



THE COLLEGE OF  
OPTOMETRISTS

## **Sponsorship Scheme for Pre-Registration Optometry Trainees from Outside the European Economic Area**

### **Guidance for Trainees**

## **Introduction**

At the beginning of 2012 UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) outlined a number of changes to immigration rules which came in to effect from 5 April 2012. This meant that in order to complete the Scheme for Registration students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) would not be able to switch from a tier 4 (general) visa to a tier 2 (general) visa unless their employer was prepared to act as a sponsor and pay them a salary of at least £20,000.

## **What are your options?**

If you are a non-EEA migrant student in your final year of university there are a number of options available to you. This document provides guidance on the first option only.

### **1. College sponsorship for tier 5 Government Authorised Exchange (GAE) visa**

The College of Optometrists is a licensed sponsor under tier 5 GAE scheme. If you are a student from outside the EEA you can apply to the College for a Certificate of Sponsorship which will enable you to then apply to UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) for the visa under tier 5 GAE. This visa will allow you to complete the Scheme for Registration in the UK. This guidance document gives more information on the process of the tier 5 GAE route.

### **2. Apply to a university to complete a masters course**

Aston University runs an optometry masters course where the pre-registration scheme is integrated into the 4 year programme. The whole period of training is covered under the tier 4 (general) visa. You should contact the university directly if you want to find out more information on this course.

### **3. Tier 2 general visa**

If you have been offered a pre-registration placement with a salary of at least £20,800 you may be able to remain in the UK on a tier 2 visa. This would mean that your employer would have to be your sponsor. You should seek further advice about this route from the UKVI.

### **4. Tier 5 Youth Mobility Scheme visa**

This is a separate scheme to the tier 5 GAE and one in which the College has no involvement. The Youth Mobility Scheme (YMS) is only available to trainees from specific countries and there is a limit to the number of visas awarded. Your country's government is responsible for issuing the visas. Please refer to the UKVI website for more information about this.

<https://www.gov.uk/tier-5-youth-mobility>

## **Tier 5 GAE visa**

If you are a student from outside the EEA and you are studying optometry at one of the General Optical Council recognised schools of optometry in the UK, you may have the option of applying for a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) in order to remain in the UK and complete the Scheme for Registration.

The College of Optometrists has been awarded a licence to sponsor trainees from outside the EEA during the Scheme for Registration under tier 5 GAE. This means that you can apply to switch from a tier 4 visa to a tier 5 GAE visa. You can apply to make this switch from within the UK and also from your home country. You must apply online.

The visa will allow you to stay in the UK as a pre-registration optometrist for the length of time it takes you to complete the Scheme for Registration, and will be for a maximum period of two years. Employment as an optometrist and residence in the UK after you have completed the Scheme for Registration is outside the scope of this scheme. You should seek appropriate advice from UKVI or an immigration lawyer if you wish to live and work in the UK once your visa has expired.

## **The College's Role**

We act as the overarching body that administers the exchange scheme and act as the licensed sponsor for migrants participating in the scheme. We will issue the CoS. This is not an actual certificate but a reference number which you will need to include in your application to UKVI for your visa.

### **We will be responsible for the following:**

- Collecting and storing the data which you provide when applying for a CoS
- Collecting information from your supervisor about your attendance at work
- Reporting any significant changes in your working hours to UKVI
- Complying with the requirements of the tier 5 (GAE) sponsorship scheme

### **What we will collect from you**

- A copy of your passport or UK immigration status document
- Your contact details and proof of address
- Confirmation of employment
- Your completed Scheme for registration enrolment form
- University final grade
- When your visa is issued a copy of the passport or biometric residence permit

### **What we will collect from your supervisor**

- Confirmation of your employment and salary
- Information about your attendance including if you do not attend for your first day of work and if you are absent for 10 days or more without the sponsor's permission
- Notification that your contract has ended

- If there are any significant changes in your employment for example your job role, location or salary
- Any information leading to suspicions that you might be breaking the conditions of your permission to stay

## Your Role

Before you can apply for a CoS you must have secured a pre-registration placement. We will require evidence of this and we will verify this with your employer. When you apply for the CoS you will need to send us the following information:

- Completed Scheme for Registration enrolment form. Make sure you complete the relevant sections for international students
- Payment of £525; this can be paid by cheque (to the College of Optometrists), or credit/debit card by calling 0207 766 4354. **We are unable to proceed with your application until the fee has been paid**
- Your passport (you can make an appointment to come to the College or send it by post)
- Proof of your University final grade (final transcript or degree certificate)
- Contract/agreement from your employer for your pre-registration placement
- Proof of address (utility bill, bank statement or rent agreement).

