The Company+

Develop your entrepreneurial competences

University of Antwerp

Unlock Your Entrepreneurial Potential

For Who ?

Are you an early career researcher (PhD or postdoc) curious about entrepreneurship?

Do you want to develop your entrepreneurial skills in practice regardless of whether your idea is related to your research or not ?

Are you open minded to learn from others even outside your own discipline?

The Company+ is an **immersive, hands-on entrepreneurial training programme** that bridges theoretical knowledge with real-world applications. This programme offers an opportunity to collaborate **in interdisciplinary teams**, explore potential for cutting-edge innovations within some priority domains of the University of Antwerp and gain essential entrepreneurial skills.

1. Purpose of the Course

The Company+ is a unique nine-month, hands-on learning journey **running from January to November 2027.** Throughout a carefully designed series of workshops, sessions, and project moments, you will gradually build the skills and mindset needed to turn early-stage ideas into meaningful value propositions.

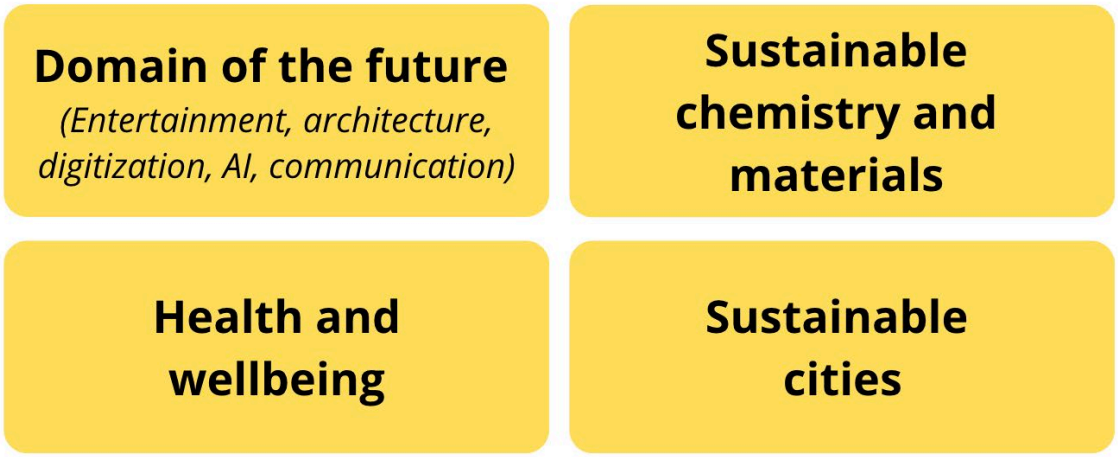
The programme combines around 30 contact hours with individual work between sessions. Participants also have access to optional one-on-one coaching offering personalized guidance at key moments in the process.

You will be challenged of working in interdisciplinary teams, while you are supported **by experienced coaches and mentors. Purpose is the development of your entrepreneurial competencies and essential soft skills.** Interactive workshops introduce you to core topics such as team formation, ideation, legal basics, marketing and sales, and business modelling. Each session is practice-oriented and directly connected to the challenges your team is working on.

Rather than traditional classroom learning, The Company+ focuses on **learning by doing**: you engage with real-world problems, experiment with ideas, gather feedback, and refine your solutions step by step.

Upon successful completion, you will receive an official certificate, which is eligible for doctoral training credits within the doctoral programme (suggested 3 DOCOP points).

Working in interdisciplinary teams, you will address real-world challenges within one of the following domains:



2. Learning Objectives

By participating in The Company+, you will:

- ✓ Gain hands-on experience in first entrepreneurial steps
- ✓ Connect academic expertise with real challenges and societal and market needs
- ✓ Learn how to work in an interdisciplinary team and how to combine expertise
- ✓ Gain insights in how to transfer an idea into a value proposition towards a business case
- ✓ Gain insights in basics on legal aspects of starting a business and the basics of IPR strategies and how to apply it on the one case
- ✓ Gain a better understanding of their own role and competence profile in a valorisation-oriented team
- ✓ Apply key business concepts (finance, marketing, sales, market analysis, pricing, strategy, etc.) in the creation of a coherent business case.
- ✓ Learn to give a strong pitch to a professional jury.
- ✓ Interact with a self-created network of stakeholders.

