What does a Certificate of Sponsorship do in a UK work visa case?

A Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) is not a physical document or a certificate you carry. It is a digital reference number that a UK employer assigns to a foreign worker through the Home Office's sponsorship management system. In a Skilled Worker visa application, the CoS confirms that the employer offers a genuine job in an eligible occupation and that the worker meets the skill and salary requirements. Without a valid CoS, an applicant cannot submit a visa application under the Skilled Worker route.

The CoS serves as the employer's formal statement of sponsorship. It records key details about the role, the salary, the occupation code, and the start date. The Home Office uses this information to check whether the job meets the minimum thresholds for skill level and pay. The system also logs whether the role is exempt from the resident labour market test, which applies to most Skilled Worker cases. Once issued, the worker receives a unique CoS number to enter on their visa application form. The employer does not hand over a paper copy, though they should provide the reference number and confirm the details are correct.

How the Certificate of Sponsorship works in practice

Employers must hold a valid sponsor licence before they can assign a CoS. The licence shows the Home Office that the organisation is approved to recruit workers from outside the UK. Assigning a CoS uses one of the employer's allocated allocations, which are renewed each year. For a new Skilled Worker visa application, the employer assigns a "defined" CoS. For extensions or changes of employment within the UK, they use an "undefined" CoS. The system tracks every assignment, so the Home Office can see how many workers each sponsor brings in.

When an employer assigns a CoS, they confirm the job is genuine and that the worker intends to perform the role. The system records the worker's personal details, the job title, the standard occupational classification (SOC) code, and the gross annual salary. The Home Office checks these against the current salary threshold for the occupation. If the salary falls below the minimum, the visa application will be refused. The CoS also captures whether the employer pays the immigration skills charge, a fee that funds training for the domestic workforce. This charge applies to most sponsored workers, though there are exemptions for certain roles and for small businesses.

View the location on Google Maps

Why the CoS matters for the worker

For the visa applicant, the CoS number is the gateway to the entire application. They cannot start the online form without it. The number links the worker's application directly to the employer's sponsorship record. If the employer has not assigned a CoS, or if the assignment contains errors, the Home Office will reject the application. The worker must also meet the English language requirement and pass a tuberculosis test if they come from a listed country, but the CoS is the employer's part of the process.



Once the visa is granted, the CoS remains part of the worker's immigration record. It defines the conditions of their stay, including which employer they can work for and which occupation they must perform. A change of employer or a significant change in job duties requires a new

CoS and a fresh visa application. The worker cannot simply move to a different sponsor without going through the assignment process again.

The employer's responsibilities

Assigning a CoS is not a one-off task. Employers must keep their sponsorship records up to date, report any changes in the worker's circumstances, and comply with Home Office rules on record-keeping. The Home Office can carry out compliance visits to check that the sponsor is meeting its duties. If the employer fails to report a change or assigns a CoS for a role that does not exist, they risk losing their sponsor licence. This would affect all their sponsored workers, not just the one in question.

The employer also pays a fee for each CoS assignment. The cost varies depending on the type of CoS and the size of the organisation. Larger employers pay a higher immigration skills charge per worker. The employer must also ensure that the salary offered meets the going rate for the occupation and the general salary threshold. If the role is in a shortage occupation, the salary threshold may be lower, but the employer still needs to assign a CoS that reflects the correct rate.

Common pitfalls with Certificates of Sponsorship

Errors on the CoS are a frequent cause of visa refusals. A wrong SOC code, an incorrect salary figure, or a missing start date can all lead to a refusal. The worker may not realise the mistake until the Home Office sends a refusal notice, which can delay their start date and create complications for the employer. It is wise for both parties to double-check the CoS details before the worker submits the application.

Adamir Immigration Solicitors London is also on Discord.

Another issue is the timing of the CoS assignment. The employer must assign the CoS before the worker applies, but the assignment itself does not guarantee the visa. The Home Office still assesses the application on its merits. If the worker's circumstances change between the CoS assignment and the visa decision, they should inform the Home Office. A change in salary, a new job offer from a different employer, or a change in personal circumstances can all affect the outcome.

How a solicitor can help

Navigating the CoS process is not always straightforward, especially for employers who are new to sponsorship or for workers whose role falls outside the standard categories. A solicitor who specialises in UK work visas can review the CoS details before the application is submitted, check that the occupation code and salary are correct, and advise on any additional

documents needed. They can also help if the Home Office refuses the visa or raises a compliance concern.





For employers, a solicitor can assist with the sponsor licence application, the allocation of CoS numbers, and the ongoing compliance duties. They can also represent the business during a compliance visit or if the Home Office revokes the licence. For workers, a solicitor can explain what the CoS means, what to check before applying, and what to do if something goes wrong. This kind of legal support for sponsored workers can make the difference between a smooth application and a costly refusal.

Many visa cases involve more than just the CoS. The worker may need to show that they meet the English language requirement, that they have enough funds to support themselves, and that their criminal record does not bar them from entry. A solicitor can coordinate all these elements and ensure that the application is complete. They can also advise on the rights of dependant workers, such as a spouse or partner who wants to work in the UK while the main applicant holds a Skilled Worker visa.

Choosing the right **legal support for sponsored workers** is an important decision. A solicitor who understands the sponsor licence system and the CoS process can save time and reduce the risk of errors. They can also provide guidance on what to expect during a compliance visit and how to maintain the sponsor licence over the long term.

What to ask a solicitor before hiring them

If you are an employer or a worker looking for advice on a CoS or a Skilled Worker visa, it helps to ask a few practical questions. Find out whether the solicitor has experience with sponsor licence applications and CoS assignments. Ask how they handle errors on a CoS and what they would do if the Home Office refused the visa. A good solicitor will give clear answers and explain the process without jargon.

It is also worth asking about the firm's approach to compliance. Some solicitors offer ongoing support for employers, including mock compliance visits and record-keeping audits. Others focus on one-off visa applications. Choose the one that matches your needs.



For workers, ask whether the solicitor can review the CoS before you submit the application. A quick check can catch mistakes that would otherwise lead to a refusal. Also ask about the timeline. A Skilled Worker visa application usually takes a few weeks, but the processing time

can vary depending on the service level you choose. A solicitor can help you decide whether to pay for priority processing.

Adamir Immigration Solicitors London provides UK immigration and nationality advice from their office at Unit-1, 5 Norman Rd, London N15 4ND, UK. You can reach them by phone at +44 20 3302 0074.