TECH NATION
Visa Scheme

Tier 1 Exceptional Talent Visa for Digital Technology

From

TECH CITY UK

Guidance for Applicants

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, with the Home Office being able to issue 200 visas annually for this visa route.

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 6 April 2017 and are subject to review.

Please note that for the purposes of these criteria exceptional talent in digital technology is defined as proven commercial or technical expertise in management or exploitation of a technology stack.

This visa route can be granted for 5 years of leave and applicants can 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 two stages:

1. Endorsement application

You must apply to be endorsed by Tech City UK by filling out the application form **available here** and printing 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.

Please note, as each application is assessed by our independent experts, Tech City UK unfortunately cannot advise on the eligibility of individual applicants or the likelihood of their endorsement.

Should your application meet the criteria, it will be endorsed by Tech City UK and recommended to the Home Office for approval. **You will then be notified by the Home Office about the outcome of your application.** Tech City UK is unable to disclose the outcome of applications directly to applicants.

If your application does not meet the criteria for endorsement and is not approved, you can apply for your application to be reviewed. Your review will only be successful if you are able to demonstrate a material error in the process (e.g. you can prove that the guidelines have not been followed in making the decision.)

Should your application for endorsement be refused 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.

Please note that Tech City UK's experts review each application based on its own merits and reserves the right to not recommend endorsement if the evidence provided is not deemed sufficient to consider the applicant to be a leader in the field of digital technology.

Finally, you must ensure you read the **Home Office guidance** prior to applying for this visa route. You must also have completed a Home Office Endorsement Form, either **online** or by **post**, as your application will not be processed otherwise.

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**.

Guidance and Eligibility Criteria for Stage 1: Endorsement

Eligibility criteria for Tech Nation Visa Applicants (Exceptional Talent / Promise)

In order to enter the UK through the Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent / Exceptional Promise) route you must:

· Be established as a world leader in the field of digital technology; or
· Demonstrate the potential to become a world leader in the field of digital technology; and/or
· Be an internationally recognised skilled professional in this field; and/or
· Have the necessary business and technical skills to grow and scale-up technology companies.

Please see below examples of the types of technical and business skills and roles that this visa route is designed for.

*Please note that this list is not exhaustive and we will consider applications from other backgrounds.

Table 1: Technical skills and roles:
Senior DevOps / SysOps engineers
Senior systems administrators
Senior systems engineers
Principal software engineers / developers
Senior data scientists / data engineers
Artificial Intelligence, Natural Language Processing and Machine Learning experts
Senior cybersecurity experts
Senior hardware engineers
Senior front-end developers
Compiler experts
Operating Systems engineers
Kernel programmers

Senior graphics programmers
Senior GPU developers e.g. C++, CUDA
Experienced published mobile app developers
Experienced back end developers leading development of or contributing heavily to major new technologies or open source projects (e.g. blockchain, Scala, Golang, Elasticsearch, etc.)
Information Architecture strategy / Chief Technology Officer for business applications with international operations (ERP, CRM, BI, etc.)
VR/AR developers

Table 2: Business skills and Roles:
Experience of taking a tech company through IPO
Experience as a commercial / business lead (P&L, growth, sales and distribution strategy in a digital business)
Experience of scaling a digital product internationally
Sector-specific experience e.g. payment infrastructure in FinTech / international expansion in EdTech
Solution sales experts
Data and Complexity Academic
Experience as a digital product lead (head of product management / development / requirements)
SaaS or enterprise sales leadership for digital services
Performance marketing experts
Track record of leadingSenior VC or PE analysts with track records of leading investments in digital businesses
Experience as C suite in an SME+ (CEO, CMO, CIO) or head of operations for a digital business

Eligibility Criteria

Every applicant must be aware that the Tech Nation Visa is not determined solely by objective criteria. If the eligibility criteria are satisfied, our independent panel of experts will determine whether, overall, they consider that you should be endorsed. It is at Tech City UK's discretion to assess each application on its own merits and make a recommendation for or against endorsement.

There are two routes for applicants to apply and be considered for endorsement: the Exceptional Talent route and the Exceptional Promise route. Further details on these routes can be found below.

Please note that there is no difference in requirements for supporting evidence for the Exceptional Promise and Exceptional Talent routes.

Exceptional Talent

In order to be considered eligible for endorsement via the Exceptional Talent route, you must meet or have demonstrated the potential to meet at least one of the two key criteria and two or more of the four qualifying criteria listed in the Exceptional Talent column in Table 3 below.

