



Self-employed skilled visa workers: An untapped opportunity

The UK's growing reliance on international professionals to fill persistent skills gaps is reshaping the mortgage landscape. It's also opening the door to new opportunities for brokers. From doctors and dentists to architects and IT contractors, a growing number of highly skilled workers are arriving on visas with every intention of building a long-term future in the UK. For many, that includes owning a home.

These professionals often work under hybrid arrangements. While sponsored by UK employers to meet visa requirements, they contract their services in a way that makes them functionally self-employed. This is particularly common in medicine, law and technology. Yet many of these clients find themselves underserved by lenders who still struggle to accommodate non-standard income or visa complexities.

For brokers willing to understand this niche, there's a loyal, upwardly mobile client base in need of expert advice.

The skills gap driving demand

The backdrop is a UK economy still contending with serious recruitment pressures across several sectors. In Q1 2025, 75% of IT firms reported difficulty hiring for data and programming roles. Vacancies persist in engineering, research and development and construction, while the NHS continues to grapple with shortages in midwifery, nursing, and support staff. The pressure extends to nuclear projects, multimedia IT, and even defence industries, many of which require long-term technical expertise. (1)

To help plug the gap, 192,110 work visas were granted in the year to March 2025. While numbers have stabilised from pandemic highs, they remain significantly above pre-COVID levels. Skilled Worker Visas accounted for more than 10,800 applications in Q1 alone, with over 3,300 in senior or specialist categories.

What sets this cohort apart is their long-term view. Government data shows that 75% of highskilled visa holders remain in the UK after five years, progressing toward permanent residency and often bringing dependents with them. This cohort aren't here short-term, they're building lives. (2)

Navigating employment complexity

While some visa holders are in straightforward salaried roles, others fall into a grey area. A doctor might be sponsored by an NHS trust but work across multiple sites as a contractor. A software developer may hold a sponsored role while billing as a limited-term consultant. A barrister might split their time between chambers on contract. Technically self-employed, they still meet visa conditions, but many mainstream lenders are wary of the paperwork. This is where brokers can add real value, by understanding the nuances and partnering with lenders equipped to underwrite these cases manually. With specialist support, these clients often turn out to be low-risk, high-potential borrowers.

A growing niche

We are one of the few lenders openly supporting self-employed visa applicants, recognising their strong earnings potential and intent to settle or invest long term in the UK.

Those who've been in the UK for at least 12 months and have one year's accounts may be eligible for up to 90% loan-to-value (LTV). For employed visa holders, lending is available up to 95% LTV, with no minimum income, residency period or visa term required. If there's less than six months left on a visa, applicants simply need to confirm they intend to renew.

We accept 5% builder deposit incentives on new-builds without adjusting the purchase price allowing visa holders to reach 90% gross LTV. Additional borrowing is available for existing customers, and each application is assessed individually via manual underwriting.

Buy-to-let lending is also available up to 75% LTV for qualifying visa types, though limited companies and self-employed BTL applicants are excluded. Applicants must prove their UK residency and hold deposits in UK-based accounts.

Brokers who understand these visa structures can build a steady referral stream by serving a growing cohort of skilled professionals looking to put down roots.

Meanwhile, we have also expanded our lending footprint into Scotland for the first time, with no changes to criteria, and Scottish borrowers will benefit from the same proposition available in England and Wales.

In a further boost to affordability, we have increased our maximum loan-to-income (LTI) ratio to 5.5 times income across the core residential range. This will open up more options for skilled workers with strong earnings potential but affordability constraints under conventional limits.

The referral boost

Skilled worker clients tend to stay in roles longer, support their families, and seek guidance from professionals they trust. For brokers, this creates a powerful opportunity to establish long-term relationships and generate consistent referrals within tightly knit professional networks.

In a mortgage market that increasingly rewards expertise and human insight, helping the people who are closing the UK's skills gaps is not just good for society, it's good for business.

Laura Sneddon is Head of Sales and Distribution at Hinckley & Rugby for Intermediaries

NOTES

1. Skilled worker statistics. Skilled Worker Visa applicants data. Immigration system statistics, year ending March 2025:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2025>

2. Why do people come – workers:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2025/why-do-people-come-to-the-uk-work>

This article has also featured in Mortgage Solutions

For information about Hinckley & Rugby's range of mortgage products, criteria and more, visit:
intermediaries.hrbs.co.uk