



TECH NATION
VISA

The Tech Nation Visa guide for
digital technology applicants
of the Tier 1 Exceptional Talent Visa

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Overview

The Tech Nation Visa, officially known as the Tier 1 Exceptional Talent Visa, enables the brightest and best tech talent from around the world to come and work in the UK's digital technology sector, contributing their cutting-edge expertise, creativity and innovation to maintaining the UK's position at the forefront of the global digital economy.

Tech Nation is the Home Office Designated Competent Body (DCB) authorised to assess endorsement applications from individuals with expertise in digital technology who want to come to the UK under the Tier 1 Exceptional Talent visa.

The Tech Nation Visa is for founders and employees with technical or business backgrounds, including all tech sub-sectors like fintech, ai, cyber, and games. The visa is valid for up to 5 years and 4 months, enabling you to work, change employers, or be self-employed, without the need for further authorisation. The Tech Nation Visa can be extended to your immediate family members and after the initial visa period you can either apply for an extension or permanent settlement in the UK.

If you are exceptionally talented or show exceptional promise and want to work in the UK's digital technology sector, the Tech Nation Visa is for you.

About this guide

This Guide applies to all applications submitted after 30 March 2019 and is subject to review. It is based on the official guidance available here and is not a substitute, you must review the official guidance before making an application!

You should also review the official Home Office website for Tier 1 Exceptional Talent.

Frequently asked questions

Who is the Tech Nation Visa for?

The Tech Nation Visa welcomes individuals who are exceptionally talented or show exceptional promise to join the UK's digital technology sector.

How many visas are available?

Tech Nation is allocated 200 visas per year (from April to April) for digital technology applications but has the ability to endorse up to a further 1000 if required.

Do I need a job offer to apply?

You do not need a job offer in the UK in order to apply. You will be assessed solely on your skills, expertise and how you intend to benefit the UK's digital tech sector.

Am I eligible to apply?

There are two routes available to cater for different levels of experience.

Exceptional Talent: proven to be a recognised leader

Exceptional Promise: proven to be an emerging leader.

What is the application process?

The application process is in 2 stages:

Stage 1: Application for Endorsement – up to 8 weeks to be processed. You must apply for endorsement on the Gov.uk website and then complete a Tech Nation Visa application form for assessment.

If you are successful in receiving endorsement from Tech Nation, you can proceed to apply for the visa.

Stage 2: Application for Visa – up to 3 weeks out of country and 8 weeks in country. Tech Nation is not involved in Stage 2.

How long can I stay in the UK?

The visa can be granted for up to 5 years for applications made from inside the UK, or 5 years and 4 months for applications from outside the UK.

Can I apply for settlement in the UK?

You may be eligible for Settlement under this visa route. The qualifying period depends on whether your visa is granted under the criteria for either Exceptional Talent (3 years) or Exceptional Promise (5 years).

Can I bring my family with me to the UK?

Dependants are allowed to join you in the UK subject to requirements.

Stage 1: £456

Stage 2: £152

This does not include additional costs such as your Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) enrolment fee and NHS surcharge.

Where can I get more information?

You should read the official guidance prior to making an application. See the Useful Resources section of this guide.



