

Top five North East early-stage tech scaleups announced in Tech Nation's latest 'Rising Stars' competition

- Tech Nation announces the top five North East Regional Winners of its fourth Rising Stars competition, recognising the UK's early-stage tech scaleups with the highest potential
- The 5 North East companies to be selected are Durham-based [Settld](#) and [onHand](#), Gateshead-based [Zoa Rental](#), Newcastle-based [Haystack](#), and Middlesbrough-based [Kodobo](#), which span tech subsectors retail tech, adtech, fashion, HRtech and impact tech
- The North East tech sector is rapidly growing; the sector has received \$200mn in VC investment this year as of November 2021 (a 119% increase on the \$91.4mn received in 2020), and has created 193% more jobs compared to the previous year (32,442 in H1 of 2021, up from 10,380 in 2020)

7th December 2021: Tech Nation has today announced the 5 North East Regional Winners of its fourth Rising Stars competition, which recognises the brightest and best early-stage tech scaleups from every area of the UK. In total, 55 fast-growing tech companies from across the UK have been named this year's Regional Winners - 5 within each UK region. Previous years' Rising Stars Regional Winners have included [Selazar](#) (from Northern Ireland), [Circa5000](#) (from the North West) and [SeedLegals](#) (from London), who have received a combined £33.79mn in investment to date, demonstrating the ability of the Rising Stars Regional Winners to scale quickly, and their potential to become the UK's tech 'unicorns' (companies with valuations of \$1bn+) of the future.

These Regional Winners have been selected by a panel of over 50 judges (industry experts with extensive experience in starting and scaling tech businesses) based on their value proposition, competitive advantage, market traction, team experience and potential to scale.

This year's North East Regional Winners are [Settld](#), [onHand](#), [Zoa Rental](#), [Haystack](#) and [Kodobo](#). These companies, which hail from Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle and Middlesbrough, are working to transform a range of different industries, including retail tech, adtech, fashion, HRtech and impact tech.

These 5 early-stage tech companies have an average of 14 employees, and have raised £5,363,000 in investment funding between them.

The North East tech sector is growing

The success of these early-stage North East companies reflects the strength and fast growth of the North East's tech market overall.

According to data from Tech Nation, the North East has raised \$200mn this year in VC investment as of November 2021 (a 119% increase on the \$91.4mn raised in 2020).

Tech job creation is also growing rapidly in the North East, rising by 193% in the past year (from 32,442 tech roles in 2020 to 10,380 in H1 of 2021).

This year's Rising Stars Regional Winners are accelerating the tech sector across the UK

This year's Regional Winners demonstrate that the tech sector is growing quickly across all corners of the UK.

An impressive 69% of the 55 Regional Winners are generating revenue, and 38% have at least one female founder. 27% of the Regional Finalists are Pre-Seed, 29% have no previous rounds of funding, and 36% are Seed funded. As for what's next, 49% of the Regional Finalists are looking for Seed Funding, while 34% are looking to raise Series A.

The 55 Regional Winners are a mixture of B2B and B2C and 49% have previously attended an accelerator. 73% of the Regional Winners plan to expand internationally in the next 12 months, with 58% wanting to expand into the USA.

Rising Stars' mission

Going forward, these 5 promising, fast-growth North East tech scaleups will continue to be supported by the UK tech ecosystem as they are inducted into the Tech Nation alumni network. This will allow the companies national recognition, greater access to networking opportunities and more opportunities to learn from other early-stage tech businesses going through a similar scaling journey.

Recognising and empowering all of the Regional Winners of the Rising Stars competition is at the core of Tech Nation's mission to fuel the growth of tech scaleups who are helping us create a stronger economy, society and future.

Quotes:

Esme Caulfield, Competitions Lead at Tech Nation, said: "With Tech Nation's Rising Stars competition now in its fourth year, it's amazing to see so many inspiring companies innovating to change our world for the better. This year, we reached the milestone of 1000 applications to Rising Stars (and surpassed it!). We had a record number of applications this year - 380 (nearly 400) - and we also saw our first applications - and our first Regional Winner - from the spacetech sector, (Elestial, from the Midlands) and agritech (Cropsafe, from Northern Ireland).

From revolutionising modern healthcare and disrupting the finance sector to transforming education and tackling climate change, each of these fast-growing regional early-stage tech companies is helping us improve our economy, society and quality of life. This year's Regional Winners represent the brightest and the best of UK tech and talent, and I'm excited to see what they do next."

