

UK Global Talent visa. Guide for software engineers who are mere mortals without a Nobel prize.

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Hiya!

My name is Andrey G. I am a senior software engineer at Facebook from London, UK. Primarily, I am a full-stack web developer (think React, Angular, Node.js), but I also have a keen interest in low-level stuff (hello, C) and finance (love-hate relationship with Pandas). I write about tech in my [small blog](#). Occasionally, I [speak at conferences](#). I am currently pursuing a [Master's in Computer Science \(OMSCS\) from Georgia Tech](#). Love math, physics, rational thinking, and figuring out how things work. In my spare time, I enjoy hiking, snowboarding, boxing, and weight lifting.

Stay in touch: [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [blog](#), [newsletter](#), [RSS](#), [Instagram](#).

G. stands for Goncharov. I wanted to save you the pain of reading my Cyrillic last name.

I came to Great Britain on a Skilled Worker visa in 2021 and transferred to a Global Talent one in March 2022. Once I made that leap, I decided I want to help others do the same.

In this new guide you will find:

- How a Global Talent visa is different from a Skilled worker visa
- How the application process looks like
- A list of documents I provided to support my own application (only the list, not the documents themselves!)
- Concrete document examples (evidence, a recommendation letter, CV, personal statement) for an imaginary applicant Minus Hexonalds
- Guidance on how to structure your own evidence documents, recommendation letters, CV, personal statement

- How you could build your case from the ground up (yes, it is possible in 6-12 months and even less!)

Who is Minus Hexonalds? [Quoting TechNation](#), "The use of templates within your application is not acceptable (e.g. Letters of Reference, Personal Statement, Criteria Evidence, etc.). The standard required for Global Talent endorsement requires that your application be unique. The use of templates may weaken your application or potentially raise concerns regarding the validity of your application." Under no circumstances shall you share your own documents not to endanger your own visa or application of the people you share it with. I am going to provide concrete document examples for an imaginary applicant Minus Hexonalds to keep my own visa safe. Do not ever copy these examples word-by-word! It might drop a shadow on your own application and even lead to rejection. Use the examples mostly as inspiration.

NOTE! I am not a lawyer and have no legal background. I am in no way associated with TechNation. I do not know for certain how they assess the applications. This guide is based solely on my own research and experience. I do not and could not provide any guarantees.

Types of visas

There are two potential routes for software engineers:

- [Skilled Worker visa](#)
- [Global Talent visa](#)

Check out www.gov.uk for [a complete list of work visas](#).

Skilled Worker visa is sponsored by an employer. It means you have to find a job before you enter the UK.

Key moments:

1. You are tied to your employer. If you switch jobs, your new employer will have to sponsor the visa for you.
2. If you are fired, you will [have up to 60 days*](#) (I couldn't verify it on gov.uk though) to find a new job.
3. You can get your [indefinite leave to remain \(ILR\)](#) (a.k.a. permanent residence) in 5 years.
4. [Citizenship in 6 years](#).
5. [Limited opportunities to run your own business/take on additional work](#). [Here is another resource](#) with information on the restrictions, but it is not official like www.gov.uk. There is [another official guidance from www.gov.uk](#). In article "S1.29" it states "If the worker is self-employed, there must be a genuine contract for employment or services between you and the worker". TL;DR - get a lawyer if you want to start a business on a Skilled Worker visa.

Global Talent visa, on the other hand, is unsponsored. It allows you to enter the country and work for whomever you want and start your own business.

Key moments:

1. You are not tied to your employer. Switch jobs, leave jobs, start a business, downshift in the wilderness for a year - your choice!
2. You need to win an [eligible award](#) or [get endorsed](#) by [TechNation](#).
3. You can get your [indefinite leave to remain \(ILR\)](#) (a.k.a. permanent residence) in 3 years (in some cases it is still 5).

4. [Citizenship in 5 years](#) (only if you are recognised as "Exceptional Talent", it is still 6 years for "Exceptional Promise").

I am not a rock star academic turning the world of science upside down, so my only choice was to be endorsed by TechNation.

Not every Global Talent is the same

When you apply for TechNation's endorsement, you have to choose if you apply as an Exceptional Promise or an Exceptional Talent. They have [almost the same requirements](#), but for every criteria you have to match you need less significant proof for the Exceptional Promise. The visa gives you the same rights, but you get your ILR in 5 years instead of 3 with Exceptional Promise. As a result, you get your citizenship in 6 years instead of 5.