Please note that we will assess applicants' potential based on the evidence they provide in relation to the criteria below.

Exceptional Promise

The Exceptional Promise route is intended for applicants who are able to demonstrate the potential to become a world leader in the field of digital technology.

Applicants must demonstrate that they meet one of the two key criteria and at least two of the four qualifying criteria listed in the Exceptional Promise column in Table 4 below.

Applicants who choose to apply via this route are often individuals who are at the start of their careers in digital technology, and so may not have the same levels of experience as someone endorsed via the Exceptional Talent route, but who feel they demonstrate the potential to be a world leader in digital technology through their skills and/or achievements thus far.

Applicants applying for Exceptional Promise should tick the relevant box on the application form.

TECH NATION
Visa Scheme

Tech Nation (Tier 1 Exceptional Talent / Exceptional Promise) endorsement criteria

Table 3: Exceptional Talent Key Criteria:
1. Have a **proven track record** of innovation in the digital technology sector as a director / founder of a digital technology sector company or an employee working in a new digital field or concept that must be clearly evidenced (e.g. patent application)

OR

2. Proof of recognition for work outside your immediate occupation that has contributed to the advancement of the sector (e.g. evidence that you have gone beyond your day to day profession to engage in an activity that contributes 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 entrepreneur 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 published or otherwise endorsed by a research supervisor or other expert |

Table 4: Exceptional Promise Key Criteria:
1. Provide **two or more** examples of innovation in the digital technology sector as a founder of a digital technology sector company or an employee working in a new digital field or concept that must be clearly evidenced (e.g. patent application)

OR

2. Proof of recognition for work outside your immediate occupation that has contributed to the advancement of the sector (e.g. evidence that you have gone beyond your day to day profession to engage in an activity that contributes to the advancement of the sector) |
| **Qualifying:** |
| 1. Have made significant technical, commercial, or entrepreneurial contributions in the digital technology sector as either a founder or entrepreneur of a digital technology company

2. Have been recognised as having the **potential** to be 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. Provide **two or more** examples of exceptional ability in the field by making academic contributions through research endorsed by a research supervisor or other expert |

Fast Track Options

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

If we are satisfied that 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 working 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 form and mention this option in your personal statement, providing evidence to demonstrate how you meet the option you have selected.

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

1. Empowering the North

You intend to settle and work in the North of the UK and can provide evidence of this (i.e. demonstrate that you intend to be employed or set up a company in one of **Tech North**'s seven focus cities: Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield and Sunderland or the surrounding regions);

2. Bridging the Gap: building UK scale-ups

You can demonstrate that 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. These will be reviewed regularly depending on the changing skills shortage. Please note that only skills listed in Table 5 and Table 6 below will be considered for this fast track-option:

Table 5: Technical skills and roles:
Senior DevOps / SysOps engineers
Senior systems administrators
Senior systems engineers
Principal software engineers / developers
Senior data scientists / engineers
AI, NLP, and ML experts
Senior cybersecurity experts
Senior hardware engineers
Compiler experts
Operating Systems engineers
Kernal programmers

Table 6: Business skills and roles:
Experience of taking a tech company through IPO
Experience as a C suite in an SME+ (CEO, CMO, CIO) or head of operations for a digital business
Sector-specific experience e.g. payment infrastructure in FinTech / international expansion in EdTech / AdTech / E-commerce

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 (g) 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.

Application content and documentation

In order to apply for the Tech Nation Visa, 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 Home Office application for endorsement form visa, which can be completed either by **post** or **online**;

b. A completed **Tech Nation (Tier 1 Exceptional Talent / Exceptional Promise) application form**. This includes a personal statement (maximum 7000 characters in length) written by yourself to explain the contribution that you will make to the UK digital technology sector;

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

d. 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;

e. Evidence of any active or dissolved digital technology businesses in the last five years, if applicable, or evidence of share ownership through business in a digital technology sector company (please note that this evidence will form part of the ten supporting documents).

f. Up to ten pieces of evidence in relation to one key and at least two qualifying criteria listed in the table on page 6 above. Examples of the type of evidence you may wish to provide can be shown in Annex B. Please note that applications should be accompanied by no more than ten supporting documents, with each piece of evidence (i.e. document) comprising maximum 2 sides of A4 paper. For documents longer than this, please summarise or condense the document to the most important aspects, e.g. key terms of employment for an employment contract. Sending additional information or evidence that exceed the maximum document length is unlikely to aid your application and may delay consideration;

g. Evidence you provide in relation to continuous learning should not date back to more than a year;

h. 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 sfounder/employer.