The CoS is only valid for 3 months so it is essential that you apply to UKVI for your tier 5 GAE visa within 3 months of your CoS being issued. You will not be able to start your placement with the CoS, you can only start work when UKVI issue your visa.

### Maintenance funds

An important part of your application for the tier 5 GAE visa is to evidence that you have the necessary funds to support yourself during the pre-registration period. You must provide evidence that you have had at least £945 in your bank account/building society at all times over a 90-day period just before you apply for the visa. If this means that you will need more time to gather your evidence before applying for the visa then you are advised to delay your submission of your CoS application until you are able to provide all evidence for your visa.

### Immigration health surcharge

The UK government introduced an immigration health surcharge on 6 April 2015. The health surcharge will be paid by non-European Economic Area (EEA) nationals who apply to come to the UK to work or study for more than 6 months. It will also be paid by non-EEA nationals who are already in the UK and apply to extend their stay after 6 April 2015.

When you make your immigration application you must pay the health surcharge at the same time. If the surcharge is not paid, the application will be refused or treated as invalid and rejected. If an immigration application is unsuccessful the surcharge will be refunded.

The surcharge is £200, to check how much you will have to pay, please visit the UKVI surcharge calculator <https://www.immigration-health-surcharge.service.gov.uk/checker/Type>

### Working before your visa is issued

It's important to note if you have time left on your tier 4 general visa and are waiting on your tier 5 GAE visa you are able to live and work in the UK until your visa expires.

- It is illegal to test sight and fit or carry out aftercare on contact lens patients without being enrolled on to the pre-registration scheme and taking up the position of a pre-registration optometrist.

If you have a temporary contract as a support member of staff in a practice, then you will be able to carry out those functions appropriate to a support member of staff e.g. dispensing to other than exempt groups, pre-examination screening etc. but as this will not have been carried out whilst you were in pre-registration training, it cannot count towards any of your pre-registration targets i.e. patient episodes or dispensing numbers.

## The application process

Outlined below is a step by step guide on how to apply for the tier 5 visa.

1. You must have a pre-registration placement secured before you can apply for a visa.
2. Once you have a placement you need to send the following documents to the College (by special delivery)

- Completed Scheme for Registration enrolment form. Make sure you complete the relevant sections for international students
- Payment of £525; this can be paid by cheque (to the College of Optometrists), or credit/debit card by calling 0207 766 4354. **We are unable to proceed with your application until the fee has been paid**
- Your passport (you can make an appointment to come to the College or send it by post)
- Proof of your University final grade (final transcript or degree certificate)
- Contract/agreement from your employer for your pre-registration placement
- Proof of address (utility bill, bank statement or rent agreement).

3. Send your documents to:

Emily Stevens  
Tier 5 Sponsorship  
College of Optometrists  
42 Craven Street  
London  
WC2N 5NG

\*If you would prefer to have your passport checked in person please call us in advance to make an appointment to come into the College. We cannot accept applications and check passports without an appointment.

