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New push to help tech start-ups in the West Midlands

Tamlyn Jones
Business Correspondent

A NEW business accelerator programme has been launched to boost West Midlands tech start-ups.

Called 'ScaleUp Accelerator', it will allow ten tech start-ups to get support and mentoring with the aim of helping them grow.

The scheme is being run by not-for-profit body Birmingham Tech, in partnership with West Midlands Combined Authority and consultancy Purpose Led Performance and is targeted at local businesses with high-growth potential.

The free, six-month scheme will start in April and support the ten successful applicants by offering workshops and events alongside advice and mentoring from experts who have previously built up tech and digital companies.

Two of the companies will be chosen to work with the combined authority and experts on tech solutions to tackle the climate change emergency.

Birmingham Tech's chief executive Yiannis Maos said: "We do an amazing job of creating innovative start-

ups across our region and we should be proud that, for the seventh year running, data from the Centre for Entrepreneurs shows the West Midlands is the UK's start-up capital outside of London.

"However, with investment in tech companies in the city declining, we need to do a better job of supporting those start-ups to ensure they meet their potential.

Technology will play a key role in our mission to create a zero carbon region by 2041

Mayor Andy Street

"Our region has some exciting tech and digital businesses emerging and we hope that, with a bit of help, these companies can go on to benefit the regional economy, create more jobs and become internationally recognised brands we are all proud of."

The combined authority recently

launched its 'Digital Roadmap' - a plan to give the region a digital reboot, with the aim of tackling digital exclusion, reaching net zero carbon and supporting a post-covid recovery.

West Midlands Mayor Andy Street added: "Technology will play a key role in our mission to create a zero carbon region by 2041, including through better managing of our resources to cut down waste, helping people transition to green forms of transport and moving away from carbon-heavy sources of energy such as gas boilers.

"On top of that, technology and the green economy is set to drive significant economic growth and create thousands of new jobs across the region.

"That is why it is so critical we support initiatives such as this one by Birmingham Tech, and why we have drawn up a Digital Roadmap for the West Midlands."

The first cohort will be selected later this month ahead of the programme commencing on April 5.

The successful businesses will then be showcased at the Birmingham Tech Week festival later this year.



➤ Chief executive Brendan Farrell (centre) with the Linear Diagnostics team

Major £800,000 boost for medical diagnostics firm

A BIRMINGHAM firm has secured £800,000 to support development of its technology used for point-of-care diagnostics.

Linear Diagnostics, which was founded in 2011 by Tim Dafforn and Matt Hicks as a spin-out from the University of Birmingham, has received the capital from the Midlands Engine Investment Fund, University of Birmingham, UKI2S Fund and UK Future Fund.

Its technology is used to detect the presence of molecules in solutions and its product is helping to diagnose sexually transmitted infections which often show little or no symptoms.

Chairman and chief executive Brendan Farrell said: "We are very grateful to our existing investors for

their continued support and to the UK Future Fund for providing matched funding.

"The funds received will enable Linear Diagnostics to develop a prototype single use cartridge and reader for our duplex test for chlamydia and gonorrhoea."

Roger Wood, director at Midven which manages part of the Midlands Engine Investment Fund, added: "The requirement for rapid and accurate point of care diagnostics has been brought into sharp focus by the covid-19 pandemic.

"There are many other disease areas that could equally benefit from this approach and Linear Diagnostics is making excellent progress with the development of its testing platform."

Creating a level playing field by giving those left behind a leg up



Kevin Davis

WE recently marked National Apprenticeship Week 2021 and, as chairman of the Ladder Apprenticeship Foundation, my colleagues and I are seeking to change the mood about work and vocational learning, through our newspaper campaigns, online forums and events.

These help to raise awareness, highlight and connect the opportunities for apprentices, employers and their trainers.

It is a tough time for all at the moment but there are still training

opportunities, there are still employers with vacancies that need filling and National Apprenticeship Week is about magnifying those opportunities.

It has been a tough time for our region and even before Covid the barriers were, and are, individual and systemic, strongly correlated with poverty and low qualifications.

This pandemic has magnified that and has disproportionately impacted also on black, Asian and minority-ethnic communities, not just on health and mortality, sadly, but also on job sustainability.

The solutions are, of course, complex but we believe it requires a collaborative, joined-up, systems-based approach to improving skills and enrichment opportunities for all, particularly for young people and disadvantaged communities.



www.ladderforbirmingham.co.uk

This will incentivise and equip employers to hire and retain them. It is about raising awareness and getting the data so that all can make informed decisions about what to do next.

That is what the Ladder is about. What if no-one was left behind? This is the question Prince Charles' Business in the Community Network is asking.

As one of its West Midlands' leadership board members, our overview of employment and skills

activity recognises that, despite the scale of the challenge facing businesses and people as a result of the pandemic, there are opportunities for responsible business leaders to take action and support decent work, employment and skills development right now.

Our business network expounds that we need to expand horizons by supporting disadvantaged learners and jobseekers to experience the world of work and build the skills they need to be successful in education and employment.

We also need to develop essential skills by utilising government support through the Kickstart Scheme, offering apprenticeships and providing work experience and work placements.

A level playing field also needs to be created by removing barriers to

recruitment for all and mitigating some of the worst impacts on the most vulnerable.

The Ladder and its partners are cheerleading these efforts.

Kevin Davis is chairman of the Ladder for Greater Birmingham campaign, an initiative launched in 2018 in partnership with Birmingham Post publisher Reach Midlands to create hundreds of apprentices across the city region by connecting candidates with employers. For more information and to get involved visit ladderforbirmingham.co.uk or call 03332 409 699

The Business in the Community Network is hosting an online event at 2pm on Monday March 15, entitled 'West Midlands - Together we can make sure no one gets left behind'. More details can be found at bitc-org-uk