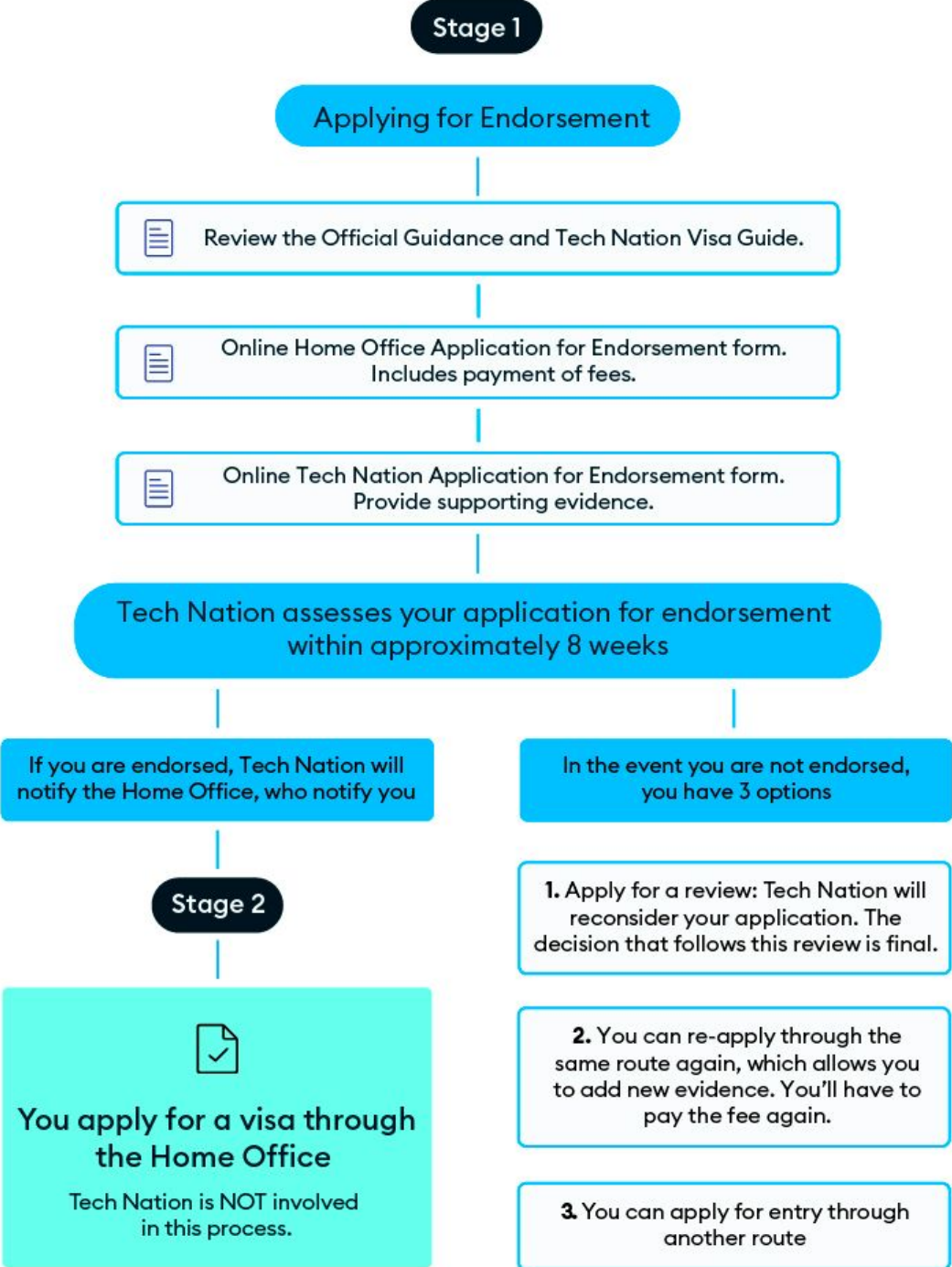
The application process

Applying for your first Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent) visa is a two-stage process.

Stage 1 assesses your skills, abilities and achievements and enables the Designated Competent Bodies to decide whether you should be endorsed in order to progress your application. While Stage 1 applications are submitted to the Home Office, they are **not** immigration applications. As such, Stage 1 applications do not affect any current leave you hold in any way.

Stage 1 is submitted online. It can be submitted from wherever you are in the world but the supporting evidence must be sent to the UK for consideration. The form is available here: <https://visas-immigration.service.gov.uk/product/tier-1-exceptional-talent-endorsement>.

If you are granted an endorsement by a Designated Competent Body, you must then apply for Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent) leave to enter or remain. This is **Stage 2** of the process, which is undertaken solely by the Home Office and assesses immigration matters only.



Note: Unsuccessful Stage 1 Applications

If your application for endorsement is unsuccessful and you think that a mistake has been made, you can ask us to check the decision by means of an endorsement review. Full guidance on endorsement reviews can be found in Annex C of the official guidance.

Alternatively, you can make a new application for stage 1 or make an application under a different immigration route if you meet the relevant criteria for that route. Both of these options will require you to pay a new application fee.

Typical applicants

Tech Nation’s criteria are designed for applicants with the technical and business skills in the digital technology sector. Suitable skill types list below, however please note that this list is not exhaustive and provides an indication of the typical applicant assessed by Tech Nation.

