

UK Startup Visa Scheme

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IMPORTANT NOTE: this policy document draft has been produced to reflect the implementation of the change from Tier 1 Graduate Entrepreneur visa to the Startup Visa – 30th March 2019. Any UKVI amendments subsequent to the drafting date of this policy may not be reflected in this policy.

Introduction

The Startup visa scheme (“the scheme” or “visa”) is operated under the control of the International Office with delivery provided by the Enterprise Support teams at Coventry University Main Campus and Coventry University London.

Each Enterprise Support team shall produce information guidance and management control according to this policy. This Policy Document is the definitive control document for operation of the scheme and all delivery and communications should remain compliant at all times.

Students and Graduates of the Coventry University Group are open to apply for the scheme within a 2-year period of their graduation date. Applications after this time are not allowed unless expressly authorised by the International Office. If applicants are currently in the UK they must make an application within the requirements as shown in the Timescales section.

All applicants must undergo a Visa eligibility check to ensure that they are eligible for the scheme prior to application. All applicants must complete a Scheme application form prior to commencement of support (i.e. assessment of idea and panel preparation). All applicants must be approved by an Endorsement Panel prior to an endorsement letter being issued. The Endorsement Panel will submit a recommendation report with any endorsement and submit it to the International Office for ratification and issuance of an Endorsement Letter via the University Registrar.

Application Form

The Application Form must contain as a minimum the following:

1. The applicant’s responsibilities according to the UKVI and Coventry University requirements for the Startup Visa – see section Applicants Responsibilities;
2. A commitment from the applicant that they must enrol on a Graduate Incubation Programme and pay any fees in advance to remain covered by Coventry University sponsorship for the duration of the Visa;
3. Permission from the applicant that Coventry University may make enquiries about their immigration history and make disclosures of the applicants personal or business information to the UKVI, Government Departments or any Enforcement Agencies as required.

All applications that progress to the stage of presentation to an Endorsement Panel must be submitted using a standardised business plan template and financial forecast. This is to ensure that any inspector or auditor for the scheme is able to identify that a comparative and objective process is in operation for considering all applications.

Start up Visa Eligibility Requirements

Applicants must be in possession of a qualifying Coventry University Group degree award dated no more than 2 years old on the date of application to the Start Up visa. Qualifying awards are restricted to full degrees. If an applicant's qualification falls outside of this, they must obtain the written permission of the International Office to proceed.

Applicants can find details of UKVI eligibility requirements online at <https://www.gov.uk/start-up-visa/eligibility>.

Coventry University is required under Start Up visa policy to develop a mechanism to assess your business idea. We must confirm that we have assessed your business proposal against the following 3 key criteria:

- **Innovation** -- Does the applicant have a genuine, original business plan that meets new or existing market needs and/or creates a competitive advantage?
- **Viability** -- Does the applicant have, or are they actively developing, the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience and market awareness to successfully run the business?
- **Scalability** -- Is there evidence of structured planning and of potential for job creation and growth into national markets?

In our assessment of your business idea, we may consider some or all of these example questions:

- Is the business offering something more than merely competing with similar local traders? Is there evidence of market research?
- Is the business likely to gain sufficient traction?
- Is there a need for the business in the UK market that is not already being fulfilled?
- Does the applicant have realistic, sustainable, product goals?
- Is it a business with a potential for growth?
- Is the idea bringing something new to the pre-existing UK/global business market?
- Is there a long-term plan for the business?
- Would this business successfully scale to be a part of the national market?

If the applicant is currently sponsored, or has been sponsored within the 12 month period preceding application, by a government or international scholarship agency, the financial sponsor must confirm in writing that it consents to the application. This permission must also include a written expression that the sponsor gives consent to extend the applicants stay in the UK.

Family

The following family members can apply to be a dependant of the applicant in the UK:

- spouse or civil partner;
- unmarried partner, or same sex partner, who is not a civil partner;
- children aged under 18 if they are outside the UK;
- children of any age if they are applying in the UK and they currently have immigration permission as a dependant and are not leading an independent life.

There are additional regulations for the amount of money that dependants must show prior to application – see section Finance Requirements.

Application Fees

There are no application fees charged by Coventry University for this scheme. However, all applicants are required to enrol on the Graduate Incubation Programme which is a chargeable service.