Summing up, here is a table highlighting key factors for different visas:

	Skilled Worker	Global Talent (Exceptional Promise)	Global Talent (Exceptional Talent)
Can be employed	Yes	Yes	Yes
Can start a business	Kind of	Yes	Yes
Sponsored by an employer	Yes	Yes	Yes
ILR	5 years	5 years	3 years
Citizenship	6 years	6 years	5 years

I was already in the UK on a Skilled Worker visa when I decided to apply for a Global Talent one. I do not have any plans to leave my current job any time soon, so I do not care too much about depending on my employer. If I pursued the Exceptional Promise route, the only benefit for me would be a chance to start a side business. While it is a good enough reason on its own, less time to ILR looked too sweet to give up. I decided to bet on the Exceptional Talent.

I heard some rumours that you might have hard time being recognised as "Exceptional Promise" if you are over 30-35. I would consider applying for "Exceptional Promise" only if I was a fresh graduate straight out of the university or I was at the very beginning of my careers. If you already have 3-4 years of experience, go for "Exceptional Talent".

Tip for Skilled Workers: years spent on your Skilled Worker visa count towards an ILR if you switch to a Global Talent. If you have 3 years on your Skilled Worker visa and you switch to an Exceptional Talent, you should be eligible for an ILR right away.

Application process

[The application process has two major steps:](#)

1. Getting endorsed by TechNation
2. Applying for the visa itself after getting the endorsement

Here is what you will need to apply:

1. [Pick criteria you match](#)
2. 3 recommendation letters from different people in different organizations
3. 10 documents with evidence supporting your chosen criteria
4. CV
5. Personal statement

[Read and choose carefully](#) which criteria you have to meet. When you fill in your application, you will have to select which criteria TechNation should assess. You cannot submit a bunch of documents and expect them to figure it out. You will have to pick certain criteria and for each one list your evidence. Luckily, the evidence documents could be re-used for other criteria.

Choosing criteria

[Mandatory criteria](#) is the same for all applicants - "show that they have been recognised as a leading talent in the digital technology sector". As to the optional criteria, you have to pick 2 out of 4:

1. "a proven track record for innovation as a founder or senior executive of a product-led digital technology company or as an employee working on a new digital field or concept"
2. "proof of recognition for work beyond the applicant's occupation that contributes to the advancement of the field"
3. "they have made significant technical, commercial or entrepreneurial contributions to the field as a founder, senior executive, board member or employee of a product-led digital technology company"
4. "they have demonstrated exceptional ability in the field by academic contributions through research published or endorsed by an expert"

I have never started a business yet, so criteria #1 was off the table. Sadly, I did not excel in the academic world as well. It eliminated criteria #4. It left me with criteria #2 and #3, which, I believe, is the most popular route among software engineers.

[Double-check the criteria on TechNation's website!](#) This guide is written on August 31, 2022. I have no idea or control of whether the list is going to change any time soon.

Recommendation letters

Example document: Recommendation_1__Evil_Corp.pdf.

Your 3 recommendation letters should come from [senior members of 3 different organizations](#). Try to get someone as high in the food chain as possible who is still in some way familiar with your work. Ask more than 3 people at once. Some people might be slow to reply, some of them might be busy. I sent out 6 requests among my network.

Whom to ask:

1. Ask your direct managers on your current project and your previous projects. These letters are going to be your back-ups.
2. Ask your skip-level managers (a manager of your manager) on your current project and your previous projects. In my view, this is the best bet in terms of availability/familiarity with your work. These

people might have not worked with you directly, but they certainly had heard about your work from your manager.

3. For smaller companies, try to get one of the directors or C-level (CEO, CTO) execs to write you a letter.

This is what you should aim for:

1. For a small startup up to 50 people - a letter from a C-level executive
2. For a medium sized-company (50-500 people) - a letter from a director or a VP (vice-president)
3. For a large company (500+ people) - a letter from a skip-level manager

All references should come from **product-led** digital technology companies. If you briefly worked for a software consultancy, I would not ask a recommendation letter from them. If you mostly worked for consultancies, I would ask for recommendation letters from the managers on the customer-side. For instance, if you worked for an imaginary consultancy "AllUnsafe" on a project for a product-led company "Evil LTD", ask your manager on the "Evil LTD" side to write a recommendation for you. Ask them to make it clear that you worked for "Evil LTD" on behalf of "AllUnsafe" in their letter. Depending on the size of "Evil LTD", try to get their director or a C-level exec to produce the letter.

