

## **Top five early-stage tech companies from the Midlands announced in Tech Nation's latest 'Rising Stars' competition**

- Tech Nation announces the top five Midlands Regional Winners of its fourth Rising Stars competition, recognising the UK's early-stage tech companies with the highest potential
- The 5 companies to be selected are Northampton-based [Elestial](#), Warwick-based [Kanda](#), Birmingham-based [Taran3D](#), Walsall-based [Regionally](#), and Derby-based [Digit](#), which span tech subsectors spacetech, proptech, fintech, VR and edtech
- The tech sector in the Midlands is rapidly growing; the sector has received \$774mn in VC investment this year, as of November 2021 (an increase on the \$533mn received in 2020), and has created more than double the number of tech jobs compared to the previous year (201,673 in H1 of 2021, up from 87,277 in 2020)

**9th December 2021:** Tech Nation has today announced the 5 Midlands 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 Midlands Regional Winners are [Elestial](#), [Kanda](#), [Taran3D](#), [Regionally](#), and [Digit](#). These companies, which hail from Northampton, Warwick, Birmingham, Walsall and Derby, have an average of 5 employees, and are working to transform a range of different industries, including spacetech, proptech, fintech, VR and edtech.

### **The Midlands' tech sector is growing**

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

According to data from Tech Nation, the Midlands is now home to 7 tech 'unicorns' (companies valued at over \$1bn), up from 3 in 2020, and has received \$774mn in VC investment funding this year, as of November 2021 (an increase on the \$533mn received in 2020).

Tech job creation is also growing rapidly in the Midlands, increasing by more than double since 2020 (going from 87,277 tech roles in 2020 to 201,673 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 Midlands tech companies 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.”

**Owain Wilson, Founder of Digit, said:** “We’re honoured to have been named among the inspiring Rising Stars 4.0 Midlands Regional Winners. To ask “What is the future of music?” is to ask a question about ourselves and how music will continue to shape how we live, but also to ask “Do we want it to include everyone?” Currently, people with disabilities face significant barriers to becoming a musician. They are absent in the education, amateur and professional spheres of the industries. For us, musical inclusion is about using technology to remove barriers so everyone, young and old, with different preferences, or users’ needs who wants to, can make music. So we fuse technology, music and education to create accessible music creation tools that can excite and engage all of us. Based in the heart of the Midlands, we’re surrounded by a rich innovation legacy and musical heritage to draw inspiration from. We hope to further that into the 21st century with the work we do.”

**Phillip Daneshyar, CEO & Co-founder of Kanda, said:** “Kanda is building financing for the \$35B EU home improvement market. We let homeowners pay monthly for their home improvements whilst fixing the endemic cash flow problems contractors face. Our team has over 10 years of experience in the construction industry and our vision has been backed by the founders of PlanGrid, Kontor, and

YCombinator. Rising Stars' recognition motivates us even more, to continue with a laser focus on our mission.”

**Flora Gray, COO at Regionally, said:** “Regionally's mission is to rebuild regional investments across the UK – we are redefining capital raising and investing, geographically and technologically. The UK SME investment market has been London-centric for too long, inhibiting growth and potential returns to regional companies and investors alike. Regionally acts as the missing plumbing, connecting private investors directly with scale-ups seeking investment via a market leading, highly sophisticated and efficient investment platform. Working directly in the regions via our professional network, we are building a nationwide investment community with regional focus. Regionally is now ready to scale rapidly across the UK and are extremely pleased to have been recognised by Tech Nation and their Rising Stars award during this growth period.”

**Taran Singh, Founder & Director of Taran3D, said:** “We are delighted to be selected as a Rising Stars 4.0 Regional Winner and gain access to this incredible platform to showcase Taran3D. Our core ethos is to help redress the skills gap in the tech industry by breaking down the barriers people face to bridge the digital divide and make immersive tech accessible for all. Tech Nation provides an abundance of support throughout each stage of the programme, and we are excited for the opportunities it will provide to raise our profile and compete at a higher level. The local and regional business communities have embraced Taran3D and our vision since we launched just over the past two years. We have been extremely well supported by a range of influential Birmingham & West Midlands organisations that have added value to our offering and helped us grow to where we are today.”

**Harry Pegg, Development Manager at Elestial, said:** “Elestial's mission is to democratize space for the masses, Rising Stars 4.0 is an awesome platform to share our message, and realise our ambitions. As the second golden age of Space travel begins we need to ensure that space is a sustainable and equal expanse for all and our in-orbit maintenance and inspection services can deliver this vision. The midlands has consistently been a hub for major innovations, and with space tech this is no different. Major academic institutions and organisations in this region are at the forefront of satellite application research and development, making it the perfect place for Elestial to grow and develop.”

**End**

**Notes to the editor:**

**About the Midlands Regional Winners:**

[Elestial](#) - Northampton - Spacetech

Elestial is an in-orbit services provider with the aim of helping to clean up and maintain commercial orbital highways in the short term, and supporting large-scale infrastructure development in space long term.

#### [Kanda](#) - Warwick - Proptech

Kanda is a new way of building business for tradespeople. Tradespeople can offer finance to their customers who want work done in their homes but can't afford to pay the full amount upfront.

#### [Taran3D](#) - Birmingham - VR

Taran3D is a creative 3D business based in Birmingham producing interactive content and experiences with their ever-evolving 3D, Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality capabilities. With clients across a range of industries, Taran3D engage their audiences by bringing their projects and products to life through creative digital storytelling and cutting-edge technology to produce unique and compelling interactive content. Their new training division XR Academy provides XR training & consultancy using digital and post-digital technologies for the acquisition of fast-paced, multi-dimensional learning.

#### [Regionally](#) - Walsall - Fintech

Regionally is a UK investment service that connects investment ready regional scaleup companies seeking growth capital, ranging from £500,000 - £15,000,000+, to national and international private investors via a market leading investment platform. Having restructured and automated traditional investment processes, Regionally has developed a highly efficient investment process that offers the diligence and discipline of a traditional exchange with the ease and convenience of an online investment environment.

#### [Digit](#) - Derby - Edtech

Digit provides equal music-making, education, and work opportunities through inclusive digital technologies as well as a curriculum of skills & training, education, and performance programs. Digit is a record label, a technology manufacturer, and a music education and performance company that uses a mixed business model as a means to offer a diverse and inclusive work environment.

#### **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.