

CONNECTING SKILLS, CREATING VALUE: STRENGTHENING LABOUR MOBILITY BETWEEN UK AND INDIA

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Connecting Skills, Creating Value: Strengthening Labour Mobility between UK and India

Foreword

People-to-people connections are the cornerstone of the UK-India partnership, driving the exchange of ideas, skills, and cultural values that enrich both societies. The movement of students, professionals, and entrepreneurs between the UK and India strengthens bilateral ties.

These connections build bridges between communities, fostering mutual respect and understanding, while also contributing to the economic and social fabric of both nations. Indian workers play a vital role in the UK economy and public services, making significant contributions across sectors such as IT, engineering, healthcare, and scientific research. From doctors, nurses, and care workers in the NHS to IT professionals driving innovation, their impact is substantial.

Additionally, in 2023, around 133,000 Indian students were granted study visas for the UK, marking a 5% increase from the previous year. This continued growth highlights the strong appeal of UK education for Indian students. Their contributions to the UK economy are substantial—through tuition fees, accommodation, and local spending. While recent estimates are pending, their economic impact is likely to remain close to the £10 billion mark, as in previous years. Beyond financial contributions, Indian students enrich the UK's academic and cultural fabric, further strengthening the dynamic UK-India relationship.

The value of these interactions extends beyond individual experiences, creating networks that facilitate collaboration in business, academia, and innovation.

This paper makes the case that two-way mobility delivers tangible benefits to both the UK and Indian economies and plays a vital role in the wider bilateral relationship.

Comprehensive and Strategic Partners

The UK and India share a long-standing, multifaceted partnership across economic, cultural, and educational domains. As two of the world's leading economies and democracies, both nations have increasingly recognised the importance of deepening bilateral ties to address shared challenges and seize mutual opportunities.

This relationship is underpinned by strong trade links, extensive collaboration in science and technology, and a vibrant exchange of cultural and academic ideas. In 2021, the UK and India elevated their relationship by signing the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, setting the stage for even deeper cooperation. An essential element of this partnership is the 2030 Roadmap, which outlines shared goals in sectors such as trade, investment, health, climate change, and defence. In recent years, the partnership has gained further significance, with both countries seeking to enhance strategic cooperation in these areas. These ambitions will be further supported by the anticipated signing of the UK-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

As part of the ongoing negotiations under the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the UK has announced the release of 100 new visas annually for Indian workers. This initiative underscores the growing commitment to facilitating greater labour mobility between the two countries and reflects the strategic importance of talent exchange in strengthening bilateral ties. The move signals a broader recognition of India's skilled workforce and aims to deepen professional and cultural links, while aligning with the UK's goals of addressing sectoral skill shortages and boosting economic cooperation through people-to-people connections.

Labour Mobility: Strengthening the UK-India Economic Partnership

As both countries seek to address skills shortages and enhance global competitiveness, facilitating the movement of professionals across borders becomes increasingly important. This paper reviews the relevant visa categories and labour mobility policies, identifying areas for reform to streamline processes for both businesses and individuals.

Methodology

This paper has been prepared by the UK India Business Council (UKIBC) in collaboration with Quastels Legal Advisers.

Survey Respondents

We heard from a diverse range of companies, varying by size and sector—from advanced engineering and manufacturing to digital and data services, professional services, healthcare, life sciences, and beyond. Alongside large companies employing more than 250 staff, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were also well represented.

Most businesses reported using business visas and intra-company transfers to facilitate mobility between the UK and India, highlighting the crucial role of labour mobility in sustaining the economic partnership between the two nations.

The following two graphs present information from the survey, showing the size and sectoral distribution of participating companies.

Figure 1: Company Size:

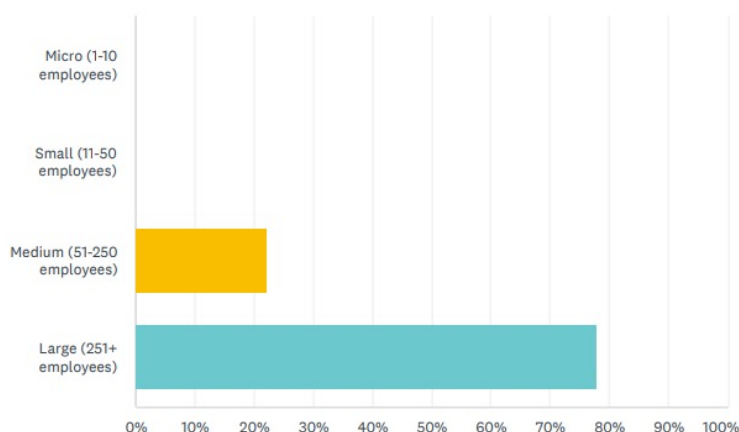
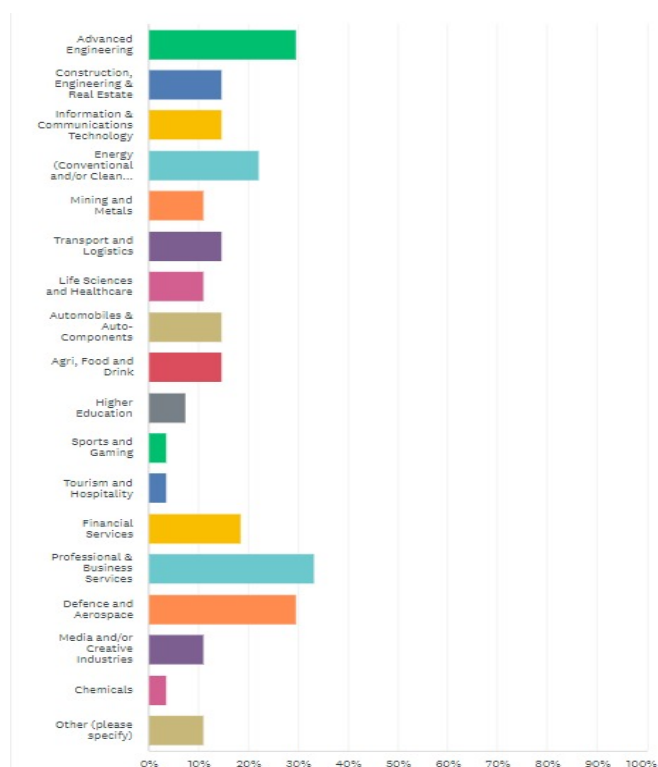