In my case it were:

1. My skip-level manager at Facebook - product-led corporation
2. CEO at [Bricks](#) - product-led startup
3. Director of engineering (who was also my skip-level technical manager) at [Hazelcast](#) - product-led startup

Value time of your peers and managers!

At minimum, provide them with:

1. A guidance on the structure of the letter
2. A list of your most notable achievements. Trust me, they are not going to remember it by heart!

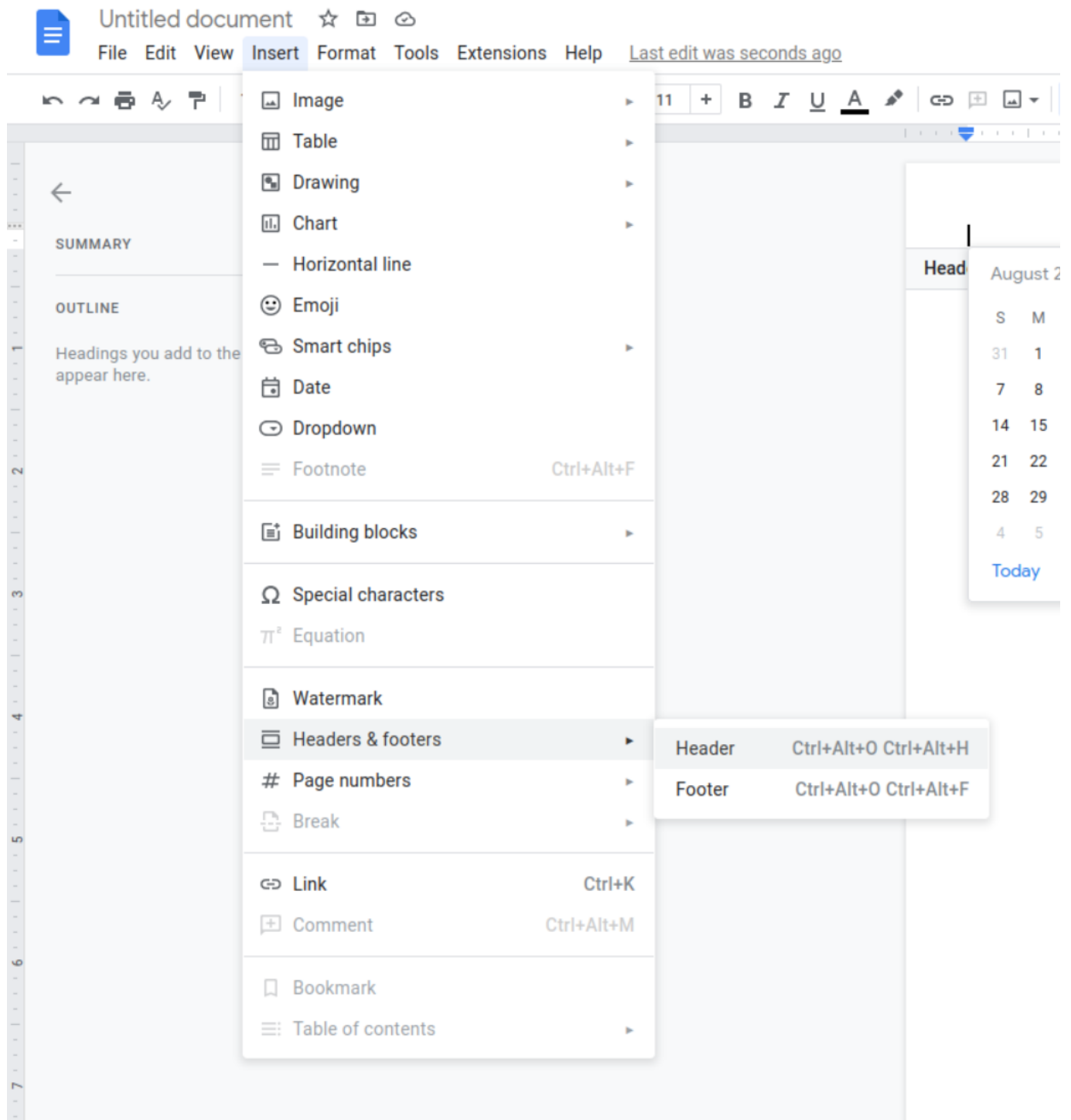
Ideally, draft up each letter yourself and share it with them. Make it clear that it is only a draft and they are free to change it in any way they want. You only want to save them time and energy.

