



## Start-Up Programme Guidelines 2025 – 2026

This is a summary of the JA Start-Up Programme for Students outlining the judging criteria

**JA Malta Foundation**

## 1.1 Why should I participate in the Start-Up Programme?

At **JA Malta**, part of one of the world's largest and most impactful youth-serving organisations, we're here to empower young thinkers and aspiring entrepreneurs like you. This programme is **your opportunity** to turn your ideas into reality in a supportive, creative, and flexible environment.

Got an idea? Want the tools to bring it to life? You're in the right place.

We've designed this programme with students in mind, knowing you're juggling studies, part-time work, and your social life. That's why it's structured to be manageable, rewarding, and well worth your time. You'll gain the skills to develop your idea, pitch it with confidence, and even compete, all while growing personally and professionally.

## 1.2 Am I eligible?

If you're passionate, curious, and ready to give shape to your ideas, you probably are! Here's what you need to join the programme:

- A team of at least 2 members<sup>1</sup>
- An idea or simply the motivation to come up with one
- To be between 18 and 30 years old
- To be enrolled in full-time education

Companies are eligible to participate only if they have been operating for no more than 12 months and have not generated sales or raised capital earlier than 12 months prior to the European competition.

### 1.2.1 Important Deadlines and dates I should know about:

| Activity                                      | Date/Deadline                | Time  | Approx. time to complete                    |
|---|------------------------------|-------|---|
| <b>Enrolment Start Date</b>                   | 1 <sup>st</sup> October 2025 | 09:00 | 30 minutes                                  |
| <b>Last Enrolment</b>                         | 3 <sup>rd</sup> April 2026   | 12:00 | 30 minutes                                  |
| <b>Keynote Event 1</b>                        | 10 <sup>th</sup> April 2026  | 17:00 | 2 hours                                     |
| <b>Keynote Event 2</b>                        | 17 <sup>th</sup> April 2026  | 17:00 | 2 hours                                     |
| <b>Pitch deck Submission for local judges</b> | 30 <sup>th</sup> April 2026  | 14:00 | Depends on your level of effort             |
| <b>Gen-E Portal &amp; Stand Creation</b>      | 3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2026     | 23:59 | 20 minutes                                  |
| <b>Demo Day &amp; Semi Finals</b>             | 8 <sup>th</sup> May 2026     | TBD   | Evening Event                               |
| <b>Finals</b>                                 | 16 <sup>th</sup> May 2026    | TBD   | Day to evening event (including rehearsals) |

<sup>1</sup> Recommended maximum of 5 members

## 1.2.2 How do I enrol?

Enrolment opens on **1st October 2025** and closes on **3rd April 2026**.

### No idea yet? No problem.

You don't need to have a fully formed idea to get started, that's what the programme is here to help with! The right idea will come as you explore, learn, and collaborate.

### Ready to sign up?

**Click this link to enrol.**

Before enrolling, make sure to:

- Familiarise yourself with the three programme tracks (JA Track, School Track & Independent Track)
- Let us know which track you're choosing when you apply

**Enrolment Fee is €65 per person.**

## 1.3 How will I benefit from this?

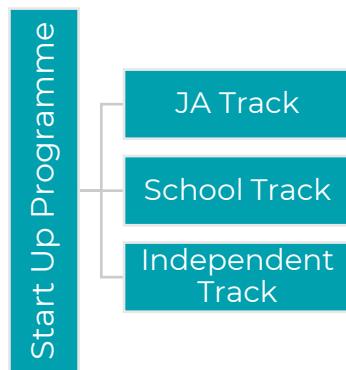
By joining, you'll gain access to a range of exciting opportunities, including:

- **Travel opportunities:** Winning team to represent Malta on an international stage
- **Networking & mentorship:** Connect with industry experts, mentors, and like-minded peers
- **Personal & skill development:** Grow your entrepreneurial, teamwork, financial capability and presentation skills
- **JA Alumni status:** Join a global network and gain access to exclusive opportunities, including the JA Venture Fund
- **Winning package:** Compete for an exciting prize package designed to take your idea to the next level
- **Award recognition:** Stand a chance to win various awards (see full list on page 7)

***Disclaimer:*** by agreeing to pitch on finals night I confirm that I am available to travel to the Gen-E competition. Dates will be announced before enrolment date closes.