Annex A

Guidelines for applicants: the two letters of recommendation and the personal statement

1. Letters of recommendation

You must provide two letters of recommendation from two **different** senior members of **different** 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 the digital technology sector. Please note that referees do not necessarily have to be based in the UK.

Acceptable organisations would be those that work with industry experts and are widely acknowledged as possessing expertise in this field; they should be familiar with your work in the digital technology sector, and able to recommend you with confidence.

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 or international expert, or a member of the executive team at a reputable international company, or an academic from a well-established university.

- Be written on headed paper, wherever possible, 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, please note that this is not an exhaustive list but that the more reputable the endorser the stronger we will consider the letter of recommendation to be;

- Include details of the author's credentials (for example, a CV/resume) and how they know you (personal relationship or reputation). Please note that we have the right to refuse your application or request more information, which could significantly delay your application, if evidence is not provided that the author is a credible referee;

- Detail your achievements in your specialist field and how in the opinion of the author you have demonstrated that you are a world leader or demonstrate significant potential 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. Personal Statement

You must also provide **a personal statement in the application form** (maximum 7000 characters 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 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 key 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.

Key Criteria

This section outlines the possible evidence you could include as part of your application to demonstrate that you meet the eligibility 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, founder, or entrepreneur, which is currently active or has dissolved in the last five years. Examples of the types of evidence you can provide is listed below.

- Evidence for each business could include your last set of audited or unaudited accounts as well as any projections for the current financial year;
- Evidence could also be provided regarding the current number of outlets or stockists of the business' products;
- Evidence of employment contract, articles of association or certificate of incorporation if relevant.

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 your active and continuing participation in a collaborative project;

- Evidence of 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

This section outlines examples of evidence you could include as part of your application to demonstrate that you meet the eligibility 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 entrepreneur 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 and evidence as to how you have contributed to its success.

Documents that will be considered as acceptable evidence include (please note that these are suggestions and that other types of documents can be submitted):

- Employment contract if relevant; although you will have to demonstrate how you have gone beyond your day to day activities to demonstrate that you have made a significant impact in the sector;

- Headed letter from an employer wherever possible in addition to the required letter of endorsement, to be written by another individual;

- Documentation on product designs or architecture diagram clearly showing your contribution; please ensure that this evidence is no more than two A4 pages long and demonstrates your personal work and not that of the company / team of individuals;

- GitHub account that contains lines of code clearly showing your continuing 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 demonstrated entrepreneurship by going above and beyond your current line of work to make a positive difference to the digital technology sector;

- 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, please note that any evidence dating back more than a year will not qualify;

- 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.

Templates

Examples of written correspondence

Letter of Recommendation

- From a UK or internationally based recognised expert in the digital technology (e.g. C suite executive, head of department, professor etc.)

- Letters must be written on letter headed paper wherever possible and include details of the author's credentials (CV/ resume/linkedin profile) as well as full contact details

- Letters must be signed and dated [electronic signatures will be accepted in certain circumstances].

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For the attention of Tech City UK

In regards to the application of Mr/Mrs/Ms [name] for Exceptional Talent / Promise status in the UK in the field of digital technology.

I **[name and position]** have come to known the applicant since **[insert date]** in the capacity of **[insert how you have come to know the applicant and in what capacity]**.

[Provide full details of the applicant's skills and credentials].

[How has this applicant differed from other employees / clients/ students].

[In your expert opinion how has the applicant made a significant impact in the field of digital technology]

[Do you believe this applicant will positively impact the UK digital economy? If so please state full details as to why.]

Letters of recommendation should be written specifically for this purpose, be authentic and personal to each recommender.

The letter should not be a general all-purpose reference letter.

Personal Statement

Please limit this field to 7,000 characters in Section 4 of the online application form and ensure that the information provided is authentic and verifiable.

I **[insert name]** wish to submit my application for the Tech Nation visa scheme (Tier 1 Exceptional Talent).

The information contained in this application is true to my knowledge and I will confirm the contents of this document at Tech City UK's request.

[Please provide details of your previous role / achievements to date.]

[Please give specific reasons as to why you are applying for this visa route and how you believe you have made a significant impact to your current digital community.]

[Provide specific reasons as to why you want to come to the UK and in what ways you believe you can benefit the UK digital technology sector.
Give details of your role and where you will live in the UK]

[Give concrete examples as to how the UK digital economy can benefit from your work.]

[Please explain your long term plans in the UK]

Please do provide any more information you deem relevant to your application.

Notes