The UKVI charges fees for the following:

- Visa application fees and any other charges imposed by the UKVI
- Healthcare Surcharge
- Fee for providing biometric information

The UKVI visa application fees are listed on the UKVI website at <https://www.gov.uk/start-up-visa>. As at 03/2019 the following charges apply:

Who is applying	Applications outside the UK	Applications within the UK
You	£363	£493
If you're a citizen of Turkey or Macedonia	£308	£438
Dependants	£363 per person	£493 per person

The Healthcare Surcharge varies according to circumstance. Applicants should be directed to the relevant UKVI web-page <https://www.gov.uk/healthcare-immigration-application/pay>.

The fee for biometric information is listed on the UKVI website at <https://www.gov.uk/biometric-residence-permits/personal-data>

All of the fees listed above are subject to change. Changes to fees do not affect the substantive content of this policy.

Finance Requirements

Applicant

UKVI maintenance requirements for Visa applications specify that money available to the applicant must be held in an account for a period of 90 consecutive days prior to applying for the visa. The closing balance of the bank statement must be no more than 31 days before the date of the visa application. The required amount of money as at April 2019 is £945.

The account must be in the name of the applicant only or a joint account if they are one of the named account holders. It is not possible to use an account in the name of parent(s) or legal guardian(s).

The form in which these funds must be held is detailed in **Immigration** Rules Appendix W: Immigration Rules for Workers (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-appendix-w-immigration-rules-for-workers#part-w5-specific-requirements--start-up>)

To obtain endorsement from Coventry University there is a requirement to show additional development funds. This is an internal policy, which is not connected to UKVI requirements. It is intended to demonstrate that the applicant is financially prepared to set up their business. Applicants must show availability of funds of £8,000 for Coventry and £9000 for London. This will be checked at the time of presentation to panel.

Dependants

The amount of money dependants must show is £630 per person. The money must have been held for 90 days consecutively before the date of the application. Please see the above section for the forms of acceptable evidence of funds.

Further Guidance can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/792013/family-members-of-sws-migrants-v16.0ext.pdf

Application Process

(Note: for audit purposes, where reference is made to the person responsible for maintaining scheme records the documents mentioned will be forwarded as digital copies to the email address emerge@coventry.ac.uk. CUSE assigned personnel will monitor this mailbox and ensure that these documents are collated and filed ready for inspection in a GDPR compliant format. See the section Record Keeping for the key to document numbers).

1. Enquiry and Scheme Application
 - 1.1. A **STUDENT** or **GRADUATE** who is interested in the scheme will arrange a visit with a representative from the International Office who will explain the visa process and conduct a **Visa Eligibility Check**, which is then notified to the Enterprise Support Team. The International Office representative will probe the applicant to establish their motivation and financial status.
 - 1.2. *Audit: the International Office will forward a copy of the Visa Eligibility Check (1) to the person responsible for maintaining scheme records.*
 - 1.3. The student will then arrange a meeting with an Adviser in the Enterprise Support team at either a group or individual session with the purpose of evaluating their general business idea. The Adviser should explain how a business proposal is evaluated (the criteria), the typical timescales involved (see section on Timescales), the obligations of the scheme, what support is provided by the Graduate Incubation Programme and any standard documentation required.
 - 1.4. Once the student understands the scheme, they must complete an **Application Form** which signals the Enterprise Support team to commence working with them to produce a valid business proposal. The student is now an **APPLICANT**.