For each recommendation letter, follow this structure:

1. Introduction of your recommender
2. Introduction of the company
3. Overview of your relationship: what role you played in the company, which projects you were involved in, how they know you and your work
4. List of your specific contributions (2-3) with their impact on the project/company. For each contribution, use the following structure:
 1. What was your role, what you did
 2. List specific activities that you performed/supervised/introduced
 3. What impact these activities had on the project/company
 4. Optionally, proof. It could be a list of commits for open-source projects, a blog post in the company's blog, a newspaper article, or any other form of public knowledge.
5. A section on how you could benefit the UK tech scene

6. End with their name, title, company. Add their email, phone number, and LinkedIn profile. Date the letter.
7. Attach a screenshot from their LinkedIn or attach their CV.
8. Ask them to sign your letter!

Do not forget that TechNation wants your letters on a **branded company paper**. Smaller companies might not have a branded company paper yet. Be proactive! Propose to create it for them! It only takes you to pull a company logo and company address from the web, and insert them in the header of the document. Here is how you can do it on Google Docs:



Evidence

My evidence

You can upload up to 10 3-page PDF documents supporting your application. Here is my list:

1. Conference program committee membership

1. I was a program committee member at 3 conferences. I listed conferences with screenshots of me on the websites, links to their websites, their short descriptions, and links to the articles in the press about the conferences.

2. Speaking at conferences

1. I attached a complete list of conferences and talks I did with links and dates. For the most significant ones, I wrote a separate section with "highlights". There I included the screenshots of my talks being in their programs, links to their websites, their short descriptions, and links to the articles in the press about the conferences.

3. Open-source contributions

1. I listed my open-source libraries with GitHub links, mentioned number of stars, and number of downloads on NPM (with links). As I do not have that many libraries, I also linked my most impactful commits to other open-source projects, and even some issues where I thought I added some value.

4. Publications

1. I do not have true academic experience, so no cross-checked articles in major science publications for me. Instead, I listed my technical blog posts. For each post I included a number of views supporting it by either a screenshot or a publicly available link.

5. Mentorship and community building

1. I mentioned I used to teach a course at my local university. I included links, screenshots, and a contact reference from DSR Corporation who could confirm it if needed.
2. I added that I mentored engineers back at DSR Corporation and Hazelcast. As proof, I included contact references from both DSR Corporation and Hazelcast who could confirm it if needed.
3. I included how I founded BeerJS Voronezh and organized several meetups. It might be a stretch, but I consider it an example of "indirect" mentorship. Like before, I added links, photos, and contact references.
4. I also listed my non-technical blog posts which are either about career advancement, education, or immigration. Yet again, included links and screenshots. For instance, if I had to do it all over again, I would add this blog post here.

6. Contracts with Hazelcast and Bricks

1. I added screenshots from the contracts with my salary.
2. I also quoted a post from a respected local agency with their data on the mean salary in the industry in the region. I explicitly highlighted by how much my salary at Bricks and Hazelcast exceeded the average.

7. Contract with Facebook

1. Same as with Hazelcast and Bricks. I decided to make it a different document because I started working there after I moved to the UK, so the reference point (average salary) changed.

8. Hazelcast Design System

1. It is a design system we created at Hazelcast. I included screenshots, links, and an overview of how I contributed to its technical design, what impact it had on the company. Luckily, it is open-source and available on GitHub.

9. Flipper JavaScript SDK

1. It is [an SDK for a new platform for Flipper](#). I linked the same stuff as for the "Hazelcast Design System". This time I also had a blog post in Flipper blog to add. The blog post explained how it was a major milestone for the team. I added a few quotes from the blog post.

10. Management and peer recognition

1. Honestly, I am not sure if it even counts, but over the years I collected quite a few LinkedIn recommendations. I just left a link to them on my LinkedIn page, and attached screenshots of some recommendations I wanted to give more spotlight.

