



WE Innovate 2026 Programme FAQs

About the Programme

What is WE Innovate?

WE Innovate is Queen's University Belfast's pre-accelerator programme for women entrepreneurs. It provides participants with masterclasses, mentoring, and opportunities to develop fledgling business ideas into successful ventures.

We Innovate is a 5-month programme running from January to June. The programme supports the development of up to 15 teams through masterclasses, business coaching, one-to-one expert support, peer mentoring, and much more.

There are three phases during which 15 teams become a final five, who then compete for a chance to secure a share of the £15,000 funding.

Who runs the programme at Queen's University Belfast?



Hosted by the Innovation Programmes team, WE Innovate is managed by Kat Maguire and Laura McGirr, Programme Manager at Queen's University Belfast. You can contact Kat or Laura for more information at k.maguire@qub.ac.uk / L.mcgirr@qub.ac.uk.

Eligibility

Who is eligible to apply for WE Innovate?

WE Innovate is open to women and non-binary postgraduate students, researchers, and recent graduates of Queen's University Belfast.

To be eligible, applicants must:

- Be a current postgraduate student (Master's or PhD) at Queen's University Belfast; or
- Be a current researcher employed by Queen's; or
- Be a graduate of Queen's who completed their degree within the last three years.

Undergraduate students, external applicants, and graduates beyond three years of completing their degree are not eligible to apply.

Applicants must also be leading or co-leading their idea or project.

Can I apply as a solo founder?

Yes!

Can I apply as part of a team?

Yes, you can apply as part of a team, but at least one team member (preferably the lead) must meet the eligibility criteria and identify as a woman.

Can I add team members to my team after the programme commences?

Yes. If you want to add team members to your team, you must inform the programme manager so we can collect their contact details and officially onboard them.



What kind of ideas or projects can I submit?

You can submit ideas or projects across any sector or field. The programme focuses on supporting innovation, entrepreneurship, and commercialisation, so projects with a clear impact and viability are encouraged.

Do I need to have prior experience in entrepreneurship to join?

No prior experience in entrepreneurship is required. The programme is designed to support entrepreneurs at any stage of their journey.

Do I need to have a fully developed idea to apply?

No, you don't need a fully developed business plan. However, you must demonstrate that you've done preliminary research and have a clear vision for your project's impact and scalability.

Can I apply if I'm already running a business?

Yes, applicants who already have a registered business or start-up are welcome to apply, provided they meet the eligibility criteria, and their business aligns with the programme goals.

Can I submit several projects?

Yes! As long as you've done the required research on all of them (see our Entry Requirements above) you can submit several ideas.

Programme Structure and Phases

How is the programme structured?

The programme is divided into three phases:

- **Phase 1:** Foundational masterclasses, coaching, and workshops to develop entrepreneurial skills.



- **Phase 2:** Advanced support, including a founder retreat and investor pitching opportunities.
- **Phase 3:** Intensive pitch preparation and the Grand Final event where teams compete for funding and recognition.

How do I move between programme phases?

Progression between phases is determined based on your application and performance during the programme. Phase 2 and Phase 3 teams are selected by the programme panel.

What is the Phase 2 Founder Retreat?

The retreat is a two-night, in-person event where Phase 2 participants immerse themselves in focused workshops, peer networking, and strategic business planning. The cost of the retreat is covered by Queen's University.

What if I don't progress to the next phase?

If you do not move to Phase 2 or 3, you will still receive valuable feedback and coaching through exit sessions and be part of the wider WE Innovate community.

What happens at the Grand Final?

At the Grand Final, finalists pitch their ventures to a panel of judges, competing for funding and other support to further their entrepreneurial journey.

Support and Benefits

What kind of support does WE Innovate provide?

Participants will receive:

- Access to in-person masterclasses, covering essential entrepreneurial skills.
- Guidance from experienced mentors.
- Opportunities to network with like-minded individuals and industry professionals.
- A chance to pitch for funding to develop their ideas.



What support is offered to participants?

Support includes:

- Access to workshops and masterclasses tailored for entrepreneurs.
- 1:1 coaching and mentoring.
- Peer-to-peer learning and networking opportunities.
- A retreat for Phase 2 participants.
- Pitch preparation and investor panels.

Are there opportunities for alumni engagement?

Yes, alumni mentors and peer mentors play an active role in the programme. Participants also gain lifelong access to the programme's network for further opportunities.

Logistics and Key Information

Do I need to attend all sessions? Can my team participate in WE Innovate while based overseas?

To participate in WE Innovate, team leads and their team members are required to attend all in-person programme sessions. In-person sessions typically take place at QUB campus.

Is there a fee to participate in the programme?

No. WE Innovate is fully-funded for eligible participants, including the founder retreat.

Timeline and Application

What are the key dates I should know?

- **Applications close:** 16th December 2025
- **Outcomes:** 7th January 2026
- **Programme launch:** 29th January 2026



- **Grand Final:** Early June 2026, date TBC

For a full schedule of events and workshops, refer to the detailed timeline provided.

What are the prizes available in WE Innovate?

All prizes will be chosen by our judging panel at the WE Innovate Final. Prizes include a share of the £15,000 prize fund.

How can I apply?

Applications are currently open and close on December 16th 2025. For any questions, contact innovationprogrammes@qub.ac.uk