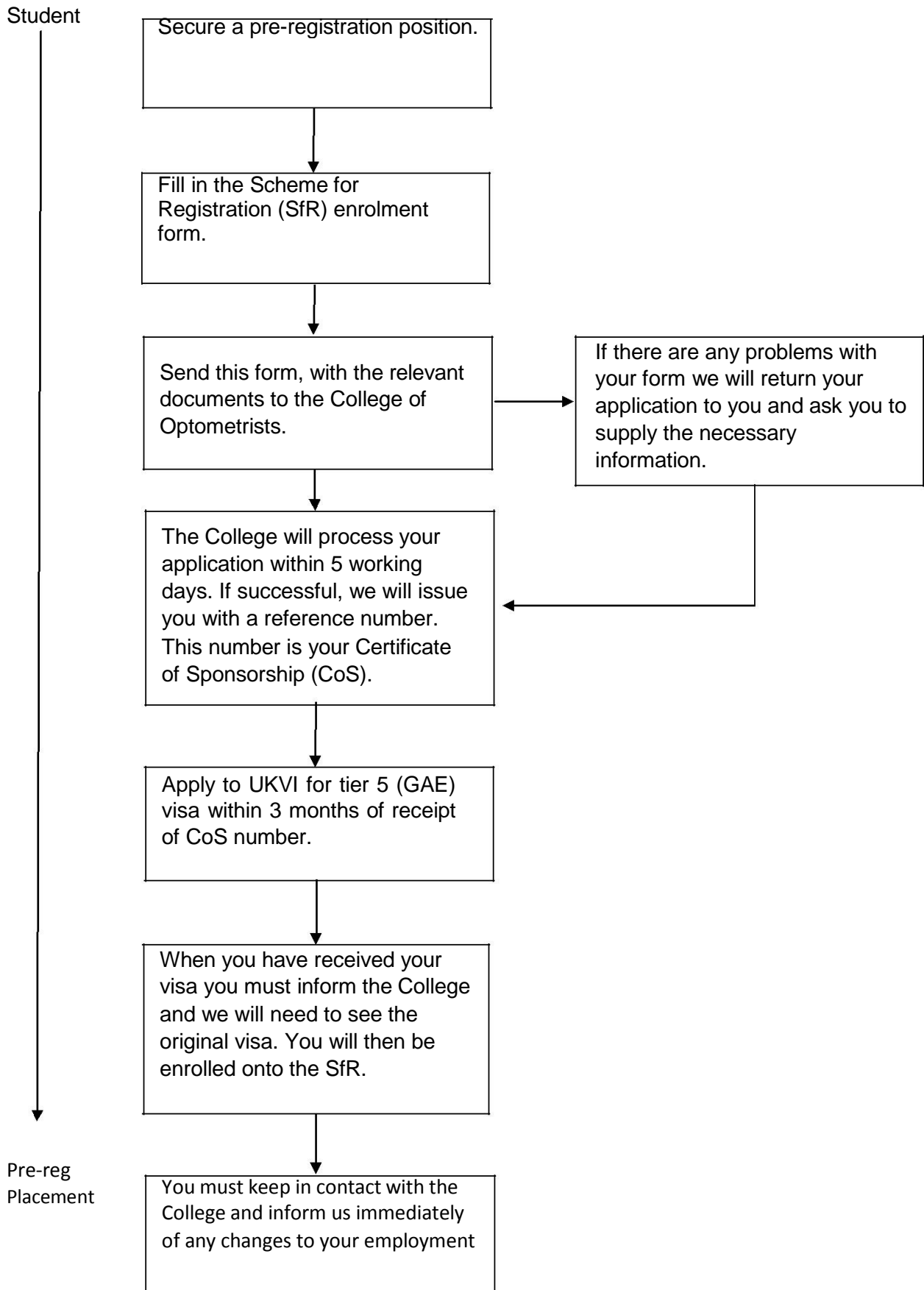
4. Upon receipt of the above documentation and once the fee for the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) has been paid the College will process your application within 5 working days. If successful we will issue you a reference number which will be your Certificate of Sponsorship.

5. Once you receive your CoS number you can then apply to UKVI for a tier 5 Government Authorised Exchange (GAE) visa. You must do this within 3 months of receipt of your CoS number, if you fail to apply for the visa within this time your certificate is invalid.

You must pay the health surcharge before you finish your immigration application. If the surcharge is required, but not paid, the application will be refused or treated as invalid and rejected. If an immigration application is unsuccessful the surcharge will be refunded.

6. When you receive your visa from the UKVI you must inform the College as we need to take a copy. We will then enrol you onto the Scheme for Registration.

### Application process flowchart





## **Annex A**

### **Visas referred to in guidance**

#### **Studying in the UK**

Tier 4 (general)

For adult migrants who want to study in the UK who pass the point based system.

#### **Working in the UK**

##### **Skilled workers**

Tier 2 (general)

For migrants wishing to work in the UK, who have a job offer with a minimum salary of £20,800, have passed the resident labour market test and are sponsored by their employer.

##### **Temporary workers**

Tier 5 (Government Authorised Exchange)

For migrants who are sponsored by an authorised agency, coming to the UK through approved training programmes.

Tier 5 (Youth Mobility Scheme)

For young migrants from participating countries wishing to work temporarily in the UK.

**Where can I get more information?**

**Certificate of Sponsorship enquiries:**

Emily Stevens  
Executive Assistant to Director of Education  
Tel: 0207 766 4354  
emily.stevens@college-optometrists.org

**Address for sending documentation through the post:**

Tier 5 Sponsorship  
Education Team  
College of Optometrists  
42 Craven Street  
London  
WC2N 5NG

**UKVI**

Immigration enquiry bureau: 0870 606 7766

UK Visa and Immigration  
Lunar House  
40 Wellesley Road  
Croydon  
Surrey  
CR9 2BY

UKVI cannot give you help or advice on completing your application, or on deciding which visa you should apply for.