

COMMONWEALTH

Commonwealth applicants applying from inside their country of origin must be aged 18. Commonwealth citizens who are resident in the UK can enlist at 16 years of age. To be eligible to apply for Royal Air Force service a current, valid passport and visa are mandatory. Moreover, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have permission to be in the UK and that this permission is valid for the entirety of the recruitment process up to the point of enlistment. The main issues are summarised below. However, for full details please see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-appendix-armed-forces>.

Hosts: If you intend to stay with family or friends, they may be required to provide evidence that they are permitted to accommodate visitors and that they are financially stable before your Visitors Visas is approved. Hosts must provide contact details so your careers advisor can contact them in the event of any problems.

Immigration: If you are joining from outside the United Kingdom, once you have entered Phase 1 training you will be exempt from immigration control under section 8(4) of the Immigration Act 1971. This exemption will remain valid for the duration of your time in the Service. Your passport will be marked accordingly to indicate to the immigration authorities that you are exempt. Once released from the Royal Air Force, for whatever reason, you will have to return to your country of origin unless you have made your own arrangements with the Home Office to stay in the UK.

Visas: If you succeed in becoming a member of the Royal Air Force, visas will be supplied at public expense for all journeys undertaken for Service reasons. However, you will be required to pay for visas for personal and recreational journeys.

Families often arrive in the UK with visitor visas that only allow them to remain in UK for a 6-month period. You should be aware, however, that if your immediate family wishes to reside in the UK then you will need to fulfil the criteria on income as detailed by the Home Office and apply for 5-year settlement under, 'Appendix Armed Forces'. Further information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/uk-family-visa/proof-income>

UK Citizenship: UK citizenship is a matter for the Home Office and being a member of the Armed Forces has no influence on the granting of British nationality. After 5 years' service, Royal Air Force personnel are eligible to apply for UK citizenship. The rules for family members are different. You are advised to check the Home Office website for more details. Applying for UK citizenship is voluntary and is not required to join the Royal Air Force.

Universal Credit: Six of the most common benefits in the UK were recently merged into one system called Universal Credit. This replaced the following benefits:

- Child Tax Credit
- Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Housing Benefit
- Working Tax Credit

There are specific eligibility criteria for Universal Credit, and there are several factors that will determine whether you can apply under the new system, or whether you will need to apply for the relevant benefits separately, as per the old system. Further information can be found at www.gov.uk/universal-credit/eligibility. If your family is granted limited leave to remain for 5 years under the Appendix Armed Forces route, they will not be eligible for social welfare benefits from public funds. This will mean that you, as the serving person, will need to make all claims for Universal Credit, or the appropriate benefit category.