Evidence document structure

For every document follow the template:

1. Have a distinct short name - "Evidence_X__achievement". Example: "Evidence_1__Speaking_at_conferences.pdf".
2. Start with a short (up to 5-6 sentences) paragraph setting the context. Let your reviewer know what they are looking at. Be concrete, use numbers where possible. Do not say "Minus Torvalds spoke at many major conferences". Instead, say "Minus Torvalds spoke at 20+ events out of which 5 were major conferences with 1000+ attendees each".
3. For every evidence find either a publicly accessible proof of your participation or a person of contact (PoC) who could confirm your claims. It could be a conference organiser, your manager, your university professor. When linking a PoC, add their name, title, and an email.
4. Links can change over time. Capture the current state of your proof. Be visual! For your most notable achievements attach not only links, but also screenshots. If the data is not publicly accessible, always attach a screenshot of how you collected it privately. For instance, if you can see the number of views for your blog posts only privately, attach a screenshot from that page.
5. Be creative with the metrics. I am not saying cook the books. It is illegal! I am saying to pick the most favourable metrics. For instance, your library on GitHub has only 10 stars, but at the same time it has over 100k downloads. Which number is more impressive? Use 100k downloads and do not even mention how many stars your library has. Sometimes, it is hard to say if the number is impressive. For example, you have an academic article with a good H-index (how many times other people referenced your work). It is highly doubtful that TechNation representatives know an average H-index by heart. Link a proof of your H-index and statistics about the average H-index in the industry. If your H-index is not that impressive compared to H-index in the entire industry, once again, be creative. What if you compare it with the H-index in your region? Maybe, in your city or even your university? Maybe, you do not have an outstanding H-index, but you have an above average number of publications? Find a number that shows your work in the best light!
6. Try to find any external publication mentioning the event. For instance, you could link an article in a local newspaper talking about a conference you spoke at. Any external mention of the event boosts its credibility.
7. Remember about the limit. It is 3 pages only.

You can attach up to 10 evidence documents. If you have free spots left or if you are in doubts about providing enough proof for one of the criteria, ask your manager (skip-level manager / senior executive) from work to write a separate letter on a company-branded paper confirming your claim. Remember about saving their time and providing a draft.

Example evidence

Now, let's review our imaginary evidence for Minus Torvalds

1. Conference participation - "Evidence_1__Conference_participation.pdf"

2. Open-source work - "Evidence_2__Open_source_work.pdf"
3. Blogging - "Evidence_3__Blogging.pdf"
4. Mentorship and leadership - "Evidence_4__Mentorship.pdf"
5. Contract with Evil Corp - "Evidence_5__Contract.pdf"
6. Evil Corp's AI assisted support system - "Evidence_6__System_design.pdf"
7. News article / interview - "Evidence_7__Interview.pdf"

Linking evidence to criteria

TechNation's website clearly states what they want to see for the [mandatory criteria](#), [optional criteria #2](#) and [#3](#).

Here is how I mapped it to my list of evidence:

1. Mandatory criteria
 1. Conference program committee membership
 2. Speaking at conferences
 3. Open-source contributions
 4. Contract with Facebook
 5. Contracts with Hazelcast and Bricks
 6. Publications
 7. Management and peer recognition
2. Optional criteria #2 (recognised for my work outside of my immediate occupation that contributed to the advancement of the sector)
 1. Open-source contributions
 2. Hazelcast Design System
 3. Speaking at conferences
 4. Mentorship and community building
 5. Publications
 6. Management and peer recognition
3. Optional criteria #3 (made a significant technical, commercial or entrepreneurial contributions to the field as a founder, senior executive, board member or employee of a product-led digital technology company)
 1. Contract with Facebook
 2. Contracts with Hazelcast and Bricks
 3. Hazelcast Design System
 4. Flipper JavaScript SDK
 5. Open-source contributions
 6. Management and peer recognition

As you can see, **criteria intersect and re-use the same evidence**. I did not find any official guidelines about it, but it worked for me.

Here is how we could map Minus Hexonalds' list of evidence:

1. Mandatory criteria
 1. Conference participation
 2. Open-source work
 3. Contract with Evil Corp

4. Blogging
5. News article / interview
2. Optional criteria #2 (recognised for my work outside of my immediate occupation that contributed to the advancement of the sector)
 1. Open-source work
 2. Conference participation
 3. Mentorship and leadership
 4. Blogging
 5. News article / interview
3. Optional criteria #3 (made a significant technical, commercial or entrepreneurial contributions to the field as a founder, senior executive, board member or employee of a product-led digital technology company)
 1. Contract with Evil Corp
 2. Evil Corp's AI assisted support system
 3. Open-source work
 4. News article / interview

Personal statement

Example: Statement.pdf

You do not have to upload it. Instead, at one of the steps, they will give you a form to fill in. I drafted my statement in Google Doc in advance and copy-pasted it in the form.

