

Start Up programme – Frequently Asked Questions

Eligibility

1. Is the programme open to anyone, for example non-students or non-graduates?

No. The **Start Up** programme is only open to NTU students and graduates. If you're not eligible, there are other business support programmes available locally and nationally. We'd be happy to signpost.

2. Can international students apply for the Start Up programme?

No. International students studying on a [Student Visa](#) are not permitted to engage in business activity while completing a university degree in the UK. For this reason, the **Start Up** programme is not open to Student visa holders.

3. Can international graduates apply for the Start Up programme?

Yes. International graduates are eligible to apply for the **Start Up** programme if they hold a [Graduate visa](#) (either secured or currently in process), or another visa or immigration status that allows them to live and work in the UK. You can apply for a Graduate visa as soon as NTU notifies the Home Office that your studies have ended. Other visa types that allow you to take part in the **Start Up** programme include: Skilled Worker visa, Innovator Founder visa, Sponsored work visas, Family visa, Global Talent visa, Temporary Work visa, Indefinite Leave to Remain. Further information and guidance for international students and graduates can be found [here](#).

4. I'm an NTU international graduate and I currently live in Nottingham. I want to start a business in my home country – can I still do the programme?

Yes, as long as you hold a visa that allows you to stay in the UK (as outlined in the previous answer above), you're eligible to take part in the programme. Please note that **Start Up** is primarily designed to support businesses operating in the UK. This means our examples, guidance and discussions are based on UK law and practice. However, you're still very welcome to explore a global perspective and consider how your idea might apply in a different country.

5. Does it matter that I graduated over 10 years ago?

No. The programme is open to all NTU graduates, regardless of how long ago they graduated.

Business idea

6. What sort of business ideas do you support?

Our programme is not sector specific, and we welcome ideas from across a wide range of industries. However, there are some exceptions based on legal, ethical and funding considerations.

We're unable to support business ideas that fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Politically or religiously motivated activity
- Trading in stocks, shares or other financial speculation
- Armaments or weaponry
- Pornography or activity related to the sex industry
- Ideas involving irresponsible, unethical or harmful practices
- Gambling or gambling-related activity

7. Does it matter what my idea is?

Not necessarily, but we do expect you to be able to talk us through your idea when you join the programme. We recommend doing some initial research beforehand such as looking at the market, potential customers and competitors. This will help you make a more balanced and informed assessment of how viable your idea might be. It will also give you more to work with once the programme begins.

8. Will advisors give me honest feedback about my idea?

Yes. There may be areas where your idea could be strengthened – you'll have chance to review and reflect on your this when the programme starts. In many cases, this might involve a small change or reframing to make your plans more viable. Our Enterprise Advisers provide constructive, honest feedback. It's our role to support and guide you on your journey – asking the right questions, challenging ideas when needed, and helping you identify ways to improve and develop your concept.

9. I've been working on my business for a while and have made some sales. Can I still apply?

Possibly. As long as you're still at an early stage and not beyond the start-up phase, it can be really valuable to take a step back and review where you're at. If you've made some early sales but are still exploring, testing and laying foundations, then **Start Up** may still be a good fit. However, if you're primarily looking for specialist support to grow, scale or accelerate an established business, we'd encourage you to look for growth support.

About you

10. I'm from art and design – I'm worried your programme is too corporate – is it for me?

Yes, absolutely. **Start Up** is open to students and graduates from all disciplines, including art and design. We actively value different perspectives and make a conscious effort to use a wide range of examples that reflect creative, cultural and non-traditional business pathways. We understand the concerns that some creatives have about 'business' feeling overly corporate, and we work hard to ensure our approach is relevant, accessible and adaptable to different ways of thinking and working. Several members of our team have set up businesses in the creative sector, so we do understand where you're coming from.

11. I want to explore freelancing. I'm not sure if the programme is aimed at me?

Yes. The **Start Up** programme is very much for freelancers. The frameworks, tools and approaches we use apply just as well to freelancing as they do to other ways of starting and running a business.

You might be freelancing, running a side hustle, working as a sole trader, or exploring a social enterprise – all of these fall within our definition of starting a business. The programme is designed to help you develop something sustainable, whatever shape that takes.

12. I study business so know a lot already. Is it worth me applying?

Absolutely! We have many Nottingham Business School students on our **Start Up** programme. While your academic studies give you a strong foundation, our approach is different. We help you look at business through a practical, real-world lens. Our workshops are interactive, hands-on and focus on practical ideas and our advisory team are practitioners who have set up and run businesses. We help you to achieve goals, make progress and move to the next stage, whatever that looks like for you.

13. I'm not business minded, and I don't consider myself to be an entrepreneur. Is this a problem?

Not at all. We know the word 'entrepreneur' can be a bit like marmite – it appeals to some people and puts others off. That's completely fine. Our view is that anyone can start a business with the right mindset and skills – and we're here to support you to develop both. We don't apologise for talking about entrepreneurship as we believe it's a useful term referring to someone who has ideas, takes action and learns through doing.

14. I'm looking for more than just 'how to start a business' – I can get that from AI. What more do you provide?

Start Up isn't just about how to start a business - it's about you. The programme focuses on developing your skills, confidence, ideas, motivation and direction. While AI can provide information and templates, it can't replace human judgement, lived experience or tailored guidance. We offer mentoring and support in a variety of forms, grounded in real-world practice. You'll have space to talk things through, sense-check decisions and learn from people who've been there themselves.