Technical skills	Business skills
<p>DevOps / SysOps engineers</p> <p>Principal software engineers/developers</p> <p>Experienced data scientists/data engineers</p> <p>Artificial Intelligence, Natural Language Processing and Machine Learning experts (AI, NLP, ML)</p> <p>Cybersecurity experts</p> <p>Hardware engineers</p> <p>Experienced front-end developers</p> <p>Operating systems engineers</p> <p>Experienced video game developers</p> <p>Experienced UX/UI designers</p> <p>Experienced Mobile App developers</p> <p>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)</p> <p>CTO or VP engineering experience managing teams of in-house employees at a growing digital business</p> <p>Virtual and augmented reality developers</p>	<p>Experience of leading substantial VC investment over £25m GBP</p> <p>Experience as a commercial / business lead (P&L, growth, sales and distribution strategy) in a digital business</p> <p>Experience of expanding or growing a significant product-led digital technology business</p> <p>Sector-specific experience e.g. payment infrastructure in FinTech / international expansion in EdTech etc.</p> <p>Solution sales experts</p> <p>Experienced Product Manager</p> <p>SaaS or enterprise sales leadership for digital services</p> <p>Solution sales skills performed for a growing B2B digital business (i.e. not big-company experience)</p> <p>Performance marketing experts, performed in house for digital businesses</p> <p>Experienced and senior VC or PE analysts with track records of leading investments in digital businesses</p> <p>Experience as C Suite in a SMEs + (CEO, CMO, CIO) or head of operations for a digital business</p>
<p>Please note the following specialisms are not considered suitable:</p> <p>Service Delivery, Process Delivery, Outsourcing, Consultancy / ERP Consultancy, Systems Admin and all related fields.</p> <p>Corporate roles or experience of managing large corporate teams.</p> <p>Junior investors / analysts. Such specialisms must be supported by an investment track record made at a senior level and are not suitable for Exceptional Promise.</p> <p>Business skills apply to in-house work within product-led digital technology companies, not tech-enabled or service companies such as agencies, outsourcers, marketing firms etc.</p>	

Eligibility criteria

There are two options for applicants applying for endorsement by Tech Nation: **Exceptional Talent** and **Exceptional Promise**. The criteria for both Talent and Promise can be found below.

Applicants must meet one of the key, and two of the qualifying criteria from the relevant column in the table below. Applicants cannot mix criteria from the Exceptional Talent and Exceptional Promise columns interchangeably.

Exceptional Talent	Exceptional Promise
Key	Key
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have a proven track record of innovation in the digital technology sector as a director or founder of a product-led digital technology company or an employee working in a new digital field or concept that must be clearly evidenced 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) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide more than one example of innovation in the digital technology sector as a founder of a product-led digital technology company or an employee working in a new digital field or concept that must be clearly evidenced 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	Qualifying
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have made significant technical, commercial, or entrepreneurial contributions in the digital technology sector as either a founder, entrepreneur or employee of a product-led digital technology company 2. Have been recognised as a 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 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have made significant technical, commercial, or entrepreneurial contributions in the digital technology sector as either a founder, entrepreneur or employee of a product-led digital technology company 2. Have been recognised as having the potential to be a 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

In meeting these criteria, **Technical applicants must** demonstrate proven technical expertise in building, using, deploying or exploiting a technology stack and building technical infrastructure.

Business applicants must demonstrate proven commercial, investment or product expertise in building digital products or leading investments in significant digital product businesses.

You must specify on the Tech Nation (Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent)) application form if you are applying as an Exceptional Talent or Exceptional Promise candidate.

Applicants who choose to apply under the Exceptional Promise criteria are likely to be earlier in their career, typically with 5 years or less commercial experience and therefore have yet to establish a track record in innovation. This means that they might not have had the same levels of experience or commercial impact as those expected to apply via the Exceptional Talent criteria, however they will need to be able to demonstrate the potential to be a leader in digital technology through their skills and achievements thus far.

If you have 5 years or more commercial experience you should apply for the Exceptional Talent route rather than Exceptional Promise (unless there has been a recent career change into the digital technology sector or other differentiating factor).

