

Black Founders Programme

FAQs

About the Programme

What is the Black Founders programme?

The Black Founders Programme is a 14-week accelerator targeted at high-growth potential pre-seed or seed stage companies creating innovative products and services in the Creative industries.

The Black Founders Programme is delivered by Digital Catapult in partnership with Sony Music UK and Sony Music Publishing UK, and in collaboration with Channel 4.

What are the benefits of the Black Founders Programme?

Digital Catapult is unique in its ability to connect high potential companies with established businesses, investors, government and public sector, research and academia - to discover new ways of solving industry challenges, increasing productivity and opening up new markets.

Across the programme, a range of sessions and events are provided to support participants in scaling their commercial, operational and technical activity.

These include:

- **Diagnostic Sessions** - 1:1 sessions with experts and mentors to determine your current business and investment needs.
- **Investment guidance** - Business and investment support, based on the findings of your diagnostic sessions, including sessions with experienced investors.
- **No fees or equity required** - Applying to and participating in is free, and Digital Catapult does not ask for equity in return for support.
- **Potential for funding opportunities** - Successful completion of the Black Founders programme can open the door to potential funding opportunities as part of Digital Catapult's alumni community.
- **Peer Support** - Build relationships, share insights, and collaborate on projects with other non-competing entrepreneurs through group coaching sessions and networking events.
- **Masterclasses & mentoring from experts** in the Creative industries - Learn from Sony Music, Channel 4 and other creative specialists and build your network. Develop and improve business planning, commercial strategy, pricing and positioning, operational processes and investment readiness.
- **Access to state-of-the-art facilities & deep tech expertise** - Visit one or more of our facilities including our immersive labs, SONIC labs and more. Learn how our facilities can support your business upon completion of the programme.
- A programme final during which the cohort will present and network with an invited audience of investors, partners and industry representatives.

- The opportunity to join the Digital Catapult alumni network, which keeps them informed of opportunities and relevant updates from the Digital Catapult, and additional opportunities to engage with Digital Catapult and other alumni.

What are the key dates of the programme?

Activities marked with an asterisk (*) are compulsory/non-negotiable where relevant

1. Open Call – Applications Open – 4th September 2025
2. Q&A drop-in session for Black Founders programme - 11, 12, 18, 19, 25, 26 September, 2, 3 October
3. Open Call – Application Deadline – 5th October 2025 at 23:59*
4. Interviews (one 25 min slot) - w/c 20th October 2025*
5. Notification of application status – 27th October 2025
6. Contracting - w/c 27th October 2025
7. Programme Start Date – 10th November 2025*
8. Programme End Date – 6th March 2026*

Dates and activities can be subject to change. Digital Catapult will endeavour to provide as much notice as possible to applicants/participants should any changes arise.

Do I have to attend all of the activities?

In general, attending all activities on the programme can be beneficial as it provides you with the opportunity to learn from experienced mentors, connect with other entrepreneurs, and develop your business skills. However, it's important to prioritise your time and focus on activities that are most relevant to your business and investment goals.

If there are certain activities that you feel are not relevant to your business or that you already have a strong understanding of, you may choose to skip them to allocate your time and resources more effectively. However, it's important to consider the potential benefits of all activities before deciding to skip them.

Ultimately, attending all activities on a business accelerator can help you maximize the potential benefits of the program, but it's important to balance this with your specific business needs and goals.

What is meant by Creative Industries?

- ⌘ Advertising and marketing
- ⌘ Animation
- ⌘ Architecture
- ⌘ Arts and culture
- ⌘ Crafts
- ⌘ Design
- ⌘ Fashion
- ⌘ Film, TV and video
- ⌘ Games
- ⌘ Publishing

- ≠ Music and radio
- ≠ Visual art and photography

What is meant by pre-seed/seed stage companies?