Need More info? **Join Info session on the Company + edition 2027 in January 15 th 2027**

Infosession Company+ programme - Edition 2027 - Formulier invullen

3. Programme 2027

Info Session + Testimonial of participant Company+	
Date & Time	**15 January 2027, 13:15 - 14:30**
Location	CMI – G.005 (TBD)
Expert(s)	Barbara Tan, Head Creativity & Entrepreneurship: presentation Company + 2026 programme Testimonial of former participant Company +: TBD
	The programme of Company + 2027 will be presented, and a former participant from the Company+ 2026 will share their experience and lessons learned in a short testimonial. After this info-session the **Registration deadline for the Company + 2027: will close 22 January 2027.**

Session 1: Presentation domains and Getting To Know Each Other	
Date & Time	**29 January, 2027, 10:00 - 13:00, including networking lunch**
Location	CMI – A.143 + hall Building A for lunch
Expert(s)	
Overview Compulsary in person participation (not hybrid)	The aim of this session is to give participants and coaches the opportunity to meet each other for the first time. The four domains – **Sustainable Chemistry, Domain of the Future , Sustainable Cities, and Health and Wellbeing** – will be **introduced by domain experts**, who will each briefly present themselves. The session is also intended to inspire participants to start thinking about ideas they may want to develop further. Ahead of the session, participants will receive a short template to prepare a brief self-introduction. Those who already have an idea are welcome to pitch it during their introduction. During this first meeting, the interdisciplinary teams will not yet be formed. Instead, the focus will be on getting to know the domains, potential ideas, the coaches, and the other participants. We will close the session with a team lunch. **Desired outcome:** Participants have a clearer understanding of who the other participants are and know which coaches they can turn to for support.

Session 2: Team Creation	
📅 **Date & Time**	**23 February 2027, 9:30-12:30**
📍 **Location**	TBD
🎤 **Expert(s)**	Bart Geraets, Entrepreneurial Coach STEM CREO, Prof. dr. Jelle Saldien, Product Design
Compulsary in person participation (not hybrid)	Building on the introductions from the previous session, this session aims to deepen participants' understanding of what characterizes well-functioning teams, how team dynamics work, and how complementary expertise and personality types can strengthen collaboration. This session will help you gain insight into different personality types and team roles and explore how these factors influence effective teamwork. By the end of the session, you will form balanced interdisciplinary teams with clearly defined roles based on complementary interests and expertise. **Activities:** • Brainstorming • Matchmaking around a business idea • Team formation based on complementary interests and expertise, supported by the coaches **Desired outcomes:** • A completed team canvas • Increased awareness of personality types and team roles • Formation of balanced interdisciplinary teams with clearly assigned roles for each member

Session 3: Ideation + Value Proposition	
📅 **Date & Time**	**4 March 2027, 9:30 - 16:00**
📍 **Location**	TBD
🎤 **Expert(s)**	David Pas, Strategic Innovation at Verhaert Masters in Innovation
Overview Compulsary in person participation (not hybrid)	Using design thinking, we will begin by exploring a problem context to extract ideas from it. To spark your creativity, we will provide inspiration through concrete, real-world examples. **Desired outcomes of the session:** • Participants are inspired, teams are confirmed around an idea • Ideas are refined • Each team develops an initial draft of a value proposition related to the chosen challenge