Tech Nation experts will establish whether your skills and achievements meet the necessary criteria and whether you should be endorsed for Exceptional Talent or Exceptional Promise. This is not determined solely by objective criteria. If the eligibility criteria are satisfied, Tech Nation's independent panel of experts will determine whether, overall, they consider that you should be endorsed and for which route. It is at Tech Nation's discretion to assess each application on its own merits and make a recommendation for or against endorsement.

Fast Track

Tech Nation provides a fast track option if you can provide evidence of being accepted onto one of the recognised UK accelerator programmes listed below. The evidence in your endorsement application should provide clear details regarding your plans in the UK outside of your involvement in the accelerator programme.

The following listed accelerators are currently eligible for this fast track (this includes any active programmes run by these accelerators throughout the UK):

- Barclays Accelerator
- Bethnal Green Ventures (BGV)
- Collider
- CyLon
- Entrepreneur First (EF)
- Founders Factory
- GCHQ Accelerator
- Ignite Accelerator
- Microsoft Accelerator
- SETSquared
- Startupbootcamp
- TechStars
- Wayra
- Zinc

To apply under the fast track option you must confirm this on the [Tech Nation application form](#).

Fast track only impacts Tech Nation's processing times and may enable your application to be processed approximately one to two weeks faster. It does not affect Home Office processing times and it does not relate to eligibility. If you are applying as a fast track applicant, you still must meet the relevant Exceptional talent or promise key and qualifying criteria. Whether your application is eligible to be fast tracked will be at the discretion of Tech Nation. Applicants will not be informed if their application is being processed under fast track. Applications which are not accepted under fast track will still be processed but will not be expedited.

Tech Nation will aim to fast track applications for endorsement and provide a decision within 18 working days to the Home Office. Please note that the 18-day period does not include the time the Home Office need to complete administrative tasks. Applicants will not be informed if their application is being processed under fast track.

Documents and evidence

To allow your application to be assessed, you must provide the following documents:

- ❑ **A completed Tech Nation (Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent / Promise)) application form** which is available on Tech Nation's website at: <https://technation.io/visa/apply>. This includes a personal statement (maximum 1000 words in length) written by you to explain the contribution that you will make to the UK digital technology sector. The statement should include answers to the following questions and any other information you deem relevant:
 - Why do you want to come to the UK?
 - What is your planned occupation 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 product-led digital technology company, the activities you will take part in outside of your direct occupation.)
- ❑ **A short curriculum vitae** outlining your career and any relevant publication history (of no more than two A4 sides in length).
- ❑ **Three letters of recommendation from three different recognised experts** who are familiar with your work and contribution to the digital technology sector. They must be qualified to assess your claim to be a leader or potential leader in the field and be able to recommend you with confidence. Letters of recommendation should be written in support of your application by three different senior members of three 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 your field. They do not need to be based in the UK, although it may strengthen your application where your plans in the UK are supported by a recognised leader in the UK digital technology sector. The calibre and reputation of your chosen references will be taken into consideration.

The letters should be written on an officially headed document (wherever possible), be dated and include:

- the signature of 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 and senior the author, the stronger the letter of recommendation will be considered to be;
- details of the author's credentials (for example, a CV/resume). Tech Nation reserves 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;
- how the recognised expert knows you (by relationship or reputation);
- your achievements in the specialist field;
- how in the opinion of the recognised expert you have demonstrated that you are a leader, or demonstrate significant potential, in your field;
- details of previous work should be supported by quantitative data or objective information regarding the impact of your contribution;
- how you would benefit from living in the UK;

- details of the contribution you would make to the UK digital technology sector;
- details of any of your future professional engagements in the UK; and
- full contact details of the author, including personal email address and direct telephone number, so that personal contact can be made.

Letters of recommendation must be written specifically for this purpose by the referee and include all of the information detailed above (and be of no more than two A4 sides in length). General purpose reference letters, or confirmation letters (such as being accepted onto an accelerator) are not acceptable. Letters from individuals within service-based organisations (i.e. consultants, agencies, outsourcers, service/process delivery) are generally not considered appropriate.