Figure 2: Company Sectors:



In acknowledging and understanding the scale and sectoral diversity of the companies that participated in the survey, the following sections will examine important areas of the UK's visa and immigration system most relevant to Indian businesses and professionals. These include Business Visit Visas, Intra-Company Transfers, the Skilled Worker Visa, the Young Professionals Scheme, the Graduate Route Visa, and the Investor Visa. This analysis aims to identify practical barriers and opportunities within each route, with a view to informing policy that supports greater mobility, strengthens bilateral economic ties, and ensures the UK remains globally competitive and accessible to talent.

Business Visit Visas

Business visit visas play a critical role in facilitating bilateral commercial engagement, enabling professionals to undertake short-term travel for meetings, negotiations, and strategic collaboration between UK and Indian companies. In 2023, Indian nationals accounted for over 26% of all UK visitor visas granted, totalling approximately 1.95 million visas. While the UK government does not publish separate statistics for business visit visas, the substantial volume of visitor visas issued to Indian nationals underscores the strong commercial connections between India and the UK.

The following graphs illustrate the significance and utilisation of Business Visit Visas, as reported by survey respondents.

Figure 3

Question 3: Does your company use Business Visit Visas for travel to the UK?

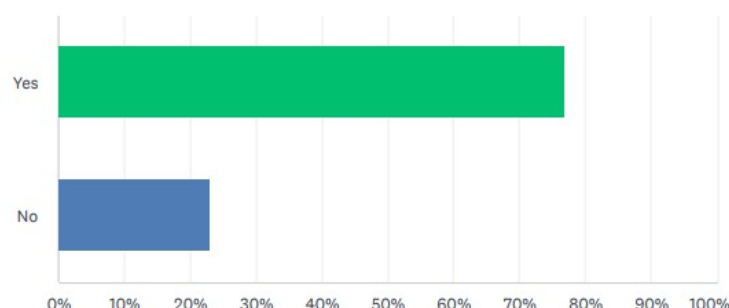


Figure 4

Question 4: If yes, how frequently does your company use business visit visas for staff travelling between UK and India?

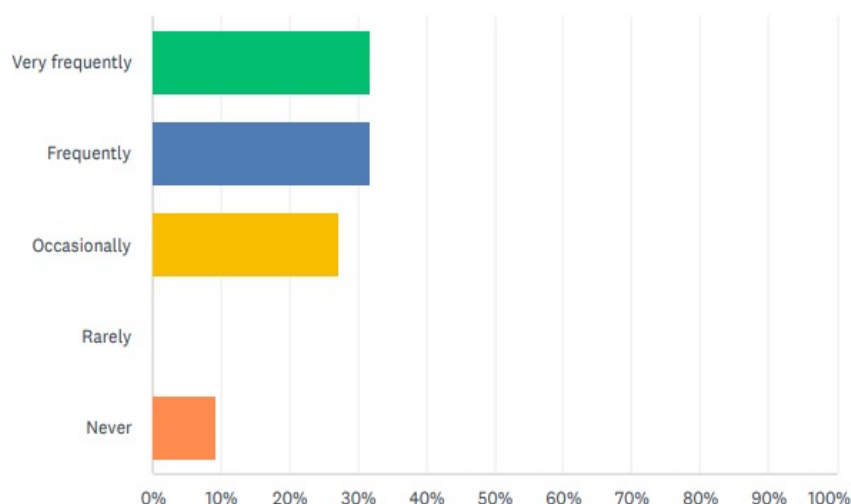
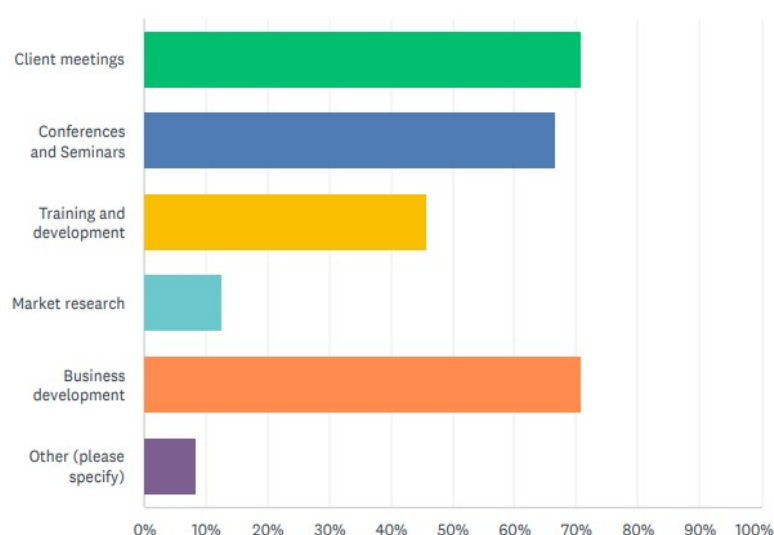