Here is the structure that I used:

1. Introduction (a shorter and more formal version of [what I have on GH](#))
2. Biography and my journey to tech
3. Career
4. My plans on what to do when I get the visa. Why I want to switch from Skilled Worker to Global Talent
5. My Napoleonic plans to write a book one day
6. Where I plan to live. They do not need your address here, just a city.
7. Why I want to come specifically to the UK. What I love about the UK.
8. How I could contribute to the UK tech scene

CV

Example: CV.pdf

Structure:

1. Name, contact details, location
2. Introduction / overview
3. Experience. List every company you worked for with dates. List every project you worked on.
4. Education
5. Selected achievements. List here your most significant publications, conference talks, open-source contributions, mentorship endeavours.

Remember to keep your CV under 3 pages.

How to build your profile from scratch

Here are a few ideas:

1. Salary. If you live in a small town, boost your salary by starting working remotely. You can find lots of remote jobs on <https://remoteok.com/>. [Hackernews](#) also regularly host a thread with jobs called "Ask HN: Who is hiring?" ([example](#)).
 1. *Special section for the Russian market.* I have had success on [Habr Career](#) and [G-Mate](#). If you need to brush up your English, consider [Easy Speak](#). I personally have used their help even after a year of living in London (shame on me?). Use a secret word TALENT42 to get a sweet 10% discount.
2. Speaking. Aim for 3+ talks. Organise a small event inside of your current company to use it as a dry-run for your talk. Right after, speak on a local meetup. Next, approach one of the online conferences (<https://geekle.us/> organises lots of events on various topics with sizeable viewership). After that, submit your talk to one of the offline conferences. Search for a suitable conference at <https://confs.tech>. Remember, that a CFP (call for papers) usually closes several months before the event. Do not hesitate to present the same talk on different conferences. I have done it multiple times with success.
3. If you do not have any local meetups or communities, start one! That's exactly what I did with BeerJS Voronezh (<https://github.com/beerjs/voronezh>). It took me only a day to scout the local bars and find the one that was willing to host the event. If you can't find a physical location, start an online community. Guess what? Hosting your own event and speaking at it counts as 3 things at once: being a program committee member, speaking on a meetup, community building and volunteering.
4. Once you speak at a meetup or a conference, ask the organiser if you could be on the program committee next time. Even a single event is a huge boost for your profile. It shows that the industry experts acknowledge you as someone who can judge the work of others.
5. Star contributing to open-source. I would try to get 10 pull-requests to popular libraries. It does not have to be big. Open GitHub repo for your favourite library and search the issues for the label "good first issue". For instance, React has 4 open issues (on September 1, 2022) marked as "good first issue" - <https://github.com/facebook/react/issues?q=is%3Aopen+is%3Aissue+label%3A%22good+first+issue%22>.
6. Start mentoring people. Reach out to your local university, college, school, or any other educational institution and offer them your services. Voice your desire to be a mentor on Twitter or LinkedIn. I am sure you will not wait too long before your first mentee knocks on your door. Ask your mentees to leave public feedback about your work. It could be a LinkedIn recommendation, a post on one of the social networks, or anything else you could get a publicly accessible link to.
7. Start blogging. Your goal is to get 3-5 posts. Every time you bang your head against the wall trying to figure out a problem, every time you are wasting hours on StackOverflow or Github issue, I guarantee you are not alone! Share your thinking process, what you have tried, and the final result. I have had the most views on [Medium](#). Do not publish it by yourself. Find out a Medium publication, reach out to them, and post your article there (see screenshot below). Ideally, post it first on your own blog on your own domain first (you can do it in a few clicks with [Hashnode](#)). Cross-post it to Medium later. Make sure the publication is OK with it though. Posts on your own domain, in my view, help you build a stronger personal brand, but it is easier to reach audience via a well-established publication. Promote your post on [Hackernews](#) and on [Reddit](#).

If you want more in-person guidance on how to build your profile from scratch, consider reaching out to [Nadia Zhuk](#). She is running a fantastic [Global Talent Visa Bootcamp](#).

Fees, timeline, next steps

The application for endorsement is going to [cost you £456](#). On top of that, you will have to pay £152 for the visa, and £624 per year for the healthcare surcharge. If you apply for Exceptional Talent, it means 3 years to your ILR or £1872 total for the healthcare surcharge (at least, that's the way I read it). The final sum should be £2480.

TechNation offers a [fast track option](#) to get your endorsement sooner. I was not in a rush and did not try it. I submitted my application on February 21, 2022. Home Office got back to me on March 16, 2022. It took me 3.5 weeks to get my endorsement. After I got my endorsement it took me 2 more weeks to get my new visa and my new BRP.

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