

## **Non-UK Players & Coaches – Visa FAQ (2026-27 Season)**

### **Summary Principles**

1. All players in hockey will have to be defined as amateur or professional. An amateur player will receive no payment or tangible in-kind financial support for playing. (e.g. accommodation, cars or payment or payment in kind from the club)
2. Overseas Players will have to be clearly defined as professional or amateur every season.
3. A non-UK professional player must have an international sportsperson visa and be paid above *the* minimum wage threshold and be determined to be of a suitable standard. England Hockey will demand proof of this via consent to league regulations and approve all applications on a case-by-case basis
4. A non-UK amateur player must receive no financial support from a club and must only enter the country via an appropriate visa that is justified via the relevant route - Student or Skilled Worker. England Hockey will ensure that league regulations, and sanctions are aligned to this, penalties are applied for non-compliance and clubs/individuals understand that we may share information with UKVI.
5. Any non-UK coach who doesn't play must be a professional coach and paid above the minimum wage threshold and hold the appropriate qualifications (verified by EH if gained overseas).
6. Any non-UK coach that also plays must meet the threshold and expectations in terms of being the level of player required to gain a sportsperson visa.

### **1. Who do these visas rules apply to?**

These rules apply to any player or coach who does not hold a British passport and intends to play or coach hockey in England or Wales from the 2026-27 season onwards.

### **2. Can non-UK players play hockey in England?**

Yes, but they must have the appropriate visa or immigration status that allows them to participate in sport in the UK at the relevant level.

### **3. Which players or coaches have no work restrictions?**

Players or coaches may participate without restriction if they have immigration status such as:

- EU/EEA citizens with pre-settled or settled status
- Irish passport holders
- Certificate of Right of Abode
- UK Ancestry & UK Ancestry Dependant

- Family member (spouse/partner of a pre settled person or a settled person of a British Citizen)
- Settlement Indefinite Leave to Enter/Remain
- Refugee status
- Homes for Ukrainian's

#### **4. What is considered a “Professional Sportsperson”?**

The UK Home Office considers someone a professional sportsperson if they meet certain criteria, such as:

- player or coach at a professional or semi- professional level whether paid or unpaid
- receives payment, including payment in kind, and that payment covers all, or the majority of, their costs for travelling to, and living in, the UK, or has received such payment within the previous 4 years
- currently registered to a professional or semi-professional sports team or has been so registered within the previous 4 years
- has represented their nation, national, state or regional team, within the previous 2 years, including all youth and development age groups from under 17s upwards
- has an established international reputation in sport
- engages an agent/representative or has engaged an agent/representative in the last 12 months
- is providing services as a sportsperson or coach at any level of sport, unless they are doing so at a charity event.

England Hockey cannot change this definition.

#### **5. What happens if a player is classified as an International Professional Sportsperson?**

They will need to apply for an International Sportsperson visa and play for a club that holds a Home Office sponsor licence, depending on the level of competition.

#### **6. At what league level will these rules apply?**

England Hockey confirms the league level where the International Sportsperson visa requirement applies following consultation to

- England Hockey League (EHL) Premier Division
- England Hockey League (EHL) Division One North & South

#### **7. Why don't England Hockey simply designate all divisions as amateur?**

If England Hockey designated all divisions as amateur, all overseas players would be required to participate strictly on an amateur basis. This means they could not receive any form of payment, benefits in kind, or other compensation.

Players would also need to confirm this status when registering.

However, any player who has:

- represented their country internationally within the previous two seasons, or
- meets the Home Office criteria for a professional sports person would not be eligible to participate in such competitions.

### **8. What is the standard to be able to apply for an international sports person visa?**

- the individual must have played for a nation in the relevant Top 25 of the FIH Senior Outdoor World Rankings in the previous 24 months, at the time of application (see <https://www.fih.hockey/outdoor-hockey-rankings>)

or

- the individual must have played in one or more of the following outdoor tournaments in the previous 24 months, for a nation in the relevant Top 12 of the FIH Senior Outdoor World Rankings at the time of application.
  - U21 World Cup
  - U21 Continental Championships
  - U18 European Championships

### **9. Can players on student visas play hockey?**

An international student can play EHL Premier Division and other grades of Hockey as an amateur. Providing they have a student visa.

