

Manchester accelerator lands North's only spot in FT Europe Top 150 for 2026

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Alumni companies raise more than £78m in funding

A Manchester-based accelerator has been named the North of England's only programme to feature in the Financial Times' Europe's Leading Start-Up Hubs 2026 list, underlining Manchester's growing profile as a base for successful start-ups. Alumni of the [Exchange programme](#), which supports early-stage founders with mentoring, networks and investment-readiness support, have raised more than £78m in funding and created over 1,000 jobs to date.

The recognition comes amid continued scrutiny of regional imbalances in UK innovation funding. London continues to attract a [disproportionate share of venture capital investment](#), intensifying debate about the strength of scale-up infrastructure in regional technology clusters.

Exchange, which is operated from [Department at Campfield](#) in Manchester St John's innovation district, joins 149 other accelerators from across Europe in the list compiled by the Financial Times, in partnership with Statista and Sifted.

The ranking evaluates performance based on alumni feedback, growth outcomes, and the quality of mentoring, infrastructure, funding access, and business support.

Since launching in 2020, Exchange has supported more than 270 businesses, with alumni securing more than £78m in external investment during and after programme participation and creating over 1,000 jobs. A significant proportion of participating companies operate in the technology and digital sectors, reflecting Manchester's expanding role as a regional tech hub.

Among them is HACE, a female-founded Tech for Good start-up addressing child labour, which joined Exchange in 2023. During the programme, the company completed an oversubscribed pre-seed funding round, raising more than £450,000, including investment from Manchester-based backers connected through the Exchange network.

It has since doubled the size of its team, hiring from the city's graduate ecosystem, and created opportunities for young people through more than 20 student placements and four work experience roles across the University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Salford. HACE is now a founder in residence at Department at Campfield.

Commenting on the news, **Rich Jones, head of Exchange**, said:

"Inclusion in the Financial Times ranking matters because it's based on founder feedback and real business performance. The companies that come through Exchange are raising capital, increasing revenue and growing their teams at pace.

"For a long time, scaling meant looking to London for investment and infrastructure, but we're increasingly seeing founders access experienced workers and credible funding networks here in the North.

"The jobs created and funding secured by our alumni businesses only go to show that high-growth companies can scale successfully from Manchester and build serious, sustainable operations."

Exchange operates within Department at Campfield, a 135,000-square-foot technology campus designed to cluster digital, media, and creative businesses within a single commercial environment. By combining structured accelerator support with embedded workspace and proximity to established operators, the model enables participating companies to learn and scale within Manchester rather than relocating. Department differs from many workspace operators because it pairs the space with an active operating layer, running year-round programming, events and partnerships that connect members to new business partnerships, talent and collaborators.

Find out more about Exchange at Department, visit: <https://www.exchange-programme.com/>

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Notes to editors

For additional details, please contact:

Emily McGowan-Phoenix, Liv Garland, or Adam Gooseman at PR Agency One

T: 0161 871 9140

E: department@pragencyone.co.uk

About Department

[Department](#) is a UK workspace operator focused on tech, media and modern enterprise, providing coworking, studios and flexible office space across Manchester and Leeds. It creates environments designed to help businesses begin, build and scale, supported by an on-site team, community and member programming. Department Campfield, in St John's, Manchester, is Department's technology and media campus, spanning over 135,000 sq ft across three buildings and offering workspace and production facilities for tech and media companies.

[Department at Campfield](#) is a next-generation technology and media campus in St John's, Manchester, spanning 135,000+ sq. ft across three buildings. Built within the reimagined Victorian market halls dating back to 1878, it brings co-working, private offices, studios, collaboration hubs, event space and social venues together under one campus - and is the home of Exchange accelerator programme.

[Department at Bonded Warehouse](#) is a Grade II listed, St John's landmark, and an 1800s railway terminus later tied to Old Granada Studios, which is now repurposed into a modern workspace destination powered by 100% green renewable energy. Designed for teams of 1-100, it combines co-working, private offices, and creative studios with a hospitality-led experience - from wellness and community events to standout social and event spaces.

[Department at Globe Building](#) in St John's, Manchester, offers sustainable private offices with flexible billing, powered by 100% green energy and holding BREEAM 'Excellent' status. With serviced suites suitable for up to 70 people and close walking access to Spinningfields and key transport links, it's designed for businesses that want premium workspace and connectivity in the city centre.

[Department at XYZ](#) is Department's Spinningfields destination. It's a contemporary, furnished workspace designed for professional services, digital and technology businesses. It offers flexible private office suites, , serviced essentials and a strong amenity mix, including Department coffee. The building is powered by 100% green energy.

[Department at Leeds Dock](#) is Department's work, wellness and social destination for media, creative and digital communities, powered by 100% green renewable energy. Set within a vibrant waterside neighbourhood just an eight-minute walk from the city centre, with the Royal Armouries Museum nearby, it's home to 60+ businesses and continues to expand with additional workspace available on Level 2.

About Exchange

[Exchange](#) is an award-winning independent accelerator programme supporting early-stage and scaling businesses in the tech, media and creative industries. Established in July 2020 as part of Manchester's St John's district, it provides a structured six to 12-month programme combining mentorship, networking, workspace and investment support, alongside ongoing alumni support. Exchange operates from Campfield in Manchester and Leeds Dock. Since launch, Exchange says it has supported more than 1,080 individuals across over 272 businesses, with alumni raising more than £78.1m and creating 1,300 jobs.

Company Contact:

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