Figure 5

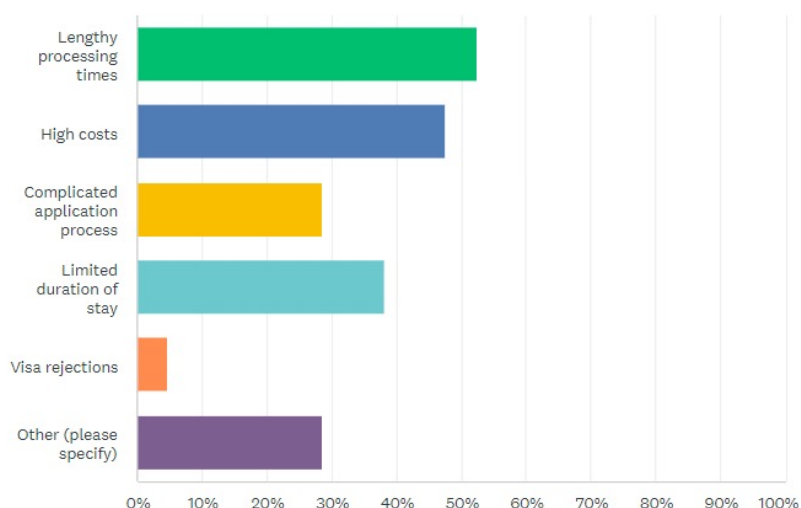
Question 5: What are the main purposes of business visit between the UK and India for your staff? (Select all that apply)



The survey indicates that 78.9% of respondents utilise business visit visas, with more than 30% reporting they are used 'very frequently', primarily for purposes such as conferences, client meetings, training, and business development.

Figure 6

Question 6: What challenges, if any, does your company face with obtaining visit visas for staff travelling between the UK and India? (Select all that are applicable)



When respondents were asked about the challenges they encounter, several issues were highlighted. These included lengthy processing times, high visa costs, a complicated and often cumbersome application process, limited duration of stay, and occasional rejections. Such challenges create significant barriers for businesses seeking to engage in cross-border activities between the UK and India.

Addressing these concerns through targeted reforms would greatly enhance the efficiency and accessibility of the visa application process. Streamlining application procedures, reducing processing times, and lowering costs would not only facilitate smoother business operations but also foster a more positive perception of the UK as an accessible and welcoming destination for Indian business professionals. By tackling these issues, the UK can further strengthen its position as a global business hub, demonstrating openness and commitment to fostering stronger commercial and economic ties with India.

The May 2025 White Paper outlines intentions to digitise and streamline visitor visa processes, reduce duplication in documentation, and establish clearer processing benchmarks. These priorities are directly aligned with our recommendations, particularly in improving turnaround times and increasing transparency.

In our survey, 78.9% of respondents reported frequent use of business visit visas, with many citing these as essential for client meetings, training, and short-term project delivery. Several businesses noted that visa delays had led to missed commercial opportunities or postponed engagements, particularly in fast-moving sectors such as technology and professional services. These delays—often caused by a lack of transparency in processing times—can disproportionately impact project timelines and undermine client confidence, especially for SMEs.

To address these challenges, streamlining the visa application process is critical. Drawing on existing frameworks such as the **UKVI Service Standards Policy, Immigration Rules Appendix V (Visitors)**, and **Part 6A of the Immigration Rules** governing Skilled Worker visas, there is scope to introduce more consistent and predictable timelines across key visa categories. This could include:

- Legislative amendments to embed statutory service standards for visa processing.
- Defined maximum decision-making timeframes, such as:
 - o 15 working days for standard applications
 - o 5 working days for priority applications
- Improved transparency and accountability, allowing businesses to better plan cross-border activity and reduce disruption.

Incorporating digital application and biometric updates, as proposed in the White Paper, will be essential for realising these efficiencies. These changes could also improve access for first-time applicants from Tier 2 and Tier 3 Indian cities.

Creating clear, enforceable service standards would enhance user confidence, particularly for high-volume categories like Business Visit, Intra-Company Transfer, and Skilled Worker visas, and support smoother UK-India business mobility.

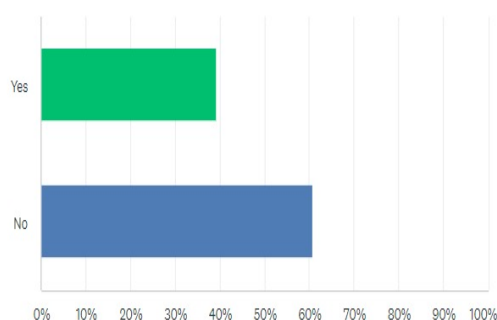
Largely, by enabling faster, more reliable access to the UK for Indian professionals, the government can support real-time commercial exchange, improve investor confidence, and solidify the UK's reputation as a responsive and business-friendly environment.

Intra-company transfers

Intra-company transfers (ICTs) are essential for multinational companies, enabling personnel to move between the UK, India and global offices to share expertise, enhance collaboration, and support business operations.

