

TECH NATION VISA SCHEME (Tier 1 Exceptional Talent)

Guidance for Applicants



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Tech City UK (www.techcityuk.com) is one of five Designated Competent Bodies appointed by the Home Office to assess applications from individuals wishing to enter the country under the Tech Nation Visa Scheme (Tier 1 Exceptional Talent). We evaluate applications in the area of Digital Technology, and can endorse up to 200 candidates annually.

The following criteria apply only to digital technology applicants who will be assessed by Tech City UK. These criteria will be valid for all applications from 19 November 2015 and are subject to review.

This visa route can be granted for 5 years of leave and applicants can therefore be eligible for Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK under this scheme.

Overview of the Application Process

The application for Tech Nation Visa Scheme (Tier 1 Exceptional Talent) application is in 2 stages:

1) Endorsement application

You must apply to be endorsed by Tech City UK by filling out the application form available here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-for-endorsement-for-tier-1-exceptional-talent-visa and posting a hard copy to the Home Office.

You will also need to provide various pieces of evidence as described in this document. Tech City UK's experts will then review your application and decide whether or not it meets the criteria set out in this document. Should your application meet the criteria, it will be endorsed by Tech City UK and recommended to the Home Office for approval. You will be notified by the Home Office about the outcome of your application.

If your application does not meet the criteria for endorsement, there is an option for review and you can request for your application to be reconsidered. Should the Home Office refuse the application for a second time, then the process ends here. You can still apply via another visa route or re-apply to this route with different supporting evidence.

2) Immigration application

If your application is endorsed you will then need to separately apply for a visa directly on the Home Office website along with a copy of your endorsement letter. Tech City UK has no influence on this stage of the process.

For further information on how to apply, please see the published Home Office guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/tier-1-exceptional-talent>



Guidance and Eligibility Criteria for Stage 1: Endorsement

Eligibility criteria for Tech Nation Talent Applicants

Tech City UK have a single set of criteria that covers all applicants whether you are at the beginning of your career (Exceptional Promise) or at a more advanced stage (Exceptional Talent). This provision will facilitate companies in recruiting the highly skilled individuals needed to fill specific talent gaps. Please note that Tech City UK experts will use their technical know-how to establish whether you meet the necessary criteria to be endorsed for Exceptional Talent or for Exceptional Promise.

You must meet **one** of the **two** mandatory criteria and two or more of the four qualifying criteria.

Tech Nation (Tier 1 Exceptional Talent) endorsement criteria for both Exceptional Talent and Exceptional Promise applicants	
Mandatory 1) Have a proven track record of innovation in the digital technology sector as a director, founder or employee of a digital technology sector company OR 2) Proof of recognition for work outside your immediate occupation that has contributed to the advancement of the sector.	Qualifying 1) Have made significant technical, commercial, or entrepreneurial contributions in the digital technology sector as either a director, founder, or employee of a digital technology company; 2) Have been recognised as a world leading talent in the digital technology sector; 3) Have undergone continuous learning / mastery of new digital skills (commercial or technical) throughout your career; 4) Have demonstrated exceptional ability in the field by making academic contributions through research.

Fast Track Options

There are **three** separate options for applications to be fast-tracked.

If you meet the criteria listed below your application will be fast-tracked and Tech City UK will aim to provide a decision for endorsement within 18 days to the Home Office. Please note this does not include the time the Home Office need to complete administrative tasks, however, the overall time for your application to be considered will be reduced.

To make use of the fast-track options, tick the correct box on your Application for endorsement form and mention this option in your cover letter.

You can apply for a fast tracked endorsement in the following cases:

1) Empowering the North

You intend to make a contribution in the North of the UK (i.e. plan to work in or set up a company in one of Tech North's seven cities: Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield and Sunderland or the surrounding regions);



2) Bridging the Gap: building UK scale-ups

You have the business or technical skills that are most needed in the UK digital technology sector including very specific technical knowledge, that can enable rapidly growing companies to access the right talent. The following skills will be considered:

Technical Skills	Business Skills
DevOps / SysOps engineers	Experience of taking a company to IPO
Systems administrators / engineers	Experience as a commercial / business lead (P&L, growth, sales and distribution strategy) in a digital business
Big data engineers	Experience of scaling a digital product internationally
Data scientists	Experience of scaling a digital business internationally
Artificial Intelligence, Natural Language Processing and Machine Learning experts (AI, NLP, ML)	Sector-specific experience eg. payment infrastructure in FinTech
Cybersecurity experts	Chief revenue officer in a digital company
Technical analysts	Data and Complexity Academic
QA engineers	Experience as a digital product lead (head of product management / development / requirements)
Compiler experts	SaaS or enterprise sales leadership for digital services
Operating Systems engineers	Experience as Chief Operating Officer or head of operations for a digital business
Kernel programmers	
Hardware engineers	
GPU developers - C++, CUDA	
Graphics programmers with experience in Renderscript (on Android), Metal (on iOS), DirectX and Open GL	
Back end developers with experience in new technologies such as .net, JVM, and languages such as Scala, F#, C Rust etc.	
Architecture	

