

Factsheet - Innovator visa

Purpose and length of stay

The Innovator route is open to applicants who:

- Are experienced businesspeople looking to establish a business in the UK
- Are a founder of their business, relying on their own business plan
- Have an innovative, viable and scalable business idea
- Are supported by an endorsing body
- Have £50,000 funding to invest in their business, unless they are switching from the Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) or Start-up category (relying on the same business for which the initial visa was obtained) and are able to demonstrate that their business is performing adequately
- Are 18 years old or over
- Will not be employed as a doctor or dentist in training, or a professional sportsperson

This route offers three years of leave for both initial and extension applications. There is no maximum time limit in the category and it can lead to settlement in the UK. If the applicant is applying for leave to remain from within the UK, they must have, or have last had leave in any of the following categories:

- Start-up
- Innovator
- Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur)
- Tier 2, or
- Visitor (prospective entrepreneur)

Applicants do not need to be the sole founder of the business and the applicant's business can already be trading as long as they are one of its founders.

Endorsing bodies

Applicants must have an appropriately issued endorsement from an [endorsing body](#) approved by the Home Office for this category.

The endorsing body will:

- Stay in contact with those they have endorsed at checkpoints 6, 12 and 24 months after their application is granted
- Inform the Home Office if, at these checkpoints, the individual has both not made reasonable progress with their original business venture and is not pursuing a new business venture that also meets the endorsement criteria
- Inform the Home Office if an applicant misses a checkpoint without the endorsing body's authorisation
- Withdraw its endorsement if checkpoint requirements are not complied with, unless it is aware of exceptional and compelling reasons not to do so. The Home Office must be made aware of these reasons.
- Inform the Home Office if it has any reason to believe that an individual it has endorsed breaches any of their conditions of stay

Applicants should be aware that immigration permission as an Innovator will be cut short (curtailed) if an endorsing body withdraws its endorsement of an individual migrant or if it loses its status as an endorsing body for this category.

Endorsement criteria for applicants will differ depending on whether the applicant is relying on a 'new business' or the 'same business'.

"New business" endorsement can occur where the application is an initial application or an extension application, and the applicant is pursuing a different business venture from the one that was assessed in the endorsement which led to their previous grant of leave. Evidence of investment funds is required.

"Same business" endorsement can occur where the applicant's last grant of leave was in the Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur), Start-up or Innovator category, and the applicant is pursuing the same business venture that was assessed in the endorsement which led to that grant of leave. Start-up visa holders who have changed their business venture during their leave with approval from their endorsing body will need to meet the "same business" criteria when they apply to the Innovator category.

In all cases the endorsement must be obtained before making an application. This means that an applicant who is in the UK with existing leave must ensure they have received an endorsement and made an application under the Innovator category before their current leave expires, so they can avoid overstaying.

Endorsement criteria for initial and extension applications

New business endorsement criteria	Same business endorsement criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation: the applicant has a genuine and original business plan that meets new or existing market needs and/or creates a competitive advantage • Viability: the applicant has the necessary skills, knowledge, experience and market awareness to successfully run the business. This criterion will only be met if the business plan is realistic and achievable based on the applicant’s available resources. • Scalability: there is evidence of structured planning and of potential for job creation and growth into national and international markets • Working Time: the endorsing body must be satisfied that the applicant will spend their entire working time in the UK on developing business ventures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant has shown significant achievements judged against their previous business plan • The company is registered with Companies House and the applicant is listed as a director or member of that business • The business is active and trading • The business appears to be sustainable for at least the following 12 months • The applicant has demonstrated a key role in the daily management and development of their business • The endorsing body is reasonably satisfied that the applicant will spend their entire working time in the UK on continuing to develop business ventures

Confirmation that the applicant meets the appropriate endorsement criteria must be included in an endorsement letter, which must also contain:

- The name of the endorsing body
- The endorsement reference number
- The date of issue (no earlier than three months before the application date)
- The applicant’s name, date of birth, nationality and passport number
- A short description of the applicant’s business venture and the main product or services it provides or will provide to its customers
- Name and contact details (telephone number, email and workplace address) of an individual at the endorsing body who will verify the contents of the letter to the Home Office if requested

The endorsement must not have been withdrawn by the body by the time the application is considered by the decision maker.

Investment funds for new businesses

Where an applicant is seeking to meet the “new business” endorsement criteria:

- At least £50,000 funds must be available to invest in the applicant’s business. This can include funds already invested in the business.
- Where the applicant is not the sole founder, there must be at least £50,000 of funding available per non-resident Innovator team member
- No further evidence is required where the endorsement letter confirms that at least £50,000 is available to the applicant or has already been invested in the business
- Where not confirmed by the endorsement letter, the applicant must provide evidence in the form of a letter from any organisation or individual providing the funding (an additional declaration, legal representative letter and bank letter will be required if the funding is coming from an overseas organisation, UK organisation employing less than ten people or an individual person), and/or where funds are held by the applicant, bank statements or bank letters proving that the funds are held in a regulated financial institution, and, if relevant, are transferrable to the UK

Genuineness and other considerations

In addition to having an endorsement, the Home Office will make its own assessments in relation to an applicant’s:

- Ability and intention to establish a business in the UK
- Intention to comply with their immigration conditions
- Intention to use any relevant investment funds for the purposes set out in their application, and to those funds being available as claimed

Applicants in the Innovator category must also meet an English language requirement, which is set at level B2 of the Council of Europe’s common European framework for language and learning, as well as a cash funds maintenance requirement of £945 and £630 for any dependants.

The Home Office can ask for further information or evidence from the applicant or endorsing body, and have discretion to refuse the application if not satisfied that the endorsement was issued appropriately.

Settlement

If the applicant is making a settlement (indefinite leave to remain) application, the endorsement letter must confirm that the 'same business' endorsement criteria continue to be satisfied, and that the applicant's business venture meets at least two of the following requirements:

- At least £50,000 has been invested into the business and actively spent furthering the business plan assessed in the applicant's previous endorsement
- The number of the business's customers has at least doubled within the last three years and is currently higher than the mean number of customers for other UK businesses offering comparable main products or services
- The business has engaged in significant research and development activity and has applied for intellectual property protection in the UK
- The business has generated a minimum annual gross revenue of £1 million in the last year
- The business is generating a minimum annual gross revenue of £500,000 in the last full year covered by its accounts, with at least £100,000 from exporting overseas
- The business has created the equivalent of at least 10 full time jobs for resident workers
- The business has created the equivalent of at least 5 full time jobs for resident workers, which have an average (mean) salary of at least £25,000

Where the applicant relies on job creation criteria, jobs must have existed for at least 12 months and comply with all relevant UK legislation, and must require at least 30 hours paid work per week.

An applicant can rely on any combination of the above, even if similar or overlapping, but cannot rely on one requirement twice.

If the business venture has one or more other team members who are applying for, or who have been granted, settlement as an Innovator, they cannot share the same means of meeting the settlement requirements.

For more information



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