Figure 7

Question 7: Have you utilised Intra-Company Transfers visas for your employees to the UK?



39% of businesses utilise Intra-Company Transfer (ICT) visas for a wide range of purposes. Companies highlighted the strategic value of ICTs, which include:

- **Promoting diversity within the workforce;**
- **Providing employees with international experience;**
- **Retaining top talent and specialist technical expertise;**
- **Facilitating skills development and knowledge sharing;**
- **Instilling corporate culture across global offices.**

ICT visas also play a crucial role in addressing skills gaps that are challenging to fill within the UK. One respondent noted that ICTs are particularly important for facilitating successful mergers and knowledge transfer programmes between offices—such as between two design studios—building a deeper understanding of both UK and Indian cultures and operating environments.

A deeper understanding of both UK and Indian cultures and operating environments is essential for successful cross-border business operations. While there is general satisfaction with the flexibility and ease of the Intra-Company Transfer (ICT) process, businesses raised several concerns—chief

among them being the high costs associated with visa applications, the need for longer assignment durations, and a lack of flexibility in job roles. For many companies, particularly SMEs, the cumulative cost of visa fees, immigration health surcharges, and sponsorship-related expenses presents a significant financial barrier to talent mobility.

The 2025 White Paper signals potential reforms to streamline business visa categories, including a review of the ICT route as part of simplifying the wider corporate mobility framework. This presents an opportunity to address longstanding cost barriers and introduce flexibility in assignment duration and job definitions.

To alleviate this burden and ensure more equitable access, we recommend a review of the **Immigration and Nationality (Fees) Regulations 2018**, with the aim of reducing costs for frequently used business mobility routes. This could include the introduction of a new fee band or discount scheme for SMEs and repeat corporate users. Such a reform, supported by the **Equality Impact Assessment on Immigration Fees**, would enhance accessibility without compromising compliance.

In addition to visa cost reform, businesses also suggested the following measures to improve the ICT process:

- **Simplifying procedures to eliminate unnecessary administrative hurdles;**
- **Expediting the ICT process to improve efficiency and predictability;**

Removing the requirement for applicants to have resided in India for 90 days prior to applying for a work visa, as this disrupts service continuity and delays project mobilisation. These proposals align with the White Paper's ambition to deliver "simplified and modernised mobility routes for trusted business users," especially those from priority trading partners such as India.

Together, these steps would significantly improve the efficiency and fairness of intra-company mobility, reinforcing the UK's reputation as a business-friendly destination for Indian companies.

Skilled Worker Visa

The Skilled Worker visa plays a crucial role in addressing the UK's talent shortages, particularly in high-demand sectors such as IT, engineering, and healthcare. 38.8% of respondent companies reported employing individuals through the Skilled Worker visa route, with many emphasising its value in attracting global talent to fill critical skill gaps.

One company shared how hiring an Indian Chairman led to significant improvements in their strategic approach. The Chairman brought fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, expertly identifying challenges and developing efficient solutions. This leadership significantly enhanced the company's direction, demonstrating how international talent can contribute unique problem-solving skills and strategic vision.

Another company stated, *"By selecting the best talent from across the world for our roles, we have a truly diverse team who are able to draw on their personal cultures and experiences to develop our future products. This diversity has fueled innovation, enabling the company to grow as a truly global brand."*

Similarly, a company hiring a South Asia Markets Manager benefitted from the individual's deep understanding of Indian government processes and business culture. This specialised knowledge proved crucial in expanding the company's presence across South Asia, accelerating their regional growth strategy.

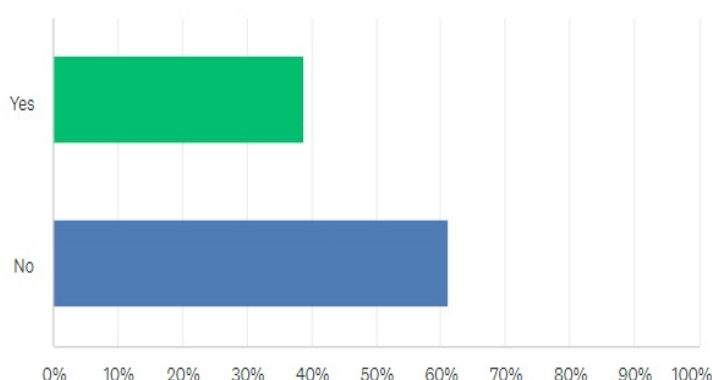
These examples underscore the broader strategic value skilled workers bring to the UK economy—enhancing innovation, promoting cultural exchange, and helping companies become competitive global players. The Skilled Worker visa is not only a mechanism for recruitment—it is a vital tool for building future-facing, globally connected businesses.

Notably, the 2025 White Paper indicates that the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) will undertake a sector-specific review of labour shortages. Indian professionals, who dominate key sectors such as IT and healthcare, are likely to remain vital to this national workforce strategy. Ensuring that the Skilled Worker route is responsive to real-world hiring cycles and talent pools—such as those in India—will be critical.

This is especially relevant as the UK Government and the Migration Advisory Committee prepare to review work immigration routes in 2025. Evidence like this can inform policy adjustments that better align with industry needs and ensure the UK remains an attractive destination for global talent.

