

Skilled Worker Visa 2026: B2 English Now Required — What Applicants and Employers Must Prepare

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, February 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- From 8 January 2026, first-time [Skilled Worker visa](#) applicants must prove English at B2 level, equivalent to A level standard. The previous B1 requirement no longer satisfies the threshold. For employers, this affects recruitment timelines. For applicants without B2 evidence ready, it delays visa submissions by weeks.

Who needs B2, and Who doesn't

According to the official GOV.UK guidance on [Skilled Worker visa English language requirements](#), the threshold changed as follows:

Application type

English level required

Applies from

New Skilled Worker application

B2

8 January 2026

Extension of the existing Skilled Worker visa

B1

No change

Switching into Skilled Worker from another route

B2

8 January 2026

Skilled Worker ILR

B1

No change

The change applies to first-time grants only. Extensions and ILR remain at B1. Switchers moving from Graduate visa or other routes into Skilled Worker after 8 January 2026 must meet B2.

The Previously Proved English Exemption

Applicants who previously proved English at B1 or higher in a successful UK visa application are not required to provide new evidence. The Home Office retains records of language

requirements met in prior grants.

This exemption only applies where the previous application explicitly required English evidence. Routes with no language requirement do not create the exemption.

Three Routes to Meet B2

As specified in the GOV.UK guidance on English language requirements for UK visas and immigration, applicants can satisfy the B2 threshold through three routes:

1. Secure English Language Test (SELT)

Approved providers include IELTS for UKVI, PTE Academic UKVI, LanguageCert, and Trinity College London. All require B2 across speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Results are valid for two years.

B Test centres in India, Nigeria, and parts of the Gulf are fully booked, with some scheduling four to six weeks out. [A Y & J Solicitors](#) is seeing applicants struggle to find available slots.

2. Degree taught in English

A degree taught and assessed in English can satisfy the requirement, but not all degrees qualify automatically. For degrees awarded outside the UK, applicants must obtain a verification statement from Ecctis (formerly UK NARIC) confirming the qualification is equivalent to a UK bachelor's degree and was delivered in English. Processing runs 2 to 3 weeks.

3. National of a majority English-speaking country

Passport holders from the USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, and several Caribbean nations are exempt. No test is required. Passport confirmation satisfies the requirement.

Impact on Hiring Timelines: Apply now or wait?

For applicants with B1 evidence ready and a job offer confirmed before 8 January 2026, the decision is straightforward: submit before the change takes effect.

For those who miss that window or receive a Certificate of Sponsorship after 8 January, the choice is whether to delay the application until B2 evidence is secured, or to attempt a switch or a new application and risk refusal for failing to meet the updated threshold.

A Y & J Solicitors recommend applicants verify their current level before booking a SELT.

Impact on Employer Hiring Timelines

Employers sponsoring Skilled Workers from overseas now face longer recruitment cycles. Candidates need time to book and pass B2 tests. Some centres are scheduling four to six weeks out. Employers are learning to verify language evidence before assigning Certificates of Sponsorship. A CoS assigned to someone who then fails B2 wastes allocation and delays onboarding.

Smart employers now screen for English level during initial candidate assessment rather than discovering gaps at the visa preparation stage.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Booking a B1 test after 8 January will cause refusal. Even if booked earlier, tests taken on or after 8 January showing only B1 do not satisfy the requirement.

Assuming overseas degrees taught in English automatically qualify is wrong. Without Ecctis verification, the Home Office will reject the evidence.

Misunderstanding who the change applies to creates unnecessary test bookings. Extensions and ILR remain at B1. Only new grants and switchers need B2.

What A Y & J Solicitors is Seeing

Test centre capacity is tightening. Candidates are discovering they are not visa-ready when expected to be. Employers who have not adjusted recruitment workflows are seeing delays.

A Y & J Solicitors offer a Skilled Worker visa readiness review for applicants and sponsors navigating the B2 requirement — covering language evidence verification, degree qualification checks, timeline planning, and CoS assignment strategy. Contact A Y & J Solicitors to confirm your English evidence meets the new B2 requirement before your application is submitted.

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