❑ **Up to 10 pieces of evidence in relation to the Eligibility Criteria**

- The evidence you supply to demonstrate you meet one key and two qualifying criteria (see Criteria – Tech Nation) must consist of no more than ten documents in total, with each piece of evidence (i.e. document) of no more than two A4 sides in length. Each document represents a single piece of evidence. 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.
- If you have had any active or dissolved product-led digital technology businesses in the last five years or evidence of share ownership through business in a digital technology sector company, you must include evidence of this as part of these documents.
- You must use the Tech Nation application form to state which of your supporting documents relate to your chosen eligibility criteria. If you choose to provide this information in the form of a cover letter you will need to upload it as one of your ten supporting documents.

The documents above should be uploaded via the Tech Nation platform as part of your application process (<https://technation.io/visa/apply>). You do not need to send printed hard copies to Tech Nation or the Home Office. Your submitted documents should contain your supporting evidence, documents containing only links to online sources are not acceptable. Authorised English translations must be provided for all documents which are not originally written in English.

Each Designated Competent Body will undertake checks on the information you provide if they consider it appropriate. If the Designated Competent Body finds that you have submitted false or fraudulent evidence, your application will be ineligible for consideration and the Home Office will be informed immediately.

Examples of evidence

When assessing your application, Tech Nation will take into consideration:

- Your track record/career history (including your international standing, the significance of your work and the impact of your activity in a company or as an individual);
- The commercial impact of your previous work, achievements and experiences;
- The strength of the supporting statements in your letters of recommendation, and relevance for the eligibility criteria;
- The expected benefits of your presence in the UK in terms of the contribution to the UK digital technology sector;
- Factors including but not limited to, your academic track record and salary level if employed, the company you are being hired by if an employee, the amount of money raised if you are an entrepreneur.

The following examples indicate the type of evidence that could be assessed by Tech Nation when considering the key and qualifying criteria for either Exceptional Talent or Exceptional Promise. These examples are not exhaustive and alternative relevant evidence can be supplied to demonstrate you meet the relevant criteria.

It remains for Tech Nation to judge whether a particular piece of documentation provides appropriate evidence of Exceptional Talent or Exceptional Promise.

Wherever possible you should provide financial documentation and proof of earnings to enable Tech Nation to assess the strength of your application (for example, where evidence relates to business ownership, commercial contracts, employment contracts, revenue history, product/market traction, or financing history in the case of investments or funds. For work within a startup, the company's capital raised and revenues should be provided).

Any statements regarding your previous or future impact on the UK digital technology sector should be supported by relevant evidence where possible.

You must meet one of the key criteria and two of the qualifying criteria. Examples of evidence for these criteria are below.

Key criteria

1) How do I demonstrate that I have a proven track record or examples of innovation in the digital technology sector as a director / founder of a product-led digital technology sector company or an employee working in a new digital field or concept?

You can demonstrate this by providing evidence of any genuine and significant product-led digital technology businesses you have established as a founder or director which is currently active or has been dissolved in the last five years. Any company provided as evidence should demonstrate a level of income beyond solely covering the applicant's salary.

Examples of relevant evidence include:

- Evidence of innovation / product development, proof of product in market and associated traction through revenue.
- Evidence for each business should include your last set of audited accounts, projections for current financial year and articles of association.
- Evidence of domestic and/or international sales should show customer numbers for each country in which the company is operating, including a ranking of your distribution channels with a breakdown of when these sales were achieved for each channel (i.e. online, physical retail, 3rd party distributors, resellers etc.).
- Evidence of employment contract with salary information including any bonus and equity options and history of earnings.

If you are an employee working in a new digital field or concept, this must be clearly demonstrated, for example by providing a patent application (patent should include verifiable ID on Google Patents).

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 gone beyond your day-to-day profession to engage in an activity that contributes to the advancement of the sector. Examples may include mentoring, advising, organising interest groups, leading on policy, teaching at university or participating in clubs or societies for the furthering of the field.

Examples of relevant evidence include:

- Evidence of contributions to an Open Source project;
- Your GitHub profile demonstrating active participation in a collaborative project;
- Your Stack Overflow profile showing significant contribution to discussions around code
- 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 mentorship (i.e. the sharing or teaching of skills and knowledge). Mentorship should have been done within an organised, structured and recognised mentoring scheme, which can be clearly demonstrated through evidence. Training a colleague or simply providing support or advice is not considered sufficient evidence for this criteria.

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 founder, entrepreneur or employee of a product-led digital technology company?