The following graphs show the responses from the survey in light of the Skilled Worker Visas

Figure 8



Acknowledging the data presented in the graph above, even though awareness around the Skilled Worker visa is prevalent, respondents cited a number of challenges. Concerns were raised regarding the high costs, long processing times, and unclear sponsorship requirements. One respondent noted, “It is very unclear how many sponsorships you are allowed as a business and what the limits are. It is difficult to clearly ascertain what skills are actually on the list.” Another response stated, “I would make it faster and less costly to recruit from India. I would also look at removing the Immigration Healthcare Surcharge.”

These issues pose a significant barrier to mobility and talent acquisition, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. They also affect the UK’s ability to remain internationally competitive in sectors experiencing acute skills shortages, such as IT, engineering, and healthcare.

The 2025 White Paper acknowledges these pain points, signalling that the government intends to consult with businesses on how to reduce complexity and improve responsiveness in sponsorship routes—particularly for SMEs and scale-ups. This includes consideration of differentiated compliance pathways for trusted employers.

Under the current framework—particularly the Immigration Rules Appendix Skilled Occupations and insights from the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC)—businesses face constraints due to narrowly defined job roles and limited recognition of international qualifications. While these safeguards aim to ensure labour market integrity, they can unintentionally exclude highly skilled individuals trained in globally respected institutions, including those in India.

To address these challenges, we recommend:

- **Bringing clarity to and expediting the sponsorship process**, reducing delays and administrative complexity for employers;
- **Streamlining the overall visa application process**, particularly for high-demand categories;
- **Increasing flexibility in job roles**, by revising occupational definitions within the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) and allowing employers more latitude to recruit for hybrid and evolving roles;
- **Recognising a wider range of qualifications**, including those formalised through bilateral education frameworks such as the UK-India Enhanced Trade Partnership and potential mutual recognition agreements.

In particular, the White Paper proposes expanding bilateral recognition of skills and qualifications in high-growth sectors—including AI, data science, and advanced engineering—which presents a timely opportunity to build upon the UK-India ETP and deepen alignment on workforce mobility.

Embedding a dynamic review mechanism—co-led by UK and Indian industry stakeholders—would ensure ongoing relevance and alignment with real-world workforce needs, while preserving the integrity of the UK’s immigration system.

Such a mechanism would complement the proposed “Industry Talent Partnerships” outlined in the White Paper, which aim to integrate employers into the design and evaluation of work visa routes.

These recommendations are particularly timely in light of the upcoming Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) review in May 2025, which will assess the use of work immigration routes for IT and engineering roles. The Skilled Worker visa plays a critical role in enabling access to global talent in these high-demand fields. Addressing the issues raised by businesses would support the UK Government’s ambition to align immigration policy with economic priorities, skills development, and industrial strategy.

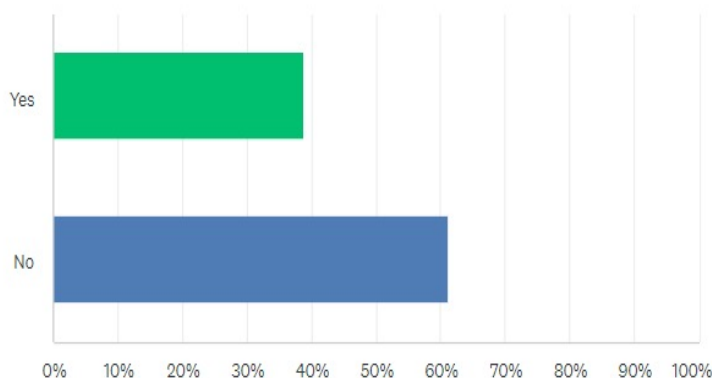
By resolving these barriers, the Skilled Worker visa could become a more viable and attractive route for UK businesses. This would enhance their ability to recruit much-needed talent from India, contribute to key growth sectors, and ultimately support the UK’s long-term economic competitiveness.

Young Professionals Scheme

The Young Professionals Scheme offers young Indian nationals the opportunity to gain valuable work experience in the UK, enhancing their professional skills and fostering cross-cultural exchange. By enabling young professionals to live and work in the UK for a specified period, the scheme not only supports individual career development but also promotes deeper understanding and collaboration between the UK and India. This exchange of talent contributes to the development of a skilled workforce and encourages enduring professional and academic ties between the two nations.

Figure 9

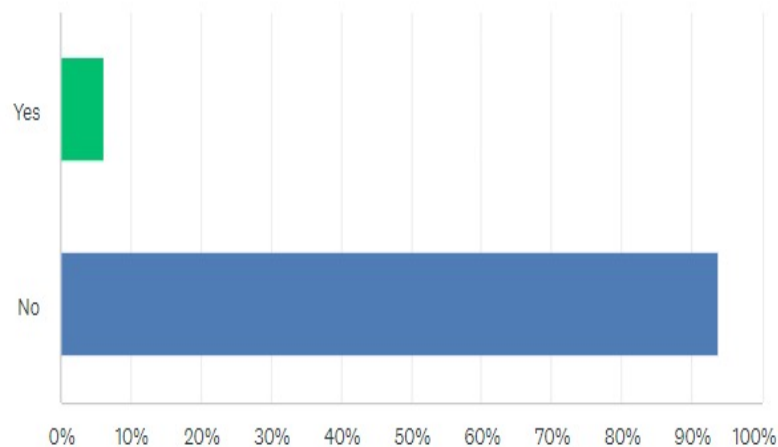
Question 9:



Although 39% of surveyed businesses were aware of the scheme, uptake remains low. Respondents recognised the scheme’s potential but cited limited publicity, administrative complexity, and the two-year visa limit as barriers to greater engagement. These factors make it difficult for businesses to incorporate the scheme into long-term talent strategies.

