



# GMS Flash Alert

## Immigration Edition

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# Australia - Recent Immigration Updates

Several immigration updates have been released by Australia's government as more information is eagerly awaited on the migration reform expected in the upcoming months.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

The COVID-19 Pandemic event visa played a significant role during the COVID-19 pandemic and was often relied upon by individuals who had a visa due to expire but no clear visa pathway to remain inside Australia.

Once the COVID-19 Pandemic event visa closes, individuals will be required to either apply for an alternative visa or depart Australia.

U.K. nationals that take part in the Innovation and Early Careers Skill Exchange Pilot (IESCEP) will be able to participate with greater facility in the Australian jobs market and enhance their careers with international experience. Participating Australian companies will have access to an overseas pool of skilled, talented labour that could have a positive impact on their business. This initiative also foreshadows an emerging trend of the Australian government to build targeted people movement concessions as part of wider treaty agreements.

## Changes to the Temporary Activity Visa (subclass 408) (COVID-19 Pandemic Event Visa)

From 2 September 2023 to 31 January 2024, the following requirements must be met at the time of lodgement to apply for a COVID-19 Pandemic event visa<sup>1</sup>:

- have evidence of your employment or an offer of employment (please note that work in any sector is acceptable); and
- hold a COVID-19 Pandemic event visa that expires in 28 days or less; or
- have held a COVID-19 Pandemic visa that expired less than 28 days ago.

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For individuals applying for this type of visa on or after 2 September 2023, a Visa Application Charge (“VAC”) will now be payable, and if granted, the visa will be valid for six months. The VAC is AUD 405 for the primary applicant, AUD 405 for any additional applicant who is aged 18 or over, and AUD 105 for any additional applicant who is aged less than 18.

For individuals who applied for this type of visa prior to 2 September 2023, the visa will be valid for up to 12 months.

From 1 February 2024, the COVID-19 Pandemic event visa will be closed and no further applications can be lodged.

## Upcoming Festive Season

As the festive period approaches, it’s important to note that processing times by the Department of Home Affairs may experience a slowdown. This is due to a combination of factors including the closure of processing offices during public holidays, staff holidays/absences, and a surge of visa applications prior to the New Year.

To avoid delays, KPMG in Australia recommends lodging visa applications as soon as possible.

## Australia – U.K. Innovation and Early Careers Skills Exchange Pilot (IECSEP)

The Innovation and Early Careers Skill Exchange Pilot (IESCEP) provides new short-term opportunities for early career and innovative U.K. citizens to work and live in Australia under the Australia-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement (A-UKFTA).<sup>2</sup>

There is a limited number (1,000) of visas available under the IECSEP in the first-year pilot. This will be doubled to 2,000 in the second year of operations, during which time the program will be reviewed.

There are two streams:

**Early Careers stream** – For tertiary-qualified U.K. citizens aged 21-45 to undertake a placement, secondment, or intra-corporate transfer for up to a year in Australia in a position relevant to their field of work.

**Innovation stream** – For highly experienced and skilled U.K. citizens with a demonstrated contribution to innovation, to undertake employment opportunities for up to three years in Australia.

### Eligibility Requirements

The applicant must be a U.K. citizen, have an employment opportunity for the planned duration of the stay, either through a letter of offer of employment or a signed employment contract from an Australian employer, and demonstrate that he or she has adequate financial means to support himself or herself (and any accompanying family members) while in Australia.

The following “stream specific” criteria must also be met:

**Early Careers stream** – Applicants must be aged between 21 and 45 years at the time of application; hold tertiary qualifications; and have worked for a minimum of three months in their current organisation (including as a graduate trainee).

**Innovation stream** – Applicants must be highly experienced and skilled in any sector (and any age), with a demonstrated contribution to innovation in areas including research and development, renewable energy, artificial intelligence, medical technology, FinTech, AgriTech, audio-visual, and cultural industries.

## How to Apply

Applicants seeking to apply under the IECSEP will first need to submit an application of endorsement to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), providing evidence of employment in Australia and any other supporting documents as required to meet stream requirements.

The first IECSEP application round opened on Monday, 25 September 2023 (6:00pm AEST).

Applicants successfully endorsed by DFAT will be issued with a Letter of Support, which must be presented to the Department of Home Affairs at the time of application for a Temporary Work (International Relations) Government Agreement stream (subclass 403) visa.

## Visa Requirements

All IECSEP applicants will need to demonstrate they meet the standard visa criteria including:

- Engagement under the terms and conditions of a bilateral agreement between Australia or an Australian state or territory government and another country: Providing the Letter of support from DFAT confirming a successful submission under the IECSEP.
- Financial capacity: Being able to financially support oneself and any included family members while in Australia.
- Health and character requirements: must be met by the primary visa applicant and all accompanying family members.

## Processing Times

DFAT processing times to assess IECSEP applications are currently not available. Current processing times for the subclass 403 visa, following lodgement with the Department of Home Affairs, are estimated to be 11 days.

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## KPMG INSIGHTS

The IECSEP recognises the importance of innovation and skills mobility to the economies of Australia and the United Kingdom. The IECSEP will provide Australian employers with an opportunity to access innovative and early-career professionals from the U.K., through the pilot of a new and streamlined temporary mobility pathway from the U.K. to Australia. U.K. organisations will benefit from employee up-skilling, as well as a way of providing key staff with an international career development opportunity.

The Innovation stream will provide a unique opportunity for highly experienced and skilled U.K. innovators to work in Australian organisations for up to three years, including through intra-corporate transfers. Whereas, the Early Careers stream will give Australian organisations the opportunity to participate in 12-month secondments, placements, or intra-corporate transfers of tertiary-qualified U.K. professionals who are early in their career.

KPMG also anticipates further significant changes to the Australian immigration program prior to the end of December 2023.

For further information about the upcoming changes and how they may impact your business and employees, please consult with a qualified immigration counsel or a member of the Immigration team with KPMG in Australia (see the Contacts section).

## FOOTNOTES:

1 For more on this visa on the website for the Department of Home Affairs, click [here](#).

Also for an update, see this Department of Home Affairs webpage: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/news-media/archive/article?itemId=1130> .

2 See Australian High Commission in the United Kingdom, "[Innovation and Early Careers Skills Exchange Pilot](#)."

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## Contact us

For additional information or assistance, please contact your local GMS or People Services professional\* or one of the following professionals with the KPMG International member firm in Australia:



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