Here Tech Nation will distinguish 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 product-led digital technology company that doesn't require you to write code):

Please note that the term 'significant contribution' in this criteria requires you to demonstrate impact, not necessarily innovation. This is different to Key Criteria 1 where you are required to demonstrate high levels of innovation, not necessarily impact. If these are your chosen criteria then your evidence should clearly demonstrate this differentiation. Submitting the same evidence for both criteria may not be sufficient if it does not meet these different requirements

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 start-up, showing evidence as to how you have contributed to its success.

Documents that will be considered as acceptable evidence include (please provide more than one piece of evidence. The list below contains suggestions – other types of documents can be submitted):

- Employment contract with salary information including any bonus and equity options (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);
- Letter from an employer wherever applicable. This is in addition to the required letters of endorsement and should be written by another individual;
- Documentation on product designs or architecture diagram clearly showing your contribution. Please ensure this evidence is no more than two A4 pages long and demonstrates your personal work, not that of the company or 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 product-led digital technology company, such as influencing investment and strategy or delivering major products or releases;
- Having founded a successful product-led digital technology company or other organisation and leading it.

Documents that will be considered as acceptable evidence include (please provide more than one piece of evidence. The list below contains suggestions – other types of documents can be submitted):

- Employment contract containing salary information including any bonus and equity options;
- Letter from an employer wherever applicable. This is in addition to the required letters of endorsement and should be written by another individual;
- Documents detailing your significant contribution towards commercial success (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 (or have the potential to be) recognised as a leading talent in the digital technology sector?

Any activity you are providing as evidence of recognition should have occurred within the past 5 years. Examples of relevant evidence include:

- 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 product-led digital technology company or product, as evidenced by a letter from a leading industry expert describing your work, or as evidenced by news clippings, lines of code or similar evidence of your choice.

Please note that evidence of media recognition should include details about the publication and target audience. LinkedIn is not considered sufficient as a trade publication. Evidence of recognition provided by a colleague, friend or manager is not sufficient for meeting this criteria.

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

Continuous learning is defined as being able to show a record of consistent and frequent patterns of study, ranging over an extended period of time (e.g. the past 5 years). Each course should have required at least 20 hours to complete and you should evidence the hours required for each course. Short courses (less than 20 hours) would not be considered sufficiently strong evidence.

Examples of relevant evidence include:

- 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 learning processes or tools such as Agile or Scrum or experimenting with new technologies, coding libraries or languages, or tools, as evidenced for example on your GitHub or Stack Overflow profile;
- Evidence of expertise and maintaining up-to-date knowledge of your sector trends, as shown for example by a relevant qualification, or by a talk in a prestigious conference (you should provide conference details and number of actual attendees, not registrants)

Please note that internal company awards, training or certificates would not be considered as sufficiently strong evidence to meet this requirement.

4) How do I demonstrate that I have exceptional ability in the field by making academic contributions through research?

Examples of relevant evidence include:

- Evidence of at least one significant contribution to the field in the form of a paper published in a top-tier peer-reviewed journal. Research undertaken as part of an undergraduate or MSc thesis does not qualify for this criteria;
- Evidence of awards received for outstanding applied work, supported by excellent academic achievement (a first-class degree or distinction);
- A letter of support from a research supervisor or other expert in your area of expertise affirming their potential world-class standard. This is in addition to the required letters of recommendation and must be written by another individual.
- Evidence of an award that has been granted by an organisation of a similar standing and distinction to the Royal Society in the UK, as well as the selection criteria for this award.

Please note that awards must be of merit and not solely monetary (e.g. grants, bursaries or scholarships).

Useful resources

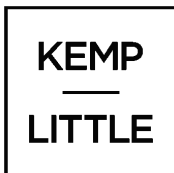
Websites

- **Tech Nation Visa website:**
<https://technation.io/visa/>
- **Official Tier 1 Exceptional Talent / Promise website:**
<https://www.gov.uk/tier-1-exceptional-talent>

Documents

- **Official Tier 1 Exceptional Talent / Promise guidance:**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-policy-for-uk-visas-under-tier-1-exceptional-talent>
- **Official Review form (i.e. appeal form):**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-for-endorsement-for-tier-1-exceptional-talent-visa>

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