Figure 10

Question 10: Have you utilised the Young Professionals Scheme?



While the scheme provides mutual benefits, its current impact is constrained by a restricted number of places and administrative barriers. Expanding access and simplifying the application process would unlock its full potential, enhancing cross-border mobility and strengthening the UK’s position as an attractive destination for global talent.

The Young Professionals Scheme (YPS), governed under the **Immigration Rules Appendix Youth Mobility Scheme** and rooted in the **UK-India Migration and Mobility Partnership (2021)**, holds significant promise. However, its limited scale and rigid parameters have restricted its reach. Compared to similar agreements—such as Australia’s more flexible youth mobility arrangements—there is clear scope for reform.

The 2025 White Paper explicitly supports an expansion of reciprocal youth mobility schemes with priority partners, including India. It signals an intention to revisit eligibility requirements and annual quotas to “unlock the full diplomatic and economic potential” of early-career exchange.

To strengthen the scheme's contribution to bilateral talent flows, we recommend the following improvements:

- Allow applicants with dependent children to be considered under the scheme, offering greater flexibility and making it more inclusive for professionals with families;
- Increase awareness and outreach, particularly targeting UK-based companies with operations in India and Indian companies active in the UK, to ensure broader engagement and uptake;
- Extend the scheme's duration beyond two years to support longer-term workforce planning and deeper professional integration;
- Amend the Immigration Rules to increase the annual quota and bring the scheme into closer alignment with comparable international models.

In addition, the White Paper encourages development of a “mobility-to-permanence” pathway for successful YPS participants—allowing those who secure skilled employment in the UK to transition into longer-term routes such as the Skilled Worker visa. Embedding such a progression track would boost the scheme's strategic value and support UK workforce priorities.

Together, these changes would position the Young Professionals Scheme as a flagship pathway for early-career talent, while supporting the wider objectives of the UK-India mobility partnership.

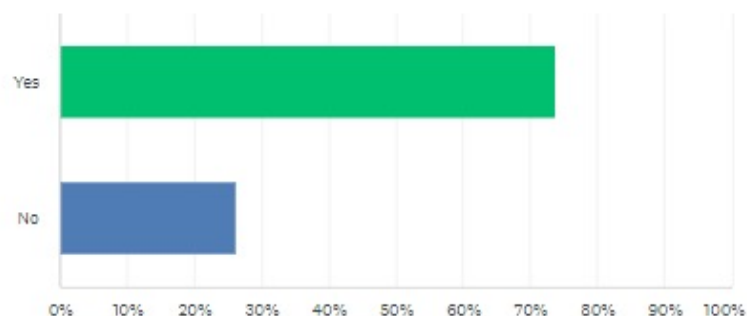
Graduate Route Visa

The Graduate Route Visa allows international students who have completed a degree at a recognised UK institution to remain in the UK for up to two years (three years for PhD graduates) to work or seek employment. This visa provides employers with the flexibility to hire for any role, without the need to sponsor the employee. At the same time, it offers the international graduate the chance to gain valuable work experience, contribute to the UK economy, and deepen their links to the UK.

The Graduate Route Visa plays an important role in retaining skilled talent, addressing critical skills shortages in sectors such as healthcare, IT, and engineering. By enabling international graduates to remain and work in the UK, this visa strengthens the UK's standing as a leading destination for higher education and supports long-term economic growth by integrating highly skilled professionals into the workforce.

Figure 11

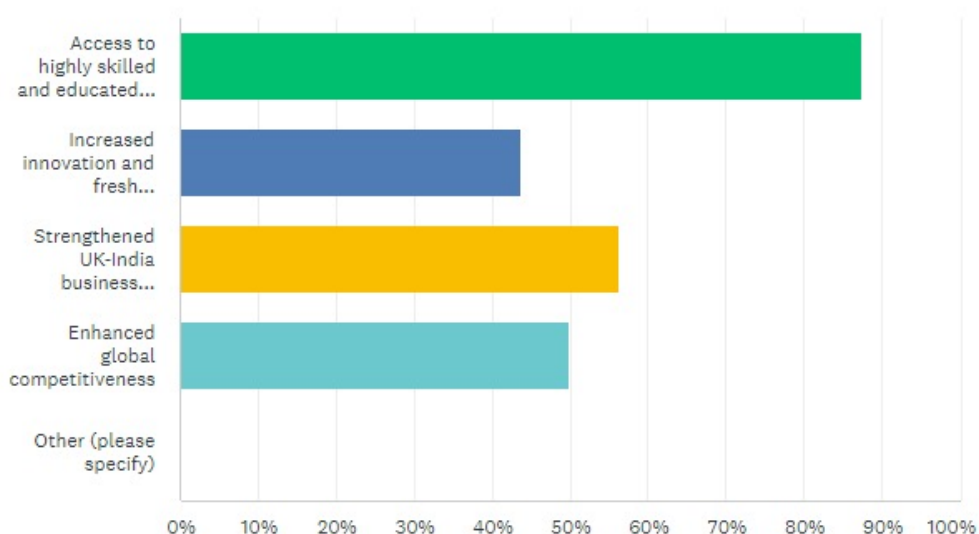
Question 11: Are you aware of the Graduate Route Visa



73.6% of respondents were aware of this visa route, and when asked about the benefits of employing recent graduates, 87.5% said that they valued 'access to highly skilled and educated candidates'. Additional advantages highlighted were increased innovation, fresh perspectives, and the potential to strengthen UK-India relations while enhancing global competitiveness.