Defining Pre-Seed & Seed:

- Pre-Seed: Demonstrate that your business solves a customer problem. We expect that you kicked off your business with a small amount of funding. You are seeking funding that will help support your early product development. It'll build the foundation of your business by funding an early team, operations, and the creation of a minimum viable product (MVP).
- Seed: focuses more on developing and proving that your customers want your product. Companies at this stage should have proven the key value of their product. We expect that you have received some early stage funding from either individual investors or an early stage venture capital fund. The purpose of seed funding is to help founders develop product-market fit, drive sales, and identify key growth strategies and enable opportunities to grow.

Does the Black Founders Programme guarantee I will receive investment?

No. The programme is designed to support early-stage companies to build skills, access resources and form relationships with potential partners, investors and customers. Digital Catapult cannot guarantee that your company will raise investment from joining the programme. Digital Catapult's aim is to support your business journey and make raising investment more likely. Once you have completed the programme, you will become an alumni member and will have the opportunity to be introduced to potential investors and partners.

Will the programme provide my company with funding?

To offset any costs to a business by participating within the programme, each startup will receive a stipend of £3,000. The money will be provided using contributions from Sony Music UK, Sony Music Publishing UK and Channel 4.

How much state aid is the programme?

The total State Assistance received or due to be received by a Participant (including any associated companies e.g. subsidiaries), originating from a United Kingdom source, must not exceed £315,000 for GB companies, and €200,000 (approximately £165,000) for Northern Ireland Companies (or any company subject to the Northern Ireland Protocol) in aggregate across the Participant's current fiscal year (as at the Agreement Date) and the previous two fiscal years.

This Programme has been assessed as providing £20,000 for Participants.

Before signing the Programme Agreement, Applicants will therefore be asked to sign a declaration confirming that they are eligible to receive the State Assistance.

Is the Black Founders Programme in-person or remote?

The majority of the programme will be delivered remotely via online calls and sessions. We expect to organise a small number of in-person events at Digital Catapult, Sony Music UK or Channel 4 offices over the 14-week period, including a programme kick-off, networking and final event. Digital Catapult will provide as much notice as possible.

Application Process

Can I speak to someone from the Digital Catapult team about my applications before submitting it?

Yes. We are holding Q&A session on Friday mornings during the application window. [Please select a 15 minute slot here to speak to one of the Digital Catapult team about your application.](#) They are intended to be informal, open and accessible to anyone who wishes to participate in the programme, regardless of their background or experience level. They will not have an impact on the judging of your application.

What information is asked for in the application form?

The application form will seek more details about your:

- Company information
- Problem & Solution
- Growth Potential
- Business Strategy
- Ability to Execute

Do we need to send a detailed business plan?

At this stage, you just need to complete the online application form without sending us a detailed business plan. If you are one of the companies chosen to participate, then you will be expected to take part in a business health scan (diagnostic session) within the duration of the programme.

Can I save my application to come back to later?

Yes, the form we use for the full application process can be modified and saved at any time before the final submission date. After full submission and completion forms cannot be altered or edited.

Who is application data shared with?

The application information will only be used for the purposes of the programme and its evaluation, and will only be retained for the duration of the programme (one year), and for participants on the programme for the evaluation period (maximum five years) and otherwise to comply with legal requirements.

How are applications selected?

Applicants are reviewed by the the Digital Catapult team, sponsors and programme collaboration partners and are assessed only on the information provided in the application. Following the first screening, successful candidates will be invited to an interview.

Application completion – To be considered for the programme you will need to submit the full online application form before the open call closing date 5th October at 23:59. You can save and return to your form as required. Applicants can submit a written or video application. Applicants must ensure all questions are answered otherwise their application may be rejected.

Applications judged and shortlist – Once applications close, completed applications are judged and assessed based on the selection criteria and a shortlist selected for review by representatives from **Digital Catapult, Sony Music UK, Sony Music Publishing UK and Channel 4**. In the case there are several applications of equal standing that are borderline, judges will conduct interviews with all shortlisted applicants for fairness. Their previous score will be made redundant and a new score generated based on the original selection criteria and interview answers. Interviews will be conducted w/c 20th October and last 25 minutes. Up to 15 Applicants will be accepted onto the Programme.

