

From Campus to Commerce: Tapping into the UK University network for startup development

The UK offers abundant opportunities for French tech entrepreneurs. Among these opportunities lies the expansive university network, serving as a fertile ground for forging partnerships grounded in expertise, talent, and practical research. Dr. Chris Moore, a distinguished technology specialist, sheds light on the diverse array of potential partnerships available, along with their corresponding advantages.

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The connections between academia and the UK tech ecosystem are highly dynamic, manifesting in diverse forms tailored to the unique requirements and stages of development of each startup.

- Incubation

Certain universities may establish incubators specifically geared towards supporting tech startups. These hubs are created to cultivate innovation and ease the exchange of ideas, often granting startups access to valuable resources including mentorship, subject matter experts, and legal advisers.

- Skills Transfer

Universities are often advanced research centres. As such, they can act as a channel for technology transfers by encouraging researchers to

collaborate with tech entrepreneurs. Intellectual property licensing programmes and simplified mechanisms for creating startups based on academic research can stimulate the development of emerging technologies in sectors such as security, AI, and quantum computing.

- Specialised Training Programmes

Entrepreneurs have the opportunity to engage in training programs tailored to essential skills crucial for project success, which may extend beyond just being tech focused. These programs encompass various disciplines such as business management, product development, marketing, and project management.

- Access to Research Resources and Equipment

Tech startups can benefit from access to university research resources. These include specialist laboratories, libraries, and databases. These resources can be invaluable to startups that may lack these specialised resources and equipment to develop and then launch their new business in the UK.

- Collaboration with Specific Sectors

Some universities have developed specific expertise in fields such as insurance, banking, and cyber security. For example, the University of Edinburgh has excellent ties to the AI sector. Meanwhile, UCL's (University College London) financial computing department has built up a vast network of corporate partners in banking, insurance, and blockchain. This provides partner startups with access to an unrivalled and solid customer base, which is ideal for testing their offering or product.

UK universities boast a diverse pool of talent across various disciplines. French startups can tap into this talent pool for recruitment purposes, accessing skilled graduates and researchers who bring fresh perspectives

and innovative ideas to the table.

In 2023, UK university spinouts raised £1.66B in equity funding, equating to 9.54% of all equity funding raised by UK companies and since 2010, Oxford spinouts have raised £2,5B in funding.

For new French companies coming to the UK, understanding the tech marketplace is essential. A recent report from Royal Academy of Engineering Enterprise Hub, defines deep tech and how these companies are thriving. The report succinctly states: “Academic spinouts are often at the forefront of technological advancements, utilising cutting-edge research and intellectual property to develop the latest innovations. “

In essence, UK universities serve as catalysts for innovation, collaboration, and growth, offering French startups a wealth of opportunities to thrive in the dynamic and competitive UK market. By leveraging the resources, expertise, and networks available within university ecosystems, French entrepreneurs can position themselves for success and achieve their business objectives in the UK.

Help and support

Within the university network across the UK, there is a mass of help and support French startup businesses can tap into.

- UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

UKRI cultivates an inclusive and ethical research environment on a global scale. In pursuit of this objective, the organisation administers various programs through its "councils," aimed at easing the integration of international startups into several burgeoning sectors. These sectors encompass engineering and physics, artificial intelligence (AI), biotechnology and biosciences, as well as medical technology (medtech).

- The Challenge Fund

As part of UKRI, the *Challenge Fund* the initiative comprises 23 key "challenges" aligned with the thematic pillars outlined in the government's *industrial strategy*. These encompass clean growth, an ageing society, the future of mobility, AI, and the data economy. French startups operating within these sectors stand to gain significant financial backing, with the fund being bolstered by £2.6B in public investment and an additional £3B from the private sector.

- Creative Industries

Also, part of UKRI the *Creative Industries Cluster Programme*, includes nine research and development partnerships based around different clusters across the UK. Some of the partners include Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Nesta, Creative Industries Federation, Creative England, British Film Institute, Tech Nation, University of Birmingham, Cardiff University. New French businesses coming to the UK within *creative industries* including film, digital storytelling, fashion, and video games could gain significant support.

- START

This initiative is an *innovative* pilot program tailored for the West of England region, spearheaded by a collaborative consortium comprising four leading universities: UWE Bristol, the University of Bristol, the University of Bath, and Bath Spa University.

Under the leadership of UWE Bristol and in partnership with techSPARK, this initiative receives funding from the West of England Combined Authority. START is designed to offer comprehensive support and developmental resources to 150 budding tech and digital enterprises in their pre-start and early formation stages across Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Bath, and North East Somerset.

How to take advantage of experts and academics

Tapping into the vast resources available within the UK's university network opens massive opportunities for French businesses coming to the UK for the first time. The UK's academic record is world class with experts in every field able to help and support your new business.

There are two initiatives that can help put your new business into contact with researchers and academics, and students that may be your future employees. Businesses in the life science, AI and quantum computing spaces can particularly benefit.

- Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs)

KTPs serve as a conduit, uniting companies with innovative concepts with academic institutions possessing the expertise to bring these ideas to market. Presently, approximately 800 companies, 100 universities, and over 800 graduates actively participate in KTPs, fostering collaborative and transformative partnerships.

- Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs)

CDTs consist of research institutions, including universities and industrial partners, collaborating to provide research and expertise while supporting and training doctoral students. These CDTs enable the deployment of researchers and experts to startups, empowering them to spearhead projects and accelerate research that new businesses can use to bring their products and services to the UK market.

The UK university network stands as a formidable resource for French startup companies coming to the UK. Through strategic partnerships, access to talent, research and development initiatives, incubation

programs, and extensive networking opportunities, startups can harness the wealth of resources available within the university ecosystems to propel their growth and innovation.

The Commercial Department of the British Embassy in Paris provides support to French companies wishing to set up in the UK. Click [here](#) to find out more.



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