Figure 12

Question 12: What opportunities do you see for employing graduates through the post-study work visa? (Select all that apply)



Maximising the Potential of the Graduate Route Visa

The Graduate Route Visa plays a vital role in retaining international talent and strengthening the UK's appeal as a global education destination. To fully harness its benefits, targeted improvements are needed to better align the route with the realities of graduate job cycles and employer needs.

Under the current provisions of Immigration Rules Appendix Graduate and the accompanying Home Office Graduate Route Guidance, eligible graduates can stay and work in the UK for two years without sponsorship. While this offers valuable flexibility, the short duration can be limiting—particularly in sectors where recruitment cycles are longer or progression pathways take time.

To address this, we recommend the following measures:

- Extend the visa duration from two to three years, providing graduates with more time to gain meaningful UK work experience and allowing employers a greater opportunity to benefit from their skills and contributions;
- Amend official employer guidance to formalise the non-sponsorship nature of this route, and increase awareness among UK employers to dispel persistent misconceptions that sponsorship is required—unlocking broader access to this skilled talent pool;
- Improve government and university signposting to ensure international students clearly understand their rights, options, and the longer-term career pathways available under the route;
- Build closer collaboration between universities, employers, and government bodies to support smoother transitions from study to work, including job-readiness programmes and engagement with key industry sectors.

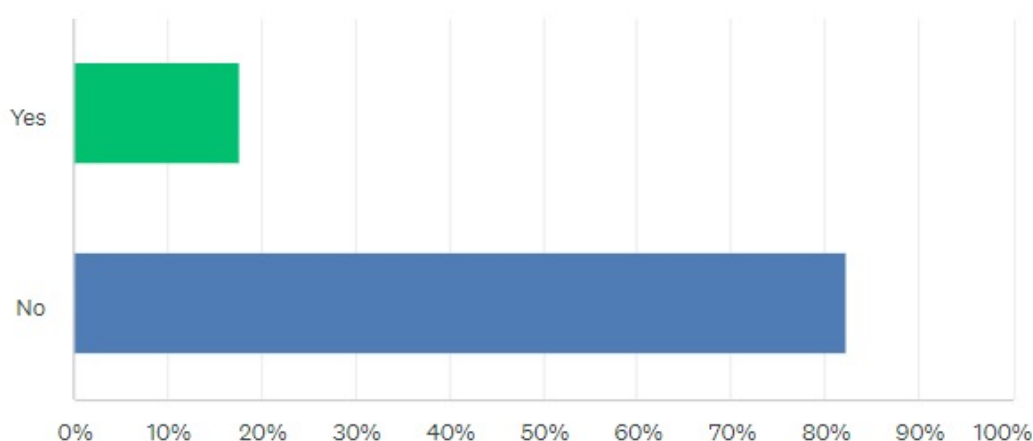
By making these adjustments, the Graduate Route Visa can more effectively serve its dual purpose: empowering graduates to contribute to the UK economy and reinforcing the UK's global reputation as a destination where education leads to opportunity.

Investor Visa

The UK Investor Visa is intended for high-net-worth individuals seeking to invest substantial capital in the UK, offering a pathway to residency for those who contribute a minimum of £2 million. This visa supports business development by enabling investors to reside in the UK, manage their investments, and expand their business networks. Many recipients benefit from streamlined access to the UK, facilitating both personal and professional growth. The Investor Visa is particularly attractive to entrepreneurs and investors aiming to establish a strong and sustained presence in the UK.

Figure 13

Question: Have you or your clients utilised investor visa for business operations between India and the UK?



Insights on the Investor Visa

18% of respondents reported experience with the Investor Visa and highlighted the following benefits:

- It enables high-net-worth individuals to invest in the UK while gaining residency status;
- It allows investors to contribute to—and benefit from—the UK's economic landscape;
- It facilitates the expansion of business operations by allowing investors to be physically present in the UK.

Unlocking the Potential of Investor and Innovator Routes

Attracting high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) and entrepreneurs from India remains a key opportunity for enhancing the UK's global competitiveness and economic dynamism. However, uptake under the existing frameworks has been limited, partly due to complex eligibility criteria and a lack of visibility around the benefits of these routes.

Under the **Immigration Rules Appendix Innovator Founder** and the **Global Business Mobility Routes**, there is scope to strategically expand and reform investor and entrepreneur pathways to better appeal to Indian investors. The closure of the previous Tier 1 (Investor) route left a gap that could be addressed through a refreshed and modernised offering.

The 2025 White Paper explicitly recognises the economic potential of expanding business mobility and innovation-led immigration pathways, especially from high-growth economies such as India. It calls for “increased engagement with global entrepreneurial and investor communities” and the creation of “modern, integrity-assured entry routes” for HNWIs. These recommendations underscore the urgency of reforming and promoting viable investor alternatives.

To unlock the full potential of these routes, we recommend the following:

- Reintroduce a revised Investor Visa, or expand eligibility under the current Innovator Founder route to accommodate a broader range of investment profiles, including Indian HNWIs;
- Consider establishing a new “Mobility Entrepreneur Visa” within the Global Business Mobility category, with more flexible capital thresholds, streamlined application requirements, and family inclusion provisions to enhance appeal and accessibility;
- Simplify existing application procedures and provide clearer, investor-friendly guidance, reducing barriers to entry for credible applicants;
- Promote real-life success stories to demonstrate the visa's tangible impact on business growth and personal development—building trust and awareness among potential investors in India.