- 1.5. The applicant must have successfully completed a CU Group qualifying degree award at NQF Level 6 or above within the last 2 years, prior to their endorsement at panel.
 - 1.6. The Application Form will contain agreement on behalf of the applicant that they understand the terms and conditions of the scheme and that they provide permission to Coventry University to contact the UKVI to pursue further information about their immigration status and history.
 - 1.7. *Audit: The Enterprise Support team will forward a copy of the Application Form (2) to the person responsible for maintaining scheme records.*
2. Pre-panel Preparation
 - 2.1. The Applicant will work with the support of the Enterprise Support Team to prepare their business plan, financial forecasts and personal presentation.
 - 2.2. Once the Adviser is happy that the Applicant has a business plan that meets the requirements and can present it to a panel, the Adviser will ask for an **Endorsement Panel** to be convened. *Note: the Adviser may not sit on a panel for any applicant that they are working with but will usually be present to assist the panel with the clarification of any points raised.*
3. Panel Presentation
 - 3.1. The panel will comprise a minimum of 3 ‘panellists’ drawn from the Enterprise Support Team, International Office and/or the Academic staff. All panellists should declare to the **Panel Chairperson** that they have no conflict of interest with the applicant or decision to be made.
 - 3.2. The panel will comprise at least one member from the International Office who will make the necessary check for funds and immigration status and record this on their Panel Assessment Sheet in the Visa Compliance Checklist section.
 - 3.3. A panel presentation will normally last no longer than 1 hour. The applicant will have a maximum of 20 minutes to complete their presentation followed by a 30-minute question and answer session. The applicant will then leave the room to allow the panel to conclude their deliberations and make a decision. A panel can be conducted via Skype for applications outside the UK, but they should include a visual presentation (i.e. not via telephone conference alone).
 - 3.4. The panellists will review the presentation according to the pre-determined criteria (see Endorsement Criteria) and will complete and sign a **Panel Assessment Sheet** indicating how well the criteria has been met and make either a recommendation to approve or reject the application. Panellists may also provide feedback to the applicant at the end of the presentation if they feel inclined to do so.
 - 3.5. It is expected that there be a unanimous decision on approval or rejection. In the event of disagreement, it is acceptable to proceed based on a majority decision of 2 out of 3 panellists in favour of approving the application. The Panel Chairperson is responsible for collating the Panel Assessment Sheets and sending to the **Scheme Manager** together with the decision to either approve or reject.
 - 3.6. The Scheme Manager will complete a Panel Endorsement Report, detailing the reasons for the approval and forward this to the International Office for ratification and issuance of an Endorsement Letter. Irrespective of approval by the Endorsement panel the final decision to endorse will rest with the Head of the

International Office and an application may still be rejected if there are concerns about compliance (see 4.1 below).

3.7. *Audit: The Scheme Manager will forward a copy of the Panel Endorsement Report and each Panellist's Assessment Sheet (3) to the person responsible for maintaining scheme records.*

3.8. If an application is rejected, the reasons for rejection will be communicated to the applicant. The applicant should be given an opportunity to correct the shortcomings, if possible, and make a second presentation (a referred presentation). If an applicant is rejected a second time, they have no right to a third presentation.

4. Endorsement and Visa Application

4.1. Upon receipt of an approval report from the Scheme Manager, the International Office will conduct any further immigration and eligibility checks necessary to ensure compliance with the Startup Visa eligibility requirements.

4.2. The International Office will then coordinate the issuance of an **Endorsement Letter**. If the applicant is applying from within the UK, the applicant will be asked to attend a meeting with the relevant International Office Representative who will take them through the Visa application in person – this will include payment of the UKVI fees. If the applicant is applying from outside the UK, the Endorsement Letter will be sent to their home address so that they can make their application locally.

4.3. The International Office will send an email to the UKVI to notify them that an Endorsement of the applicant has been issued.

4.4. *Audit: The International Office will forward a copy of the Endorsement Letter (4) and a copy of the Email notifying the UKVI of endorsement (5) to the person responsible for maintaining scheme records.*

5. Visa Approved / Check-in / Induction

5.1. Once the applicant is notified of a successful Visa application they must notify the International Office who will make arrangements for an **Induction meeting** within 2 weeks. At this meeting copies should be taken of the Visa, Passport and proof of address; the Visa expiry date should be noted along with emergency contact information; the applicant should also be reminded of their obligations under the Scheme. The Applicant is now an **ENTREPRENEUR**.

5.2. If the Entrepreneur has applied from outside the UK, they should remain in contact with the International Office every fortnight until they arrive in the UK.

5.3. *Audit: the International Office will forward a copy of the **Induction Checklist** and supporting documents – Passport, BRP, proof of address (6 – 7 – 8 - 9) to the person responsible for maintaining scheme records.*

6. Incubation Programme

6.1. The Enterprise Support team will meet with the Entrepreneur for an initial 'benchmarking' meeting to commence the incubation programme. An invoice should be raised for the fees. The Entrepreneur will be issued with a campus access card and IT account.

6.2. Further progress meetings are arranged with the Entrepreneur and **Meeting Notes** taken. Entrepreneurs are tasked with providing a **Timeline Report** (a diary of activity) to show evidence of progress outside of the meeting notes.

