
- details of any criminal, civil or immigration offences you may have committed

You may also need to provide additional information in certain circumstances but the online application process will make this clear.

As part of your online application, you also need to book an appointment at a visa application centre. Allow time to attend your appointment, as the [visa application centre](#) could be in another country.

At your appointment, you'll need to:

- prove your identity with your passport or travel document
- have your fingerprints and photograph (known as 'biometric information') taken
- provide the required documents that show you're eligible for a Standard Visitor visa

The visa application centre may keep your passport and documents while processing your application.

For **Academic Visas** you will need to provide additional information to show you meet the eligibility requirements, for example by providing a letter from:

- your employer outlining the dates of your sabbatical or exchange
- your employer outlining the research to be undertaken

- the UK host organisation confirming the arrangements for your research, exchange or clinical practice

For Tier 5 GAE Visas, HR will advise managers and the individual being sponsored under this Visa of any additional requirements when the Certificate of Sponsorship is assigned.

Passport Checks for Visitors on campus

You should contact your local Student Services Team for advice about checking and verifying your passport and/or visa in the early days of your visit. This is to ensure we can provide evidence that you are visiting us for an agreed purpose and in line with Home Office rules, when we are audited.

Visiting as a Visitor whether or not you need a Visitor Visa

We will need to see your passport and take a scan of your photo page and, if you have a Visitor Visa, also scan the page with your visa stamp in it. Please contact your local Student Services Team to arrange this. It would also be helpful to bring your Letter of Invitation with you so that we can make sure we have a copy on file.

Visiting on a Tier 5 GAE visa

You will need to [provide an on-line share code](#) in advance of your arrival in the UK.

We will also need to see your passport and take a scan of your photo page and, page with your visa stamp in it. Please contact the [HR helpdesk](#) to arrange this.