With more inclusive and better-communicated pathways, the UK can position itself as a preferred destination for Indian entrepreneurial and investment talent, driving innovation, job creation, and deeper bilateral economic ties.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Labour mobility is a vital pillar of the UK-India partnership—enabling economic growth, strengthening innovation ecosystems, and deepening bilateral collaboration. With the UK Government and Migration Advisory Committee undertaking a comprehensive review of economic migration routes in 2025, and the UK-India Free Trade Agreement negotiations finalising, this is a pivotal moment to shape an agile, inclusive, and future-ready mobility framework. As demand for high-skilled professionals rises in critical sectors such as IT, healthcare, engineering, and advanced manufacturing, it is essential that both countries foster a streamlined, transparent, and responsive mobility ecosystem.

This paper draws on insights from consultations and survey responses, identifying key friction points and opportunities within the current framework. To support a future-ready, skills-based UK-India relationship, we propose the following recommendations:

1. Streamline Visa Application Processes

- Introduce statutory service standards across key routes (e.g., Business Visit, Skilled Worker, ICT), including time-bound decisions (e.g., 15 working days standard, 5 working days priority);
- Reduce administrative burdens and eliminate procedural bottlenecks, particularly for high-volume users.
- **Legal Reference:** Immigration Rules Appendix V (Visitors), Part 6A (Points-Based System); UKVI Service Standards.

2. Review and Reform Visa Costs

- Undertake a formal review of the **Immigration and Nationality (Fees) Regulations 2018**, with a view to reducing prohibitive costs for frequently used mobility routes;
- Explore fee banding or targeted discounts for SMEs and repeat corporate users to encourage broader participation.
- **Legal Reference:** Immigration and Nationality (Fees) Regulations 2018; Equality Impact Assessment on Immigration Fees.

3. Enhance Flexibility in Job Roles and Qualification Recognition

- Strengthen bilateral cooperation through a **UK-India Qualifications Recognition Partnership**, involving UK ENIC, Ofqual, UGC, and AICTE;
- Publicly map equivalencies between UK and Indian education systems to improve clarity for admissions and visa processing;
- Permit broader flexibility in job role descriptions to allow employers to deploy talent more effectively in line with evolving needs.
- **Legal Reference:** Appendix ST (Academic Requirements); UK ENIC Framework.

4. Establish a Bilateral Skills Mobility Agreement (SMA)

- Embed a formal Skills Mobility Agreement within the UK-India Free Trade Agreement, incorporating provisions for mutual recognition of qualifications, simplified visa pathways, and regulatory cooperation—drawing on models such as the UK-Australia Mobility Chapter.
- **Legal Reference:** UK-India Enhanced Trade Partnership; UK-Australia FTA Mobility Chapter.

5. Expand and Enhance the Young Professionals Scheme

- Increase the annual cap and permit dependants, making the scheme more inclusive for mid-career professionals;
- Extend visa duration from two to three years, supporting longer-term workforce planning;
- Promote the scheme more widely, particularly among UK-based firms with India operations and Indian companies active in the UK.
- **Legal Reference:** Immigration Rules Appendix Youth Mobility Scheme.

6. Extend and Promote the Graduate Route Visa

- Extend post-study work rights from two to three years, aligning with global competitors like Canada and Australia;
- Raise awareness among employers that the Graduate Route does not require sponsorship, addressing persistent misconceptions;
- Encourage coordinated messaging by government and higher education institutions to help international graduates understand their rights and transition pathways.
- Legal Reference: Immigration Rules Appendix Graduate; Home Office Graduate Route Guidance.

7. Provide Legal Certainty and Employer Support

- Develop a consolidated, user-friendly Sponsorship Toolkit to help employers navigate requirements when hiring Indian nationals;
- Introduce system reforms such as automatic notifications or reminders via the Sponsorship Management System (SMS) to reduce compliance risks.
- Legal Reference: UKVI Sponsor Guidance; Immigration Rules Part 6A; Points-Based System Sponsorship Duties.

8. Launch Targeted Mobility Pilots for High-Growth Sectors

- Develop sector-specific pilot schemes (e.g., digital technology, renewable energy, AI) to facilitate talent flows in strategic industries;
- Collaborate with UK sector councils, Indian skills councils (like NSDC), and global firms to co-design pilot criteria and success metrics;
- Use pilot outcomes to inform longer-term visa policy and Shortage Occupation List adjustments.
- Legal Reference: Industrial Strategy Council Recommendations; Sector Deals; UK Innovation Strategy.

These reforms will improve the accessibility, efficiency, and appeal of labour mobility routes, ensuring that businesses—large and small—can recruit the talent they need to remain competitive. They will also support individuals in pursuing career development opportunities that contribute to shared UK-India prosperity.

A more dynamic and responsive labour mobility framework will not only address existing skills shortages but also foster greater innovation, cultural exchange, and bilateral cooperation. It will reinforce trust and reciprocity in the UK-India relationship, serve as a model for mobility partnerships with other major economies, and future-proof both nations' workforces in an era of AI, green transition, and digital transformation. As strategic partners, the UK and India are well-positioned to lead in shaping the future of global talent flows—unlocking mutual economic opportunity, deepening strategic alignment, and shaping the workforce of the future.

Acknowledgements

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