## 1.4 What Track is right for me?

This year the start-up programme is being rethought and reimagined. Why? We want to make it easier for you to become part of this greater idea! We are offering three different track options. Each option will get you to the same end result, however, what differs is the level of input you receive from JA Malta. The three track options are explained in more detail below.



### 1.4.1 JA Track

#### What will the JA Track involve?

As part of the JA Track, you'll take part in an exciting journey designed to support your growth every step of the way. Here's what's included:

- Attending a 4-day bootcamp to learn directly from experts through interactive sessions that will prepare you to build, refine, and pitch your idea.

Agenda as follows:

|  |                |                                       |
|--|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Launch</b><br><b>21/02/2025</b><br><b>08:30 – 12:30</b> | Launch Session |                                       |
| <b>Day 1</b><br><b>27/02/2026</b><br><b>17:45 – 21:00</b>  | Session 1      | Product Design & Prototyping          |
|  | Session 2      | Market Research & Competitor Analysis |
| <b>Day 2</b><br><b>28/03/2026</b><br><b>08:45 – 15:30</b>  | Session 1      | Business Model Building               |
|  | Session 2      | Use of AI                             |
|  | Session 3      | Branding                              |
| <b>Day 3</b><br><b>20/03/2026</b><br><b>17:45 – 21:00</b>  | Session 1      | Legal & IP                            |
|  | Session 2      | Funding & Business Opportunities      |
|  | Session 3      |                                       |
| <b>Day 4</b><br><b>21/03/2026</b><br><b>08:45 – 15:30</b>  | Session 1      | Presentation Skills                   |
|  | Session 2      | Finance Workshop 1                    |
|  | Session 3      | Finance Workshop 2                    |

- Attendance at 2 compulsory keynote events (dates as listed on page 3).
- Submission of a 10-page pitch deck
- Participation in the Demo Day
- Attendance at the Finals Event

## 1.4.2 School Track

### What will the School Track involve?

The School Track is designed to give schools, lecturers, and educators the freedom to guide student teams on their own terms, while still offering access to support and resources from JA Malta.

As an educator, you are free to support your students in areas such as business model development, market research, product design, and more at your own pace and using your own approach.

To be eligible for the competition, participating teams must meet the following requirements:

- Enrol in the programme by 3rd April 2026
- Attend the 2 compulsory keynote events
- Participate in Demo Day
- Attend the Finals Event
- Submit a 10-page pitch deck

At JA Malta, we're happy to support you throughout the process. If there's a specific topic, you'd like help delivering such as legal, finance, or pitching, just let us know. We'll connect you with the right expert.

Our Bootcamp is open to all. feel free to send your students to join the sessions alongside other participants!

## 1.4.3 Independent Track

### What will the Independent Track involve?

The Independent Track gives your team the flexibility to work through the programme content at your own pace and on your own schedule.

Once enrolled, you'll receive access to our JA Online Portal – a one-stop resource hub designed to support you in shaping your idea. The portal includes helpful video content covering:

- Financial projections
- Legal basics
- Marketing & branding
- Business model development
- Pitching & presentation tips

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- Attend the Finals Event
- Submit a 10-page pitch deck

At JA Malta, we're here to help you succeed. If there's a specific topic, you'd like more guidance on, whether it's finance, pitching, or anything else, just reach out. We'll connect you with the right expert to support your journey.

## **1.5 What are the Judging Criteria?**

Each criterion has a set number of questions that are expected to be answered within the pitch deck.

### **1. Innovation & Value Creation (30%)**

- How well is the innovative business opportunity clearly defined?
- How well does the solution fulfil a customer's need?
- Is the problem being tackled in an innovative way?
- How much of an impact does the proposed solution have on current social, ethical and environmental issues?

### **2. Market & Competition (30%)**

- Did the team clearly identify the target market and the market potential of their product/service?
- Did the team show an understanding of their competition?
- How well has the team identified their Unique Selling Proposition to differentiate themselves from their competition?

### **3. Finances (15%)**

- Is the proposed business model realistic and viable?
- How reasonable are the financial projections?

### **4. Management & Team (15%)**

- Does the team exhibit the experience and skills required for operation?
- Has the team managed to recruit advisors for the areas where expertise is lacking?

### **5. Ability to Demonstrate Achievements in Learning (10%)**

- To what extent has the team shown their evolution of competence development throughout the JA Start-Up Journey?
- To what extent have students demonstrated their ability to reflect on their own personal and professional growth?