### **10. What is amateur?**

To play as an Amateur a player must not receive any payment, in the way of a salary, benefit in kind, flights to & from UK, accommodation, match fees, sponsorship or bursaries, but may receive any reasonable out of pocket match day expenses eg: travel only which all receipts need to be fully documented within a club's annual accounts.

### **11. What are clubs responsible for?**

Clubs must:

- Check the legal right to work in the UK for every player and coach before engagement.
- Keep evidence of eligibility.

Failure to do so could result in:

- Fines of up to £60,000 per individual
- Reputational damage
- Potential loss of sponsor licences for eligible clubs.

## **12. What is the International Sportsperson visa?**

This visa is for elite athletes or coaches who:

- Are internationally established
- Will contribute to the development of their sport in the UK
- Are filling a role that cannot be filled by a resident worker.

## **13. How much does a club need to pay an International Sportsperson?**

The club must provide evidence as required by EH that the individual's salary meets the minimum requirement. (Nat Min Wage pro-rata, e.g. 6 months - £11500 (£10000 if Under 21) (NB there is small allowance for board/lodgings)

The club must have demonstrated that there are no suitable resident workers who are qualified to the level above available to do the job. The sponsor will need to provide evidence that the job has been advertised on the EH Website and the club's social media to endeavor to reach suitably qualified resident workers.

## **14. Why are these rules being introduced now?**

These changes are being introduced to ensure compliance with the Home Office Code of Practice for Sports Governing Bodies.

England Hockey is therefore updating its regulations ahead of the 2026–27 season. As these requirements are set by the Home Office, they must be implemented and cannot be delayed.

## **15. Will these rules apply to Super 6s (indoor hockey)?**

At present, indoor competitions cannot be treated differently from outdoor competitions. Players who are eligible to represent a club outdoors will also be eligible to represent that club indoors.

This means clubs would not be able to recruit guest overseas players specifically for indoor competitions.

## **16. Will these rules apply to Under-18 competitions and below?**

Yes, an international student Under 18 can play in the England Hockey League and other grades of Hockey as an amateur. Providing they have a child student visa or student visa but can only play in a relevant league dependant on their age as detailed in the EHL or Area League regulations.

**17. Can an international professional player compete in the England Hockey League?**

Yes. An international professional player can compete in the England Hockey League for a club in the Premier Division & Division One North & South only that holds an International Sports person licence & provided they hold a valid International Sports person visa and meet the required salary and visa conditions.

**18. Can a player who has represented a nation ranked 26 in FIH senior ranking compete in the Premier Division or Division One North / South?**

As the Nation is currently ranked as 26, it is not sufficiently ranked in the world rankings for players to meet the eligibility criteria required for an International Sports person visa.

As a result, such a player would not be eligible to obtain the visa required to compete under these regulations.

**19. Can a U21 player who has represented a nation ranked 13 in the FIH senior ranking compete in the Premier Division or Division One North / South?**

As the Nation is currently ranked as 13 it is not sufficiently ranked in the work rankings for players to meet the eligibility criteria required for an International Sports person visa.

**20. Can former international players with a non-sport career compete?**

A recently retired international player (within the previous two years) who is working in another profession in the UK for example as a doctor can play in the England Hockey League or Area Leagues as an amateur hockey player assuming they have a visa such as Skilled Worker for their profession.

## **21. What is the criteria for an International Coach?**

- Internationally established and whose employment will make a significant contribution to the development of their sport at the highest level in the UK
- who will base themselves in the UK
- will be filling a post that cannot be filled by a suitable British citizen or person who has a right to enter or stay in the UK without restriction.

And met the conditions below:

- have attained the EH/HW Lead Coach Course / UKCC Level 2 / Level 2, or holds a non-UK qualification that is, at the discretion of the NGB, determined to be at least equivalent of this award.
- Complete the following before engaging in any coaching activities
  - Successfully completed the England Hockey Recognition of Prior Learning Scheme, this includes
    - An assessed hockey portfolio and video assessment
    - Completion of Safeguarding in Hockey workshop
    - Completion of Planning Safe Hockey module
  - Signed up to EH/HW Code of Conduct
  - Hold England Hockey membership including appropriate insurance
  - An enhanced DBS check – if working with any Under 18s

## **22. What must the club do appoint an International Coach?**

- The club must have demonstrated that there are no suitable resident workers who are qualified to the level above available to do the job. The sponsor will need to provide evidence that the job has been advertised on the EH Website and the club's social media to endeavour to reach suitably qualified residents
- The club must provide evidence, as required to England Hockey, that the individual's salary meets the minimum requirement.