Digital Secretary Nadine Dorries said: "These technology Rising Stars are helping us solve some of the greatest challenges of our time and creating high-quality and well-paid jobs up and down the country. Capitalising on the huge potential of tech is a crucial part of our mission to level up and we are backing businesses with pro-innovation policies and supporting people to get the skills they need to thrive."

Nicola McNeely, Partner at Harrison Clark Rickerbys Solicitors - Cardiff and Rising Stars 4.0 Judge, said: “It is evident from the Tech Nation’s Rising Stars Regional Winners that there is a vast array of technology startups and scaleups around the UK, many of whom are operating within known Tech clusters already. Some have chosen to specifically establish themselves there or to relocate to these areas to leverage the incubator or accelerator services within those tech clusters. The ability to operate alongside like-minded businesses equips them well to leverage contacts, connections, services and expertise from similar businesses in their area. It also positions them well to sell into primes who are interested in diversifying their customer offering and adopting new innovative tech solutions.”

Drew Currie, Director of the Founder Institute - Birmingham and Rising Stars 4.0 Judge, said: “Two of the Rising Star candidates which I judged were extraordinary! I have judged pitches previously, but these 2 were exceptional. I have written their names on a piece of paper, and sealed them in dated envelopes. On the back of their Tech Nation entry, I look forward in a few years time to opening those envelopes in front of them & toasting their success!”

Niki Haggerty-James, Ecosystem Manager at Barclays Eagle Labs and Rising Stars 4.0 Judge, said: “I was honoured to be a judge for the fourth year, for Tech Nation’s Rising Stars programme. It seems the calibre of start-up and scaling-up businesses is getting better year on year, which is reflected in the businesses we are seeing here at Barclays Eagle Labs. When times become challenging, the best entrepreneurs see it as an opportunity to innovate and adapt. I predict exciting times ahead for this year’s cohort.”

Daniel Evans, CEO of Birmingham Enterprise Community and Rising Stars 4.0 Judge, said: “Rising Stars aims to find the UK's very best emerging startups and this year's applications did not disappoint. As we look forward to the country's recovery from COVID and the events of the past 2 years, we need our entrepreneurs more than ever. They fuel innovation and tackle the problems we face by building solutions that change the way we live, work and operate as a society. Through Rising Stars, Tech Nation is able to help showcase some of these fantastic entrepreneurs and bring attention to the work they are doing. One thing is for sure, if the quality of these businesses is anything to go by, then the entrepreneurial future of the UK is looking stronger than ever.”

Mike Davies, Co-founder of Haystack, said: “Tech recruitment is stuck in the dark ages. Spam messaging, shady practices and dull job boards make discovering that next unique opportunity a chore. This is why we built Haystack. Driven by our award-winning SaaS marketplace, we match and connect techies with innovative employers using their values, culture fit and tech stack. We’ve seen huge growth in 2021 and we're thrilled to be represented on Rising Stars as we look forward to continuing this trajectory into the new year and beyond - watch this space, we’re just getting started. The North East tech community has been amazing from the get-go - we wouldn't be where we are today without their support.”

Sanjay Lobo, Founder and CEO of onHand, said: “We're over the moon to be chosen as one of the Rising Stars 4.0 North East Regional Winners! Our mission is to help everyone learn, take action, and make an impact for the better of our community & planet. As more companies and individuals are

seeing the value of doing good, this is the perfect time for us to be reaching more people and having an even bigger impact.”

Fikayo Otun, CEO of Kodobe, said: “Being selected as a Tech Nation Rising Star Regional Winner highlights the incredible progress the team has made since we released the first version of our no-code gamification solution to improve customer experience, retention, and loyalty. As an early-stage startup focused on helping businesses build deeper connections and drive stronger customer engagement by offering rewards such as loyalty points, missions, leaderboards, badges, and rewards into their digital products, Businesses can benefit immensely from the deployment of our tools and APIs. Our clients have been impressed with our turnkey solution, turnaround time, and most importantly the improvement in retention metrics they realize without needing to write a single line of code.”