15. I've got ADHD and struggle to focus. Will the programme be ok for me?

Yes. NTU Enterprise values neurodiversity and we're actively reviewing how we design and deliver our activity to be as neuroinclusive as possible. Our sessions are a maximum of three hours and include regular breaks. Our facilitators are open, approachable and understanding. If you need to step out, take a break or adapt how you engage, that's absolutely fine. You won't be judged for it. We want you to work in the way that supports how you do your best thinking and doing.

16. I want to start my business, but I need a job as well. Is it possible to take part in the programme at the same time as working?

Yes, absolutely. Most people need paid work alongside developing their business, and we recognise that juggling a job and a start-up is the reality for many programme participants. The core commitment we ask of you is attending the workshops. Beyond that, we encourage you to carve out some time in your weekly schedule to work on your business where possible – but this will look different for everyone. We'll help you make progress at a pace that fits around your other commitments.

About the programme

17. Can I get access to the Dryden Enterprise Centre after the programme ends?

Yes – there may be opportunities for continued access to the Dryden Enterprise Centre (DEC) and our sister space Antenna when you've completed the programme. Access is offered through an application process. Please note that capacity is limited so not everyone will be able to secure a space. We aim to be transparent about this and will guide you through the process of applying when the time is right.

18. How many places are on the programme?

The number of places available varies from cohort to cohort. There is an upper limit, which is determined by our physical space, and most cohorts typically include around 30-40 participants. The application process is not usually competitive – as long as you have an idea that's clearly articulated and there are no obvious reasons why it wouldn't be appropriate for you to pursue it at this stage, we're likely to offer you a place.

19. How have you defined what 'start-up' is?

When we use the term 'start-up', we're referring to a new business (of any kind) that is still in its early stages. This typically means pre-revenue, focused on exploration and ideation, carrying out research and testing and beginning to shape services, products or marketing plans. This is the stage before a business becomes established. Beyond this point, the focus often shifts towards growth and scaling. It's worth noting that our definition of start-up doesn't always align with how funders or investors use the term – confusingly, these definitions can vary widely. Our focus is on supporting people at the earliest, formative stage of building a business.

20. Is the programme free?

Yes – the programme is completely free for participants. Our programme demonstrates NTU's commitment to supporting student and graduate enterprise.

21. Is this a training course?

No, we don't see our programme as 'training'. **Start Up** is as much about your development as an entrepreneur/founder as it is about the idea itself. We call it a 'programme' because it's designed to be structured, but it also allows flexibility. We provide educational resources, tools, concepts and methodologies to help you move from where you are now to the next stage – but it isn't a course and there's no qualification at the end.

22. How does the programme relate to the academic side of the university?

Start Up is run by the NTU Enterprise team and our student enterprise activity is extra-curricular, meaning it sits alongside, not within, academic programmes. Students from any School can choose to access our support while studying at undergraduate or postgraduate level. Our aim is for students to consider working for themselves as a serious career prospect beyond their studies. Our offer is

designed to help students explore ideas, develop skills and take action beyond the curriculum and beyond their time at NTU.

23. Do I have to register a business when I'm on the programme?

No – registering a business is something you can do when the time feels right for you and when it becomes legally necessary. In the UK you can earn up to £1,000 a year (called a trading allowance) before you're required to register, so many people don't need to take any formal steps at the very early stages. We'll support you to understand your options and make informed decisions when the time comes. Remember, it's your journey and you're in the driving seat. We're just here to help you navigate the route.

About NTU Enterprise and Dryden Enterprise Centre

24. What's the difference between NTU Enterprise and Dryden Enterprise Centre?

NTU Enterprise is the team that delivers enterprise activity for NTU students and graduates; it also manages the business workspaces such as Dryden Enterprise Centre (DEC) and Antenna. The DEC is a physical building on the City Campus, owned by NTU, which provides offices and desk space for businesses. It's home to the Enterprise team and a wider community of businesses, entrepreneurs and organisations.

25. How accessible are your programmes and workspace?

We aim to make our programmes and spaces as inclusive and welcoming as possible, while recognising there is always more we can do. If you feel comfortable sharing any specific access needs, we encourage you to talk to us. We're happy to explore reasonable adjustments wherever possible and we'll work with you to support your participation on our programme. The DEC is wheelchair accessible, with lift access and an accessible toilet on each floor. We want everyone to feel comfortable and welcome in our space.

We're also mindful of how challenging some environments and formats can be for neurodivergent participants. While we may not be able to meet every need, we make a conscious effort to design our workshop content and delivery to be as neuroinclusive as possible, and we're continually learning and improving our approach.

Timetable

26. Is there another day I can do Start Up, as I have lectures on a Tuesday?

The main **Start Up** programme runs from September – November for six weeks on Tuesdays. In Phase 2, starting in January, we also offer a range of topic-based workshops and events which will be bookable separately. We also run another full **Start Up** programme beginning in February, which takes place on a Thursday. If this timing works better for you, just let us know and we can talk through the options.

27. I can't do every date on the timetable – is it a problem if I miss a session?

We understand that it's not always possible to attend every session, and that's completely realistic given other commitments. That said, the programme is designed as a coherent journey, so we do encourage you to attend as many sessions as you can. To help with this we ask participants to block out the key dates in their diaries in advance. Some people even choose to book annual leave from work in order to attend the core workshops.

28. I want to do the Start Up programme, but I live outside Nottingham. Is this possible?

The **Start Up** programme is designed to be delivered in person at the Dryden Enterprise Centre. A key part of its value comes from being based in the space – the informal interactions, shared learning and collaborations that happen when people are working alongside one another. We recognise that this means location and travel are important considerations. Living outside Nottingham may present challenges unless you're able and willing to travel to the city for workshops. If you're unsure whether this is realistic for you, we'd encourage you to think carefully about the commitment involved and get in touch with us if you'd like to talk it through.