

KBC Group invests €100 million in start-ups from Start it @KBC

Start it @KBC is working with KBC Securities to further expand its start-up offering: from idea to IPO

KBC Group, through Start it @KBC, is investing €100 million to strengthen the Belgian start-up ecosystem. This investment also marks the launch of a new fund (Start it Fund) that focuses on early-stage funding for top-tier start-ups from the Start it programme, responding to a demand that has existed among founders for many years. Thanks to the fund, these start-ups can count on capital and guidance to accelerate their growth. For the absolute top performers, there is also the possibility of receiving additional follow-on funding at a later stage. In this way, KBC Securities and Start it @KBC together offer a unique trajectory: from the initial ideas to a potential IPO.

More than 150: that is how many scalable young companies Start it @KBC, which was launched in 2014, supports each year. In total, the accelerator has already coached more than 1,900 start-ups.

“Start it @KBC was created 11 years ago within KBC — from the same entrepreneurial DNA our organisation is made of”, says Johan Thijs, CEO of KBC Group. “What started as a small initiative has grown into Belgium’s largest start-up ecosystem. Entrepreneurship is in our genes: KBC was co-founded by entrepreneurs and encourages innovation both outside and inside the organisation. Today, we are one of the most innovative and digitally driven banks in the world, and our close collaboration with Start it @KBC fuels that ambition every day. With the new fund, we can now truly guide founders from idea to IPO: we support them not only with knowledge and networking, but also with capital tailored to their growth ambitions. As such, together we are building an ecosystem where innovation, entrepreneurship and international ambition are central. Our mission? To give entrepreneurs every opportunity to develop into the global players of tomorrow.”

“Annually, around 1,000 start-ups apply for our programme, a number that continues to grow year after year. This allows us to be increasingly selective and keeps raising the level. For eleven years, we have been building an ecosystem with founders, for founders. We already had coaching, community and a European ecosystem; only one thing was still missing: investing in the early stages ourselves. No, we are filling that gap, at the request of the founders themselves, and in our own founder-centric way”, says Lode Uytterschaut, founder and CEO of Start it @KBC.

On average 300.000 euro in the early stages via the Start it Fund

The “no equity” philosophy at the start of the Start it @KBC programme remains unchanged, but the possibility of investing has now been added via a new early-stage fund managed by Start it itself: the Start it Fund. Contrary to other accelerators, who give everybody a small amount of money at the start and on fixed terms, the Start it Fund only offers the best 1% of all applications a larger sum at the end of their journey, depending on the needs and stage of development at that point. The start-ups are completely free to accept the funding. On average, the fund invests €300,000 in early stage, although in some cases the amount may be higher.

“On top of the capital, we offer an extra year of support within Start it @KBC. This gives us an extra year’s time to match founders with our large national network of alumni who have followed the same path or successfully completed an exit,” Lode Uytterschaut continues.

Follow-on funding

The very best of these selected start-ups will also have the opportunity to receive further follow-on financing of up to €5 million via KBC Securities.

“After the early-stage investment phase, the number of funds in Belgium for those who want to grow is limited. With this new capital, we want to create a platform to help those top-tier start-ups grow into stable scale-ups,” says Tim Derycke, Head of Investment Services & KBC Focus Fund at KBC Securities. “At KBC Securities, we not only offer follow-on financing, but also access to the venture capital experience and technological expertise of our investment team. In addition, KBC Securities also provides added value in the further growth of companies: from M&A advice and financing solutions up to guidance in going public. With this integrated approach, we offer founders a unique ecosystem of guidance and financing – an offering that is unrivalled in Belgium.”

A unique data-driven selection and personal follow-up

For Start it @KBC, the key to selecting the right start-ups, and therefore also early-stage investments, lies in a close personal follow-up of the founders, supported by a thorough data analysis of the more than 1,900 start-ups that have received coaching.

“The best investment decisions don’t come from pitch decks or superficial signals, but from proximity. Traditional investors miss out on opportunities because they are too strongly influenced by superficial parameters and have relatively little contact with the founders. We follow them closely for a year and see that it is often teams with an atypical profile that build strong and successful companies”, says Andy Gijbels, CTO at Start it @KBC. “We see who is really making progress, learning quickly and persevering in the face of adversity. These are the best predictors of future success, and thanks to this close collaboration, we can invest based on what really matters, not on labels. This also gives founders who are underestimated elsewhere a fair chance to show what they are worth.”

€1,1 billion in funding raised

Of the 1,923 start-ups that Start it @KBC has supported since 2014, 227 have already raised more than €1 million, and 122 have raised more than €2 million. Altogether, they have raised more than €1.1 billion and created more than 12,000 jobs, making the ecosystem one of the largest employers in Belgium. With the recent sales of DESelect to Unaric and Segments.ai to Uber, the programme has also seen two more successful exits.

In terms of survival rates too, start-ups from Start it @KBC perform very well. After five years, around 73% are still in business, compared to 51% for start-ups that raise venture capital, according to an international benchmark. Among the biggest Start it success stories are well-known names such as Aikido Security (Scale-up of the Year 2025), Bolt, Loop Earplugs, Conveo, Keyrock, Segments.ai, Crazy Games and Ritchie.

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About Start it @KBC

Start it @KBC is a unique, equity-free accelerator programme that focuses on real impact and has supported more than 1,900 start-ups since 2014, including over 1,600 in Belgium. This makes it the leading player in our country and Europe, and even the fifth largest worldwide.

Twice a year, a new batch of selected start-ups embarks on a one-year programme focused on growth and internationalisation. In addition to intensive guidance, the start-ups also gain access to an international network and remain part of an active ecosystem of founders, investors, mentors, experts and corporate partners for life.

Since its inception in 2014, Start it @KBC has played a key role in the Belgian start-up ecosystem and has been jointly responsible for the launch and growth of some of the most successful Belgian tech and impact-driven ventures.

In total, the start-ups that participated in the programme have already raised more than 1.1 billion euros in capital and created more than 12,000 jobs. Among the best-known former participants in the programme are names such as Aikido Security, Bolt, Loop Earplugs, Conveo, Segments.ai, Crazy Games and Ritchie. In Belgium, Start it @KBC has hubs in Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, Hasselt, Kortrijk, Leuven, Charleroi, Louvain-la-Neuve and Liège.

<https://startit-x.com/en/accelerate>

About KBC Securities

KBC Securities is Belgium's leading investment bank and part of the KBC Group. It provides financial services to a wide range of professional clients, including corporate and institutional clients, each with specific needs. KBC Securities offers solutions in corporate finance, equity and debt capital markets, mergers and acquisitions, private fundraising, and financial structuring. Institutional investors value its in-depth research and access to equity and bond transactions in the Benelux and beyond. It also provides investment services with access to a broad range of venture capital and private equity funds. With strong local roots and international expertise, KBC Securities supports companies across diverse sectors, including technology, life sciences, and real assets. More information is available at www.kbcsecurities.com.

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