

Securing a contract from outside the UK

Expatriate (expat) contractors who wish to contract in the UK don't need to have a contract in place to qualify for a [Tier 1 high-value migrant visa](#). But many expat contractors won't have access to the funds required, so the only option is a Tier 2 (General) visa for skilled workers.

Tier 2 (General) visas require a sponsor to apply on behalf of the expat contractor, it may be possible to [find an assignment](#) and ask the client to apply for the visa. However, many clients are unlikely to welcome this added complication, and will prefer to choose an indigenous 'home-grown' contractor or one that already has a visa.

But for assignments that require highly sought-after skills, such as those on the Migration Advisory Service's [shortage occupation lists](#), an expat contractor may be able to arrange the contract and visa application almost simultaneously. Whilst challenging, this is not impossible.

Preparation to secure a UK contract

Before searching for a UK contract, an expat contractor must ensure there is an acute shortage of the skills and experience they can offer, so that they can convince a client to sponsor their visa application.

By using websites such as ContractorCalculator, the Migration Advisory Service's shortage occupation lists, looking at job boards and the careers sections of industry and trade media, it is possible for a contractor to determine the likely demand for their particular skill.

The next stage is to [prepare a UK style 'Curriculum Vitae' \(CV\)](#) – this is the UK equivalent of a 'resume' – the document that contractors and job seekers use to describe their skills, expertise, qualifications and past experience to a potential client, agency or employer.

This is an extremely important part of the process, as successful UK contractors use a specific style and format of contractor CV that has been proven to attract interest and invitations to interview. A useful publication, the [Contractors' Handbook](#), will take you through the step-by-step process of producing a winning [contractor's CV](#).

Another important step is for the expat contractor to convert their academic and professional qualifications into the UK equivalent for inclusion in their CV. This is also necessary to enable contractors to calculate their points for the UK visa application system.

Barriers to finding contracts from outside the UK

Approximately 80% of all UK contracts are found through and awarded by recruitment agencies. The remainder are awarded directly by the end-user client. Bear in mind, though that many of the contracts awarded by clients are never advertised, because successful contractors tend to win them through personal contacts or referral.

Expatriate contractors are at an automatic disadvantage with agencies when applying for contracts from outside the UK. This is because agencies typically prefer those candidates who will present them with the fewest problems and have the highest chance of quickly [securing a contract offer](#).

So unless your skills are highly sought after, an agent is more likely to opt for a contractor who can attend an interview without having to fly into the country, and who doesn't have to apply for a visa.

It is possible to overcome the barriers

However, some expat contractors may be in an occupation identified by the UK [Migration Advisory Committee](#) as being on the recommended shortage occupation list, which means they are likely to be in great demand. Or the contractor might find that something in their background, their experience or possibly a language skill, is attractive to the agency and the end-user client.

Having identified a contract and gained the attention of the agent, or end-user client, the next challenge is to impress them at interview. This may pose some practical problems, with logistics and travel arrangements, but it is possible for expat contractors to gain visitor's visas for the purpose of interviews. Alternatively, of course, an [initial interview](#) might be conducted by phone or online.

If contracting with the end-user client in a very international sector like oil and gas where executives travel frequently, it is also possible that an interview might be set up outside the UK, perhaps in a third country.

Interviews and contract negotiation

Having secured an interview, the contractor has the opportunity to sell themselves face-to-face to the end-user client. It is essential that the contractor

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investigates and understands the UK interview techniques required to get a contract offer.

The same is true during the negotiation process, should the contractor be [successful at interview](#). Customs and etiquette can vary hugely between different cultures, and whilst the UK is generally relaxed and accommodating, there are still some 'do's and don'ts'.

Even more important when negotiating is to understand your worth, or rather the worth of the skills you are offering, and what that worth means in a UK context. Whilst on the face of it some salaries might sound high when converted into the contractor's home currency, it may well be low for a UK contractor with those skills. The cost of living in the UK is also high, especially for those living and working in the major cities, so this needs to be taken into account.

Once again, the [Contractors' Handbook](#) has a wealth of information on interview and negotiation techniques.

Timing the visa application with the contract start date

Visa applications can still take many months to process, with no guarantee of success. If a contractor is determined to have a contract secured when they receive their visa, then it might be wise to enlist the assistance of an immigration adviser.

An expert immigration adviser with detailed knowledge of the system and experience to back this up will be able to advise on the likely timescales, so the contractor can time the stages of their contract search accordingly.

The detailed process of preparing for a contracting career in the UK and all the stages required to find and secure a UK contract are explained in the [Contractors' Handbook](#).

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