3) Relocating Teams

Overseas teams of up to five individuals, that want to **relocate** to the UK, have an option to do so under this route; each team member will be considered individually and must qualify in their own right. Eligibility includes but is not limited to existing teams within an international company which have been acquired by a UK business. If you wish to fast track your application under the team relocation option you will need to provide additional evidence listed in paragraph (f) below.

If some applications do not meet the criteria, it may be possible for a company to register as a Tier 2 sponsor. This could enable, subject to all other conditions being met, the recruitment of further non-EEA nationals into the company. See Tier 2 guidance for further information: <https://www.gov.uk/tier-2-general>



Application content and documentation

In addition to submitting the Home Office application form, you must submit the following set of documents to demonstrate you meet the exceptional talent criteria laid out in the table above.

(a) A completed Tech Nation (Tier 1 Exceptional Talent) application form:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-for-endorsement-for-tier-1-exceptional-talent-visa>

(b) A short curriculum vitae outlining the your career and publication history (of no more than two A4 sides in length);

(c) Two letters of recommendation from recognised experts who are familiar with your work and contribution to the field, and are qualified to assess your claim to be a potential world leader in the field. Full details of what each letter should show can be found in Annex A of this document;

(d) A personal cover letter of a maximum length of two A4 sides, explaining why you want to be based in the UK, what your occupation will be, what your contribution will be to the UK digital technology sector, and any other relevant information that might help our panel of experts in their assessment of your application;

(e) Evidence in relation to the mandatory and at least two of the qualifying criteria listed in the table above. Examples of the type of evidence you may wish to provide can be shown in Annex B;

The evidence you supply to demonstrate you meet the mandatory and qualifying criteria must consist of **no more than ten documents** in total.

(f) If you are applying for the team relocation fast-track option, the evidence must include your employment contract if you are an employee or your company's registration letter if you are a founder/employer.

Annex A

Guidelines for applicants: The two letters of recommendation and the personal cover letter

1) Letters of recommendation

You must provide two letters of recommendation from two different senior members of established organisations in the digital technology sector. These could be institutions or companies with a well-established national or international reputation and recognised expertise in your specialist field.

Acceptable organisations would be those that work with industry experts and are widely acknowledged as possessing expertise in your field.

Tech City UK reserves the right to determine whether organisations or individuals are well established and widely acknowledged as possessing expertise in your field. For example, this may include a UK-based expert, or a member of the executive team at a reputable international company, or an academic from a well-established university.

All letters of recommendation should:

- Be written on headed paper, dated, and signed by the author who must be an authorised member of the organisation such as the Chief Executive, Chief Operating Officer, Finance Director or Head of Course
- Include details of the author's credentials (for example, a CV/resume) and how they know you (personal relationship or reputation)
- Detail your achievements in your specialist field and how in the opinion of the author you have demonstrated that you are a world leader in your field
- Describe how you would benefit from living in the UK and the contribution you could make to the UK digital technology sector



- Include details of any future professional engagements you have in the UK
- Include full contact details of the author including personal email address and direct telephone number so that personal contact can be made.

Letters of recommendation should be written specifically for this purpose and include the information detailed above. The letter should not be a general all-purpose reference letter.

2) Cover Letter

You must also provide a cover letter (maximum two sides of A4 in length) written by yourself to explain your plans in the UK and the contribution that you will make to the UK digital technology sector. This cover letter should include answers to the following questions, and any more information you deem relevant:

- Why do you want to come to the UK?
- What will your occupation be in the UK?
- Which region or city of the UK are you planning to live in?
- How will the UK digital technology sector benefit from your work? (examples of this might include the technological advances you will bring, the creation of new markets, the planned growth of a company, the activities you will take part in outside of your direct occupation)
- What are your long-term plans in the UK?

Annex B

Examples of relevant evidence for this route

The following examples indicate the type of evidence that could be assessed by Tech City UK when looking at the mandatory and qualifying criteria for exceptional talent. These examples are not exhaustive and alternative relevant evidence can be supplied to demonstrate you meet the relevant criteria.

It remains for Tech City UK to judge whether a particular piece of documentation provides appropriate evidence of exceptional talent.