Vicky Wilson, CEO and Co-founder of SettlD, said: “We are thrilled to have been chosen as a Rising Stars Regional Winner. It shows that we are using technology to fix a major pain point in people’s lives and make a positive difference. Dealing with heaps of account admin when someone dies is unnecessarily stressful and time-consuming. At SettlD, we are changing the way families have to deal with the death of a loved one, and making it easier for businesses to support their customers at a time of need. We started with automating account closure and transfer, but there are countless other problems in this space to solve. Our goal is to transform end of life administration for all. The support we’ve received from organisations and partnerships across the North East has been fantastic. From grant funding, to connections and resources, this region has given us the chance to explore the feasibility of our idea, bring it to life, and to scale SettlD's service nationally.”

Isabella West, CEO & Founder of Zoa Rental, said: “The fashion industry is increasingly focusing on sustainability and circular models like rental are going to be critical to achieving this - the consumer demand is already there. Retailers want to offer rental under their own-brand so they can control the customer experience, but they don’t have the technology, resources or experience. Zoa’s white-label platform overcomes these barriers and powers rental for fashion brands of any size.”

End

Notes to the editor:

About the North East Regional Winners:

[SettlD](#) - Durham - Death notification service

SettlD is a SaaS product that simplifies end-of-life admin for bereaved individuals and professionals. They automate the process of notifying and resolving over 750 banking, insurance, utility and other service provider accounts when someone dies, to turn an average 6-hour workload into a 15-minute task for the user. For service providers, they reduce cost to serve, complaints and deliver major CX improvements for bereaved customers.

[Zoa Rental](#) - Gateshead - Retail tech

Zoa is the first UK-based rental-as-a-service platform that eliminates barriers to enable retailers and

fashion brands to adopt a truly circular model. They offer retailers and fashion brands white-label technology, operations and management so that they can rent out their stock under their own brands.

[Haystack](#) - Newcastle - HRtech

Haystack is a data insights and careers marketplace that uncovers, highlights and curates opportunities based on a user's interests, values and tech stack. Users are able to plug into their local and remote tech landscape with Haystack as well as uncover unique tech opportunities, check behind the scenes insights into their favourite employers and discover their next dev, data or design role.

[Kodobe](#) - Middlesbrough - Adtech & Marketing

Kodobe is an immersive customer experience management platform which provides tools and APIs that allows businesses to continuously keep their customers engaged within their digital platforms. With Kodobe, businesses can grow key metrics up to 4x for new customer conversion rates, existing customer retention rates, and transactions.

[onHand](#) - Durham - Impact tech

onHand's location-based app is a platform for corporate volunteering and climate impact that helps companies and people learn, take action, and have real impact on the causes they care about. They use collective action to help tackle big societal issues like the climate crisis, loneliness, homelessness, food waste, and more. Companies and people can make both local, and global impact, taking action on climate change by growing company forests, planting thousands of trees and changing lives in areas like Madagascar, Mozambique and Nicaragua.

Company photos:

Please find images of the companies' logos and founders [here](#), and of their teams [here](#).

About the Rising Stars competition:

Rising Stars 4.0 is the UK's only truly national scaleup competition, designed to be accessible to the best early-stage tech companies from all areas of the country. Entrants are supported throughout the application process, and given training and support at each stage of the competition to enable them to compete to their best ability and deliver the perfect pitch. The competition culminates in the top 20 companies being showcased and promoted to a highly curated audience of investors, corporates, influencers and the wider tech ecosystem. The judging panel then deliberate over the final 20, selecting 10 companies to be named as this year's Rising Stars, who will feature in a high-profile celebration event on 24 March 2022.

Eligibility criteria for the Rising Stars competition:

- Seed to pre-Series A funding stage OR if revenue focused, generating annual revenues below £1.5mn
- A digital tech business with a product or service to sell

- At least one active client or pilot
- Able to demonstrate market traction
- HQ'd in UK
- Company incorporated between 1-3 years
- Able to commit to key dates in the Rising Stars calendar

About Tech Nation:

Tech Nation is the leading growth platform for UK tech scaleups. Tech Nation fuels the growth of game-changing founders, leaders, and scaling companies so they can positively transform societies and economies. We provide them with the coaching, content, and community they need for their journey in designing the future. Tech Nation has years of experience facilitating and helping UK tech companies scale, both at home and abroad. Over 30 cohorts and 900 companies have successfully graduated from Tech Nation's growth programmes. Alumni include Skyscanner, Darktrace, and Monzo, as well as 3 of the UK's 7 new 'decacorns'; Revolut, Wise, and Farfetch.