- 6.3. If any non-compliance is identified the entrepreneur will be referred to an Endorsement Review.
- 6.4. *Audit: the Enterprise Support team will maintain evidence of progress meetings (10 and 11) and forward a copy to the person responsible for maintaining scheme records.*

7. Completion

- 7.1. The Entrepreneur will complete the Startup Visa programme either by switching to a different visa or by exiting the UK prior to the Visa expiry date.
- 7.2. *Audit: the International Office will obtain evidence of either a switch (email notification from the entrepreneur) or exit from the UK (Border control exit stamp (12) as appropriate and forward a copy to the person responsible for maintaining scheme records.*

Endorsement Criteria

The Panel must assess the applicant's business proposal against the following 3 criteria (stipulated by the UKVI):

1. Innovation: does the applicant have a genuine, original business plan that meets new or existing market needs and/or creates a competitive advantage;
2. Viability: does the applicant have, or are they actively developing, the necessary skills, knowledge, experience and market awareness to successfully run the business;
3. Scalability: is there evidence of structured planning and of potential for job creation and growth into national markets?

Panellists are given guidance on how to evaluate these criteria in the context of this scheme in the Panel Instructions Guide.

An endorsement is also subject to the applicant meeting the eligibility criteria:

- Proof of available funds – as described above, must be available to the applicant as evidenced by a bank statement showing funds available.
- Additional funds per dependent if the applicant has dependents who will also be party to the Visa application.
- Completion of mandatory UK Exit checks, performed by the International Office, as appropriate.
- Full immigration history that meets the UKVI requirements.
- Signing of the permission to contact UKVI form within two weeks of release of the endorsement letter
- Providing written permission for Coventry University to endorse you for the Start Up Visa Scheme, and also providing permission for Coventry University to provide your information on any endorsement letters issued in respect of your entrepreneurial teammates.

Timescales

Applicants must allow sufficient time to make an application under the scheme. In all cases the following conditions apply:

If the application is to be made from within the UK

1. **There must be a minimum of 2 months** from the point of scheme application (Application Form) to the date of expiry of any current leave to remain (e.g. expiry of a Tier 4 visa); and
2. An Endorsement Panel must be held to consider the proposal **a minimum of 1 month** prior to the date of expiry of any current leave to remain.

These conditions are necessary to allow an appropriate period to process the application and issue an Endorsement Letter before expiry of any current leave.

Notwithstanding the above, the applicant will need to demonstrate to their Adviser that their business proposal has merit before an Endorsement Panel will be convened.

If it is not possible to meet the above timescales, then the applicant will need to consider an application from outside of the UK.

The Enterprise Support Teams will explain to an applicant AT THE OUTSET that it is their responsibility to meet the above timescale conditions and if they are not able meet them then they will need to make an application from outside the UK.

Applicant Responsibilities

Applicants must comply with ALL of the following:

- Complete all documents and processes requested by the UKVI
- The applicant must not invest funds, become a director or register as self-employed **before** they receive approval for their Start Up visa and have received their verified BRP.
- The applicant must make sure they are fully compliant with their current visa requirements, including leaving prior to its expiry date if making their Visa application from outside of the UK.
- The granting of an Endorsement letter will only be made once the applicant is able to persuade an Endorsement Panel that they meet all of the approval criteria

Once the Visa has been granted the entrepreneur must comply with ALL of the following.

The applicant must:

- Attend an 'Induction meeting' within 2 weeks of receiving their Visa;
- Register on the Graduate Incubation Programme and make payment in advance for each 12-month period;
- Meet with a point of contact within the Enterprise Support team at least once a month to provide a business update on progress made within the Incubation scheme;
- Provide a monthly 'Timeline' report that lists all activity undertaken to further their business development;
- Remain in contact with the Enterprise Support team and attend all scheduled meetings;
- Inform the Enterprise Support team if leaving the UK for longer than a week at any time;

- Notify the Enterprise Support team and UKVI of any significant change in personal circumstances, including a change of address;
- If registering or acquiring additional businesses and/or making a significant change to the business plans already presented, the entrepreneur must seek written approval from Coventry University prior to commencement. This may require another submission to an Endorsement panel.

