Industry Challenge Led Accelerator 2026 Programme FAQs

UK Digital Twin Centre
Delivered by Digital Catapult

About the Programme

What is the Digital Twin Industry Led Challenge Accelerator Programme?

Delivered by Digital Catapult, the Digital Twin Industry Challenge Led Accelerator is a 9-month programme designed to connect SMEs with Industry Challenge Owners (ICOs) to target real challenges in the market across Maritime, Aerospace, and Defence.

SMEs in the Digital Twin ecosystem struggle to gain access to market leaders to showcase their innovative solutions. On the other hand, market leaders have the need to innovate to keep their competitive edge, but due to budget and resource restraints, experimental work is often deprioritised.

Through the Industry Challenge Led Accelerator, challenges that market leaders face will be addressed by SMEs applying their innovative approaches to Digital Twins. This approach provides the space to derisk innovation and demonstrate value and impact at a faster pace than in traditional R&D settings.

Digital Catapult is inviting up to 12 tech SMEs to take part in a nine-month programme, supported by an industry leader to develop a solution that solves one of their challenges.

What are the benefits of the Digital Twin Industry Challenge Led Accelerator Programme?

Alongside funding of up to £75,000 from Innovate UK, participants will gain access to regular check-ins and mentorship, workshops, and specialist support to develop a proof-of-concept and help bring the solution closer to real-world deployment.

During the nine-month programme, participants will be supported by Digital Catapult and the industry challenge owners through:

- Access to market leaders to network, gain practical learnings directly from industry, and showcase real-world applications of digital twin technologies.
- Access to real-world environments to develop their solutions.
- Regular check-ins and mentoring support (up to 5 hours per month) to guide progress.
- Opportunities to foster follow-on commercial engagements between successful applicants and industry challenge owners (ICOs).
- An end of programme showcase event to demonstrate their solutions to an audience of industry, government and investors.
- Alumni network access: Ongoing engagement, opportunities, and updates from Digital Catapult.

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What are the key dates for this programme?

- Open call- Applications open 15th September 2026 at 9:00 AM
- Open call- Applications Deadline 27th October 2026 at 23:59 PM
- Selected applicants informed: December 2026
- Intended public announcement of successful participants: January 2027
- Kick-off event and onboarding (in person): February 2027
- Showcase (in-person): October 2027
- End Date: October 2027

Please note that dates are subject to change

Who will own the intellectual property of the solutions/PoC?

The participants will have full ownership of their intellectual property created during the programme.

Who can apply to the programme?

The programme is open to UK-based SMEs with demonstrable technical expertise in one or more digital twin domains, including areas such as data services, AI and modelling, cyber-physical systems, interoperability, security, and visualisation. Applicants must be a registered UK company, carry out all project activity within the UK, hold a UK business bank account, and be eligible to receive up to £75,000 in grant funding alongside any applicable in-kind contributions or state aid requirements.

Is the programme expected to be in-person, or remote?

We expect to organise a small number of in-person events at the UK Digital Twin Centre in Belfast; such activities will include programme kick-off and showcase events. Participants will be informed with plenty of notice. Participants may use part of their grant funding for travel to attend in-person activities and use of the facilities at the Centre.

What are the six enabling technology areas that underpin digital twins?

- Cyber physical systems - (Sensors and connected devices, edge computing, sensor networks, real-time monitoring)
- Data services - (Data platforms and databases, big data processing, predictive analytics, interoperability)
- Security and trustworthiness - (Systems for sharing data or automating decisions Cyber resilience, data integrity, secure architectures)
- Immersive and UX - (Simulation interfaces, immersive environments, and dashboards)

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- Intelligence - (Simulation and Modelling, AI-driven decision-making, machine learning, autonomy)
- Integration and interoperability (Enabling digital twins to exchange information and work together)

How is the grant funding cascaded to successful applicants?

Successful applicants will receive funding of up to £75,000 to develop their use case PoC within the programme timeline. Funding will be cascaded from Digital Catapult to the companies through completion of milestones across the programme duration.

Application Process

Will I be able to save my application form?

Yes, you will be able to save it during the application process, so that you can complete it in more than one session if you need to.

What is the selection and scoring criteria used for applications to this programme?

Applications will be assessed and scored against four criteria:

- Strength and originality of the idea – 25%
  - Applicants must demonstrate a clear understanding of the Industry Challenge Owner's (ICO's) defined challenge and the need it addresses.
  - Proposals should show alignment with the challenge objectives and articulate the business and technical opportunity unlocked through an innovative digital twin approach.
- Project delivery and feasibility – 25%
  - The applicant should demonstrate that the proposed solution is technically and operationally feasible within the programme and budget.
  - The applicant should provide a clear, well-thought-out project plan, showing how the solution will be developed.
  - The applicant should demonstrate relevant domain expertise and delivery capability.
  - The proposal should include consideration of delivery risks and outlines appropriate mitigation strategies.
- Financial Responsibility – 25%

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    - The applicant should provide a financial plan which provides a clear breakdown of costs and demonstrates good value for money.
    - The proposal should allocate funds appropriately between development, testing, and project management.
- Growth Potential – 25%
    - The proposal should demonstrate strong potential for growth and scalability beyond the accelerator.
    - The proposed technology or approach should deliver added value to the challenge owner and could extend to wider use cases.
    - The applicant should articulate measurable post-programme goals and show commitment to continued development and commercialisation.

Note: Successful applicants will undergo financial due diligence to confirm their eligibility for funding.

Can I speak to someone from the Digital Twins Industry Challenge Led Accelerator team?

You can contact the team with any questions about the programme by emailing **ukdigitaltwincentreteam@digicatapult.org.uk**.

Will I receive feedback on my application?

Because of the number of applications we receive, we cannot provide feedback on applications that are not successful.

Applicant Company Requirements

Does my organisation need to be UK based?

Yes, your organisation must be registered in the United Kingdom including Northern Ireland and Great Britain. All delivery activities must also take place in the United Kingdom.

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