Selection and contracting – Once companies have been reviewed and the proposed teams selected by **Digital Catapult, Sony Music UK, Sony Music Publishing UK and Channel 4**, we'll communicate to successful and unsuccessful companies the status of their application and complete our contracting with successful startups. notified and provided with a standard Programme Agreement for review. These contracts are standard and not negotiable. We do try and ensure these contracts are fair and reasonable. Invitation to a programme kick-off will then follow provisionally on the completion of this agreement.

I'm not ready to apply yet – can I apply and be considered at a later date?

Digital Catapult runs multiple open calls a year, if you're not ready to apply at the moment please sign up for [our newsletter](#) to be alerted when future applications for other programmes are open.

What is the selection criteria used for applications?

Problem & Solution [25%]

The applicant should demonstrate that their company is addressing a clear problem, as well as applying advanced technologies to tackle the challenges in the selected focus areas.

Growth Potential [25%]

The company should be capable of identifying the key challenges they are facing in the market. They should be able to identify a clear use for potential future investment.

Business Strategy [25%]

The company should be able to articulate its revenue model, who its customers are and objectives for the future.

Ability to Execute [25%]

The company and its employees should have the necessary experience and skill to consistently develop, deliver and commercialise their solution.

Scoring

The scoring criteria will be assessed based on the statements above.

Each criterion will be scored on a range from 0 to 5 .

0 being "Unacceptable" Score Key Assessment and 5 being "Excellent" Score Key Assessment.

This scoring will be applied to all applications and will be equally weighted.

Score Key Assessment	Score	Interpretation
Excellent	5	Satisfies the requirement and demonstrates exceptional understanding and evidence in their ability/proposed methodology to deliver a solution for the required supplies/services.
Good	4	Satisfies the requirement with minor additional benefits. Above average demonstration by the Applicant of the understanding and evidence in their ability/proposed methodology to deliver a solution for the required supplies/services.
Acceptable	3	Satisfies the requirement. Demonstration by the Applicant of the understanding and evidence in their ability/proposed methodology to deliver a solution for the required supplies/services.
Minor Reservations	2	Satisfies the requirement with minor reservations. Some minor reservations of the Applicant's understanding and proposed methodology, with limited evidence to support the response.
Serious Reservations	1	Major reservations of the Applicant's understanding and proposed methodology, with little or no evidence to support the response.

Unacceptable OR No submission	0	Nil or inadequate response. Fails to demonstrate an ability to meet the requirement.
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Can I receive preliminary feedback on my application before completion?

Unfortunately, because of the high volume of applications, we do not provide feedback automatically. If you would like to receive feedback on your application, please send us an email stating so and we'll try to get back to you as soon as possible.

Applicant company requirements

Can university teams apply?

Applications from university teams are welcomed if they meet the eligibility criteria and are willing to incorporate as a company if accepted on the programme.

Does Black Founders Programme help with creation of new teams?

No, this programme does not specifically facilitate this – teams are expected to already be formed at the point of submitting the application.

Intellectual property

This programme does not seek to retain any IP. If applicants are collaborating with third parties they are expected to make appropriate IP agreements. The application will be screened privately by Digital Catapult.

Does my organisation need to be a UK registered company to enter?

Yes, you have to be registered with Companies House. We will consider bidders that hold any legal form of business (e.g. ltd company, sole trader, consortium).

Does my organisation need to be UK based or can I collaborate with international contributors?

Collaborations may include international contributors, but to complete the Programme (i) the team must have an establishment in the UK, and (ii) the majority of work should be carried out in the UK and teams need to be able to commit to attending the workshops and the final programme event.

How much equity does the Black Founders Programme take?

Black Founders programme is an-equity free programme. As this Black Founders programme does not provide grant funding or investment, we do not ask for equity in companies.