## **23. Where can they coach?**

- The coach may only coach a club team playing outdoor league matches in England Hockey League, Premier Divisions or Division One North / South they may also undertake additional work coach a club lower XIs or juniors. They may coach a club adult team in Super 6s (indoor hockey) competitions
- For the avoidance of doubt, the coach may not register for, nor participate in England Hockey League or Area league matches or Super 6s (indoor hockey) as a player.

## **24. Who did England Hockey consult with to develop this advice?**

England Hockey engaged Newfields Law, specialist immigration lawyers with expertise in sport who work with a number of national governing bodies. They have supported the drafting of this guidance and will continue to provide advice to England Hockey.

In addition, Newfields Law will provide an email advice service to support member clubs during the 2026–27 season.

England Hockey has also consulted with the Home Office on a number of occasions during the development of this guidance. England Hockey Board have been briefed on this subject.

A survey was also distributed to key clubs to gather feedback on the subject.

## **25. Who should a club contact for advice?**

For immigration advice, clubs should contact:

- UK Visas and Immigration
- A UK immigration lawyer

For England Hockey queries, contact: [competitions.info@englandhockey.co.uk](mailto:competitions.info@englandhockey.co.uk).

## **26. Will this policy change or be reviewed?**

This policy may be subject to review and amendment should new information or material considerations emerge.

## **27. What is the process for clubs who wish to obtain an International Sports Person Sponsorship Licence.**

1. Clubs will need to apply to England Hockey to approve and supply an endorsement for a sponsor this is to confirm to the Home Office that the application is from a bona fide sports club or equivalent, that has a legitimate requirement to bring migrants to the UK as sportspeople.

2. England Hockey will review all submitted documentation and subject to approval will supply the relevant endorsement certificate for clubs to apply to the Home Office for their Sponsorship Licence.

## 28. What documentation is required to be sent to England Hockey

See list below which shows the full list of documentation that must be provided.

### 1. Club Recognition and Operational Documents

- **Proof of Affiliation: Official documentation showing the club is affiliated with the National Governing Body (NGB) or a recognized regional association.**
- Club Constitution/Articles of Association: A formal, signed document setting out the club's name, objectives, and management structure.
- Club Membership Policy: Evidence that the club is open to the community and has a structured approach to membership.
- Proof of Legal Entity: Documents demonstrating the club is a registered business, charity, or unincorporated association.

### 2. Financial and Governance Documents

- Bank Account Evidence: Proof of a bank account in the club's name, especially if the club has three or more teams.
- Financial Solvency Proof: Financial forecasts for at least the next 1–2 years, demonstrating the club is solvent and can support a professional sportsperson.
- Management Structure: A list of officials, including the Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary, with confirmed contact details.

### 3. Safeguarding and Compliance

- Safeguarding Policy: A comprehensive, in-date child protection and vulnerable adult policy.
- DBS/Background Checks: Evidence of enhanced DBS checks for all relevant coaches, officials, and welfare officers, particularly if working with youth.
- Welfare Officer Details: Appointed Club Welfare Officer (CWO) with appropriate training records

### 4. Sporting and Structure Requirements

- **League Participation Proof: Evidence that the club plays in an official, approved league.**
- Coaching Qualifications: Certificates for coaching staff, ensuring they meet the required standard to manage professional personnel.
- Player Pathways: Evidence of junior or development teams demonstrating the club's investment in the sport (often required for higher-star accreditation).

## 5. Specific Documents for Migrant Sportspersons (Visa/Sponsorship)

If the license is for a non-resident athlete (e.g., International Sportsperson route), the SGB usually requires:

- **Job Description and Terms of Employment:** Detailed role description demonstrating the player will be paid at a professional standard.
- **Proof of Highest Level:** Evidence the sportsperson is established at the highest level internationally, as required by the sport-specific criteria.

Items listed in red already available to England Hockey.