### **Pitch Deck submission rules**

- a. Submission deadline: 17<sup>th</sup> April 2026
- b. Format of document: PDF Form
- c. Submit via JA PORTAL
- d. Language: English
- e. Font Size: Minimum font is 12
- f. Number of Pages:
  - i. Maximum 10 pages
  - ii. No appendices allowed
  - iii. Pages EXCLUDE Front and Back Cover
- g. Front Page to include Start Up name, year of operations, country and contact details.
- h. File size is limited to 10MB

### **1.6 When the judges are evaluating my pitch deck, what will they be looking out for?**

- Does the report provide relevant information and make the reader comfortable finding and reading the information?
- Does the report contain a strong executive summary?
- Does the report present the financial statements in the required structure and supported by an effective analysis of financials?
- Are the financial statements correct or are there mistakes in them that would suggest gaps in understanding of financial statements or business finances?
- Does the report show that the team understands the overall business performance, profitability, and the future potential of the Start Up?

### **1.7 Awards**

1. HSBC ESG Sustainability
2. EY Idea Validation
3. Tech MT Digital Innovation
4. Camilleri Preziosi Customer Focus
5. Bolt Disruptive Excellence
6. 3<sup>rd</sup> place
7. 2<sup>nd</sup> place
8. Start Up of the Year - Winner

Want to have an idea of what our finals event looked like last year? Check it out here on [YouTube](#).

## 1.8 What happens if I win the competition?

**Congratulations!** You've just been named Malta's Start-Up of the Year!

That's an incredible achievement and a testament to your team's creativity, dedication, and hard work. Finals night is your time to celebrate, you've earned it!

But the journey doesn't stop here.

As the winning team, you'll go on to represent Malta at [Gen-E](#), Europe's largest entrepreneurship festival, taking place next year in **Latvia**.

### What's included for the winning team?

JA Malta will fully sponsor (flights, accommodation, and meals) for up to 5 team members to attend Gen-E.

Additional team members are welcome to join but as a team you would need to cover those costs.

You'll also receive a Winning Package designed to help you take your start-up to the next level, including mentorship, exposure, and support opportunities. (More details on the package will be shared directly with finalists.)

To compete at Gen-E, you must have:

- Completed the JA Malta Start Up Programme
- Set up your virtual stand
- Applied for the Gen-E online awards

### What does the Gen-E competition involve?

You'll compete alongside top start-ups from across Europe through the following stages:

- **Pitch Deck Submission (online):** The 10-page pitch deck would need to be submitted to Gen-E.
- **Jury Interview (Online):** A 10-minute online interview with the judging panel. You'll receive the date and time at least two days in advance.
- **Stage Presentation (On-site in Latvia):** A 4-minute live presentation in English in front of an international audience. Rehearsal time will be allocated before the event.
- **Stand Exhibition (On-site in Latvia):** Your team will showcase your company at an assigned stand featuring:
  - Your company name
  - Country of origin
  - A product, prototype, or demonstration of your service
  - Judges will visit your stand for a 10-minute evaluation.

## Annex A

Recommended Pitch Deck content.

### **Problem:**

Detail the problem you are solving and who has the problem. You can talk about the current solutions in the market, but don't spend too much time (see point below - competition).

### **Solution**

Describe your product or service. How customers use your product and how it addresses the problems that you outlined. What features and benefits of your product/service brings. Detail the current stage of development and if proprietary or not and perhaps an innovative approach.

### **Target Market & Opportunity**

Define market size & your customer base. Explain who your ideal customer is and how many of them there are. What is the total market size and how do you position your company in the market? If you can find the data, investors will want to know how much people or businesses currently spend in the market to get a sense of the total market size. This is where you tell the story about the scope and scale of the problem you are solving.

### **Competition**

Describe how you fit into the competitive landscape and how you're different from the competitors and alternatives that are on the market today.

### **Market Approach**

Outline your marketing and sales plan. You'll want to detail the key tactics that you intend to use to enter the market. How are you planning on getting customers' attention and what will your sales process look like?

### **Team**

Highlight the key team members, their successes, and the key expertise that they bring to the table. Why are you and your team the right people to build and grow this company? What experience do you have that others don't?

### **Business Model**

Highlight your key revenue streams. How do you make money?

### **Financial (projections)**

Provide financial projections. Limit yourself to charts that show sales, total customers, total expenses, and profits. All financial information must be presented in euros.

### **Future Plans**

Make your 'Ask' (funding, mentoring, market access etc.); why you need the investment you are asking for and how you plan on using it.