Session 4: Business Modelling	
Date & Time	**15 March 2027, 9:30 - 14:00**
Location	TBD
Expert(s)	Nathalie De Schepper, Entrepreneurial coach CREO
Overview	After a month to refine your value proposition through research into the problem context and discussions with relevant stakeholders and potential customers/users (initial market analysis), we will reconvene to assess whether a viable business model can be developed around your concept and value proposition. You will present your value proposition to the group and receive feedback from both the group and the coach. **Desired outcomes:** • A validated value proposition • Practical insights on how you can build a business model around it (including inspiration from various types of business models)

Session 5: Legal Basics Awareness on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)	
Date & Time	**29 April 2027, 9:30 - 12:30**
Location	CMI, A.133
Expert(s)	Ilse Heyvaert, IP Expert Valorisatiedienst Mathijs Baert, IP Expert Valorisatiedienst Fons De Mey, IP Expert Gevers Bart Geraets, Entrepreneurial coach STEM, CREO
Overview	In this session, you will gain essential insights into the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) that are most relevant when developing or launching an innovative idea. We will introduce the key IPR principles every future entrepreneur should understand, illustrated with inspiring real-world examples. Where relevant, we will also briefly touch upon regulatory frameworks such as the GDPR and the EU AI Act, to highlight how existing and emerging rules may affect innovation-driven business models. There will be plenty of room for interaction. You will work on your own case, with personalised coaching to help identify any potential IP you may own (including IP assets currently "on the shelf"). If it becomes clear that your idea involves IP owned by the University of Antwerp, we will connect you with the university's IP experts for further guidance. **Desired outcomes:** • Understanding of the essential IPR considerations when developing an idea or venture • Basic knowledge of different types of Intellectual Property • First exploration of IP issues related to participants' own cases • Personalised coaching during the workshop

Session 6: Market Analysis + Possible Go-to-Market Strategies	
Date & Time	**28 May 2027, 9:30 - 12:30**
Location	CMI, G.016
Expert(s)	Eva Van den Abbeele, lecturer, social media strategist and content creator with over a decade of experience in digital marketing.
Overview	Sales are essential to business success! This session delves into market analysis and sales strategies, aiming to inspire and raise awareness. We will explore the critical role of a well-crafted sales strategy and tackle the challenges of acquiring your first customer. **Desired Outcome:** • Practical, real-world insights into how to develop a market analysis and go-to-market strategy in a hands-on way, supported by an overview of useful tools.

Session 7 (by appointment): Team Level Accountability meeting	
Date & Time	**21 June 2027, 14:00-17:00 on request**
Location	CMI, A.133
Expert(s)	Domain coaches + coordinated by Bart Geraets, Entreprneurial Coach STEM CREO
Overview	In this session, you will meet with your team coach to review your progress, explore business model scenarios, and discuss challenges and opportunities.

Session 8: Financing your next step: From Idea to Valorisation and Entrepreneurship	
Date & Time	**17 September 2027**
Location	CMI, A.133 (TBD)
Expert(s)	Elena Balachov, Business consultant, Team Bedrijfstrajecten VLAIO Marlies Polfliet, Expert BDO Dimitri Vrancken, Valorisation Manager AUHA Nathalie De Schepper, Entrepreneurial Coach CREO
	You have started from a broad domain, identified a challenge, developed an idea and further refined it. But what comes next in your valorisation or entrepreneurial journey, and which funding opportunities can help you take that next step? In this session, we will explore the different funding instruments and support mechanisms available: • **Internal funding at the University of Antwerp:** Our Valorisation Manager will introduce **the Industrial Research Fund (IOF)** and its various support mechanisms. • **External funding through VLAIO:** An expert from VLAIO's Business Support team will explain the available grants, subsidies and other funding opportunities for innovative projects and start-ups. Our Entrepreneurial Coach will complement this overview with practical cases.