Work Restrictions

Once an application (the visa) is granted and the Start Up visa BRP is received, the applicant can set up (register) a business and, in addition to this, can take employment. The number of hours per week that can be worked is unrestricted by the UKVI, with the exception of employment as a doctor or dentist in training or as a professional sportsperson (including work as a sports coach), all of which are not permissible.

However, any employment undertaken by the entrepreneur must not interfere with the development of their business which should remain the main purpose for which the Startup Visa has been granted. Entrepreneurs should discuss such working arrangements with the Enterprise Support team in advance. The Enterprise Support team will make a decision on any limits that are necessary. If an entrepreneur is considered to be working excessive hours in employment (usually more than 20 hours per week) and neglecting their business development, they will be referred for an Endorsement review which may result in a withdrawal of sponsorship.

Record Keeping

There will be a central record kept for all applicants, endorsements and entrepreneurs. This will be maintained by the Scheme Manager with assistance from the Enterprise Support Teams and International Office. This will comprise digital copies of the following:

1. Visa Eligibility Check
2. Signed Application Form
3. Panel Endorsement Report (record of decision) and Panel Assessment Sheets
4. Endorsement Letter (as issued by International Office)
5. Copy of email notifying UKVI of endorsement
6. Induction meeting checklist – signed by Entrepreneur
7. Startup Visa / BRP (as issued by the UKVI)
8. Passport of entrepreneur
9. Police Registration Certificate
10. Proof of Address
11. Progress meeting notes
12. Timeline report (as submitted by the Entrepreneur)
13. Evidence of Exit stamp / switch to a different visa as appropriate

Digital copies will be forwarded to the mailbox emerge@coventry.ac.uk by the relevant responsible person as described in the section Application Process above.

Endorsement Review

Where an Entrepreneur is considered to be in breach of their obligations under the terms of this scheme, they should be referred to an Endorsement Review.

The Review will be chaired by a senior representative from the International Office who will consider representations from the Entrepreneur and relevant Coventry University personnel. Representations should be made in writing with an opportunity for an additional verbal representation upon request from the Entrepreneur.

The Head of International Student Support or nominated deputy will make a decision on any action necessary, including withdrawal of sponsorship and notification to the UKVI. The decision of the Head of International Student Support will be final.

Withdrawal of sponsorship of a 'Start Up' visa may lead to curtailment or cancellation of the visa by UKVI. Coventry University does not decide if a visa is curtailed or cancelled and has no control over this UKVI decision.

Equal Opportunities

Applications will be processed fairly in accordance with the University's equality and diversity policies. The policy can be found here: <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/the-university/key-information/equality-and-diversity/supporting-documents/>

Coventry University supports equal opportunities for all applicants and will take all appropriate steps to facilitate access to the scheme.

However, it should be explained to applicants that the scheme is highly selective based on their ability to demonstrate entrepreneurial capabilities. Applicants will be judged using a standardised set of assessment criteria.

Service Response Times

The various departments who are responsible for various parts of the scheme commit to meet a minimum service response time so as not to unduly hamper the time it takes an applicant to complete the application process. These are summarised as follows:

Service Standard	Responsibility
Arrange a Visa eligibility check within 2 weeks of request	Local International Office
Arrange an initial consultation; meeting within 2 weeks of request	Local Enterprise Support Team
Convene an Endorsement Panel within 2 weeks of request from an Adviser	Chair of Endorsement Panel
Issue a decision on approval/rejection within 3 days of an Endorsement Panel	Chair of Endorsement Panel
Issue an Endorsement Letter within 4 weeks of panel approval	Central International Office

Complaints Procedure

Applicants may use the Coventry University Complaints procedure provided they follow the conditions of that procedure.

The complaints procedure **will not** consider any challenge to the decision of an Endorsement Panel or Endorsement Review. Coventry University retains the right at its absolute discretion to reject any application for endorsement.

The complaints process can be found at <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/the-university/key-information/registry/complaints-and-compliments/> . Applicants should choose the Conciliator for the International Office.

Public references to this policy document:

www.coventry.ac.uk/international-students-hub/current/immigration/tier-1-ge-form/
www.coventry.ac.uk/london/careers-and-internships/entrepreneurship/graduate-entrepreneur-visa/

<http://www.enterprisehub.london/sv-policy-document>

Appendix: Sample Templates

- Visa Eligibility Checklist
- Application Form
- Panel Assessment Sheet
- Induction Meeting Checklist
- Timeline