

## Waitrose joins forces with John Lewis to create the UK's largest retail tech accelerator: JLAB 2017

Waitrose joins forces with John Lewis to create the UK's largest retail tech accelerator: JLAB 2017

- JLAB fast-tracks growth of start-ups in the retail space
- Start-ups to be embedded in John Lewis and Waitrose across 12 week programme
- Finalists will have access to a microfund of up to £200,000
- Applications open 28 Mar, enter for free at [www.jlab.co.uk](http://www.jlab.co.uk)

27th March 2017: The John Lewis Partnership has opened the call for applications for JLAB 2017, its global start-up accelerator programme, run in association with innovation specialists L Marks. Now in its fourth year, this year's JLAB sees Waitrose joining the programme, creating the UK's largest retail tech accelerator and widening the growth opportunities for companies with disruptive retail tech ideas.

The programme was set up in 2014 to help talented tech start-ups fast track their growth by giving them access to John Lewis's resources and industry-leading insight, as well as the opportunity to apply for funding in exchange for equity. The programme enables the John Lewis Partnership to tap into emerging innovation in retail which will benefit their customers and forge long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with some of the world's most exciting young tech companies.

This year five to ten successful applicants will have the opportunity to immerse themselves across both the John Lewis and Waitrose businesses. Throughout the twelve-week programme, which commences in July, they will receive support from senior level mentors and free workspace in John Lewis's head office in Victoria and Waitrose's head office in Bracknell. Participating companies will also have access to industry knowledge and expertise from across the John Lewis Partnership, as well as specialist insight on the Partnership's combined range of over 400,000 of fashion, home, food and technology products and services.

Start-ups participating in JLAB will have access to capital from the dedicated microfund provided by the John Lewis Partnership and L Marks. Each team will be eligible to apply for funding of up to £100,000 from the total pot of £200,000, in exchange for equity in their company.

Paul Coby, Chief Information Officer John Lewis Partnership, said: “Industries are being disrupted almost overnight and retail technology in particular is evolving at a rapid pace. JLAB enables us to augment our understanding of innovation and partner with these disruptors to offer the next generation of customer experiences. Waitrose involvement in JLAB means we can now provide start-ups with unprecedented access to two of the UK’s leading retailers and ensure we add value to these fledgling companies, in the same spirit of cooperation the John Lewis Partnership was founded on.”

Stuart Marks, technology entrepreneur and Chairman of L Marks, said: “JLAB has become one of the best and most advanced retail accelerator programmes, attracting hundreds of hopeful entrepreneurs from around the world. At a time when most large companies are seeing disruption all around them, the John Lewis Partnership has willingly opened up its entire business up to assist and develop startups. We are excited to have Waitrose join the programme and bringing with it their unique grocery related categories. We expect this to be our best JLAB yet.”

JLAB is focusing on enhancing customer experience and is inviting early-stage and high-growth companies looking to collaborate with in the following categories:

**Amazing Food Experiences:** There is a growing potential to enhance customer experience in food shopping and food service. We are looking for start-ups which will help us serve food to our customers in more convenient, exciting and innovative ways.

**Amazing Store Experiences:** We want to partner with start-ups to make in store experiences even more inspiring and individual.

**Effortless Shopping:** We’re looking for solutions that create frictionless on and offline shopping for customers; start-ups who can help us enhance shopping experiences and save our customers time.

**Help Me Live a Healthier Life:** We want to help our customers to live well when it comes to their food and lifestyle. We want to find innovative health and wellbeing solutions that can be implemented across online channels and in store.

**Smarter Supply Chain:** We want to hear from start-ups who have innovative ideas, or solutions to disrupt traditional supply chain practices, from last mile deliveries and farm to fork traceability to smart product IDs and Internet of Things.

Surprise us - Innovations that are so out of this world they can't be classified.

Applications open on Tuesday 28th March and will close at midnight on 30 April. John Lewis Partnership and L Marks will then select five to ten start-ups to complete the 12 week JLAB programme, commencing in July 2017. The final winner will be announced at a showcase event in September 2017.