	• **Essentials of financial planning:** A financial expert from BDO will explain the fundamentals of a financial plan and the key financial considerations when turning an idea into a business. The session will conclude with **personalised feedback and coaching for each interdisciplinary team**, helping you identify the most relevant funding opportunities and concrete next steps for your own project. **Desired outcomes:** • Insight into the funding landscape and key actors (Industrial Research Fund, VLAIO funding, business angels, venture capital) • Understanding of the most relevant grants and subsidies for innovative start-ups • Guidance for estimating the funding needs of each interdisciplinary team • Understanding of how to design a funding roadmap • One-to-one coaching for all teams

Session 9: Pitching	
Date & Time	**22 October, 2027, 9:30 - 12:30**
Location	CMI, A.133
Expert(s)	Nathalie De Schepper, Entrepreneurial Coach CREO and co-author of the Book *Investor Pitching* *Bart Geraets*
Overview	In this session, Nathalie De Schepper — entrepreneurial coach and co-author of a book on investor pitching written together with Sven De Vocht — will guide you through the key do's and don'ts of crafting and delivering a compelling pitch. Drawing on her extensive experience coaching numerous start-ups, she will share practical tips and proven techniques to strengthen your message. By the end of the session, you will be able to refine your initial pitch, with particular attention to the multidisciplinary contribution of your team. **Desired outcome:** After this session you will be able to refine your initial pitch with attention to the interdisciplinary contribution of the team.

Optional Session 9 bis: Rehearsal Pitching	
Date & Time	**19 November 2027**
Location	CMI, A.133
Expert(s)	Nathalie De Schepper, Entrepreneurial Coach CREO Bart Geraets, Entrepreneurial Coach STEM CREO Barbara Tan, Head CREO
Overview	**Overview** In this optional session, you will have the opportunity to rehearse your pitch ahead of the Dragon's Den. You will receive personalised feedback from our

	entrepreneurial coach, pitching expert, and other CREO team members to help you refine and strengthen your presentation. **Desired outcome:** Teams feel more confident and well-prepared to take on the Dragon's Den pitching contest

Session 10: Dragon's Den	
Date & Time	**25 November 2027, 14:00-18:00**
Location	Hof van Liere, Willem Elschotzaal (session), T Greshamzaal (catering)
Expert(s) **Jury-members** will be selected in function of the potential Follow-up Trajectory	Jury: TBD
Overview	Join us for the grand finale of our entrepreneurial journey, where you will present your pitches in front of a professional jury.

Session 11: Feedback	
Date & Time	On request + date to be defined related to the availability of the coaches
Location	TBD
Expert(s)	TBD
Overview	The programme will conclude with a dynamic feedback session, providing you with constructive insights on your delivered pitches. This session offers a valuable opportunity to refine presentations and enhance business strategies through expert guidance.

Contact coordinator and coaches

For any further questions related to the Company + programme please contact:

- Bart Geraets, Entrepreneurial Coach STEM, bart.geraets@uantwerpen.be
- Barbara Tan, Head CREO, Barbara.tan@uantwerpen.be or

Creativity & Entrepreneurship Office

Nathalie De Schepper, Entrepreneurial Coach

Nathalie.deschepper@uantwerpen.be

Faculty of Applied Engineering

Prof. Dr. Pieter Billen

Pieter.billen@uantwerpen.be

Faculty Business & Economics

Prof. Dr. Philippe Nimmegeers

Philippe.nimmegeers@uantwerpen.be

Prof. Dr. Valentin Carlan

Valentin.carlan@uantwerpen.be

Faculty of Design Sciences

Prof. Dr. Jelle Saldien

Jelle.saldien@uantwerpen.be

Domain Health & Wellbeing

Dr. Jasna Loos

jasna.loos@uantwerpen.be

Dr. Kris Bonnarens, Liaison valorisatiemanager UAntwerpen-UZA

Kris.Bonnarens@uantwerpen.be

Bart Geraets, Entrepreneurial Coach STEM, CREO

bart.geraets@uantwerpen.be

Domain Sustainable City

Dr. Inneke Baetsen, Research Manager Urban Studies Institute

inneke.baatsen@uantwerpen.be