Mandatory criteria

1) How do I demonstrate that I have a proven track record of innovation in the digital technology sector as a director, founder or employee of a digital technology sector company?

You can demonstrate this by providing evidence of any digital technology businesses you have established as a director or founder, or worked in as an employee, which is currently active or has dissolved in the last five years.

- Evidence for each business should include your last set of audited accounts and projection for current financial year;
- Evidence should also be provided regarding the current number of outlets or stockists of the business' products;
- Evidence of employment contract or articles of association.



OR

2) *How do I demonstrate that I have been recognised for my work outside of my immediate occupation that contributed to the advancement of the sector?*

You can demonstrate this by providing evidence that you have played an active role and have a reputation as an emerging leader in your ecosystem. Examples may include mentoring, advising, organizing interest groups, leading on policy, teaching if at university or participating in clubs or societies for the furthering of the field.

Examples of relevant evidence include:

- Your StackOverflow profile showing significant contribution to discussions around code;
- Evidence of contributions to an Open Source project;
- Your GitHub profile demonstrating active participation in a collaborative project;
- A link to one or more videos of talks or conferences that have had a significant viewership;
- An op-ed or news article that exemplifies thought leadership, evidence of mentorship;
- Evidence of sharing or teaching skills, such as mentoring if at a workplace.

AND

3) You must fill at least two of the qualifying criteria: examples of evidence for these criteria are below.

Qualifying criteria

1) *How do I demonstrate that I have made a significant technical, commercial, or entrepreneurial contribution in the digital technology sector either as a director, founder, or employee of a digital technology company?*

Here we will assess whether you are a technical applicant (whether your occupation requires you to write code or manage developers) or whether you are a business applicant (any occupation within a digital technology company that doesn't require you to write code):

Technical examples of a "significant contribution" include:

- Having led in the development of high-impact digital products or services;
- Starting or contributing to open source projects in a way that has been acknowledged by peers as advancing the field;
- Having worked as a key engineer in the core product of a startup.

Documents that will be considered as acceptable evidence include (please provide at least two of the below):

- Employment contract;
- Headed letter from an employer in addition to the required letter of endorsement, and written by another individual;
- Documentation on product designs or architecture diagram clearly showing your contribution;
- GitHub account that contains lines of code clearly showing your contribution.



Business examples of a “significant contribution” include:

- Having led or played a key role in the growth of a digital technology company, such as influencing investment and strategy or delivering major products or releases;
- Having founded a successful company or other organisation and leading it.

Documents that will be considered as acceptable evidence include (please provide at least two of the below):

- Employment contract;
- Letter from an employer in addition to the required letter of endorsement, and written by another individual;
- Documents detailing the candidate’s contribution (such as evidence of sales pipeline built and delivered, growth generated, leads generated, processes developed and implemented).

2) How do I demonstrate that I have been recognised as a world leading talent in the digital technology sector?

The following examples may demonstrate that you meet this criterion:

- You have authored a well-reviewed book on digital technology or on programming or published material in a professional or major trade publication. You must include the title, date and evidence that you are the author of such published material and any necessary translation;
- You led the growth of a company or product as evidenced by a letter from a co-founder, supervisor or eminent colleague describing your work, or as evidenced by news clippings, lines of code or similar evidence of your choice;

3) How do I demonstrate continuous learning / mastery of new commercial or technical digital skills throughout my career?

The following examples may demonstrate that you meet this criterion:

- Evidence of having continuously updated technical or commercial skills showing clear progression and achievement. This can be in the form of various projects or courses completed (whether at university or independently), which demonstrate a clear progression either in depth or breadth;
- Evidence of experimenting with new technologies, coding libraries or languages, or tools, as evidenced for example on your GitHub or Stack Overflow profile;
- Evidence of learning processes or tools such as Agile or Scrum or of an up-to-date knowledge of your sector trends, as shown for example by a relevant qualification, or by a talk in a prestigious conference.

4) How do I demonstrate that I have made academic contributions to the field through research?

Documents that will be considered as acceptable evidence include:

- Evidence of at least one significant contribution to the field in the form of a paper published in a top tier journal;
- Evidence of outstanding applied work in the form of awards received for an outstanding project or thesis, supported by excellent academic achievement (a first class degree or distinction);
- A letter of endorsement from a research supervisor or other expert in the candidate’s area of expertise affirming their potential world-class standard, in addition to the required letters of endorsement, and written by another individual;
- Evidence of an award or prize that has been granted by an organisation of a similar standing and distinction to the Royal Society, as well as the selection criteria for this award or prize.

