



# BLACK BUSINESS INCUBATOR AT SOMERSET HOUSE OPENS APPLICATIONS



Somerset House, the home of cultural innovators, has today opened recruitment for the **Black Business Incubator at Somerset House**, a programme produced in partnership with **Mentor Black Business** and sponsored by **Morgan Stanley**.

The free, year-long programme aims to help Black-led creative businesses unlock their full potential and enable their creative enterprises to thrive. Bringing together Somerset House's and Mentor Black Business's different skills and networks, the programme provides participants with a series of expert-led workshops and mentorship from industry specialists. Members are given free access to Somerset House's shared workspace **The Exchange** and are integrated into Somerset House's vibrant resident community programme.

The newly announced recruitment cycle marks the fourth *Black Business Incubator* (BBI) cohort. The first group of 15 creative entrepreneurs joined in May 2021, followed by 35 in January 2022 and a further 15 in December 2022. Current and previous alumni of the *Black Business Incubator* include entrepreneurs pursuing innovation and pushing boundaries in industries across the creative sector, from performing arts, fashion and food to publishing, technology and social media.

In connection to Somerset House's major autumn exhibition, **The Missing Thread**, recruitment for the fourth cohort will see a number of places allocated specifically for applicants with fashion-related businesses. The exhibition, also sponsored by Morgan Stanley, charts the shifting landscape of Black British culture and the unique contribution it has made to fashion design, spanning from the 1970s to present day.

**Montana Hall**, founder of the highly influential jobs platform **Run The Check**, with over 50k followers on Instagram alone, graduated from the first BBI cohort in 2022. She describes the positive impact of the programme; *'The BBI Programme catalysed my working progress with Run The Check. In addition, the support*

*from peers in my cohort, and access to the wider Somerset House community were also instrumental to my personal development'.*

**Akwasi Brenya-Mensa**, founder of **Tatale**, a contemporary Pan-African concept that tells stories through food, art and culture and graduate from cohort two, was featured in the **OFM50 2022; Observer Food Monthly's** annual catalogue of favourites. In 2022 Tatale opened its debut restaurant at the Africa Centre to rave reviews. *'The programme has helped me personally and professionally and being part of Black Business Incubator, this year has made a world of difference.'*

**Deborah Latouche**, creative director of luxury modest wear brand, **SABIRAH**, who also graduated from cohort one, was featured in **Vogue** and had the opportunity to show her clothing collection to **Anna Wintour** and **Edward Enninful** at Milan fashion week showcase during her time in the programme. *'The Black Business Incubator has positively impacted my business in many different ways - from having access to positive role models and mentors to being able to meet clients at Somerset House.'*

A 2020 report by the **British Business Bank** found that businesses run by entrepreneurs from ethnically diverse backgrounds consistently came up against systemic barriers, making them more likely to struggle to get their businesses off the ground. As home to the UK's largest community of creative enterprises, arts organisations, artists and makers, Somerset House uses its supportive and inclusive creative network to address this within its own sphere of influence, empowering early-stage Black-led creative businesses to grow.

**Jonathan Reekie**, Director of Somerset House stated, *'BBI is a brilliant example of the collective power of Somerset House's creative community and its commitment to nurturing new talent. It was born out of a chance corridor conversation with Akil Benjamin, resident of Somerset House and director of Mentor Black Business, which identified the potential of partnership to create this important initiative.'*

**Akil Benjamin**, Founder and Director of Mentor Black Business stated, *'It's not every day a social enterprise, cultural institution, investment firm and partners come together to support Black entrepreneurs thrive. Starting this programme and watching it continue has been a career highlight, and watching our businesses succeed is all a part of a dream come true. I can't wait to see the achievements of cohort 4 over the next 12 months.'*

**Sanghamitra Karra**, EMEA Head of the Inclusive Ventures Group at Morgan Stanley, stated: *'Morgan Stanley is proud to sponsor the Black Business Incubator at Somerset House, helping to address the under representation of black-led businesses in the creative sector. By providing access and removing barriers to entry, the Black Business Incubator enables early-stage entrepreneurs to enhance their skills and create sustainable growth.'*

Somerset House prioritises using its own distinctive creative ecosystem to nurture new talent from those who are underrepresented and underserved in the cultural sector. From **Upgrade Yourself to Somerset House Studios** residencies, the *Black Business Incubator* and **Exchange Bursaries**, the ambition is to develop the widest span of creative talent across community, sector, race, gender, age and stage, supporting people with the skills, networks, experience and inspiration to build sustainable creative careers.

About Cohort 1: [somersethouse.org.uk/bbi/black-business-incubator-class-2021](https://somersethouse.org.uk/bbi/black-business-incubator-class-2021)

About Cohort 2: [somersethouse.org.uk/bbi/black-business-incubator-class-2022](https://somersethouse.org.uk/bbi/black-business-incubator-class-2022)

About Cohort 3: [somersethouse.org.uk/bbi/black-business-incubator-third-cohort](https://somersethouse.org.uk/bbi/black-business-incubator-third-cohort)

Apply for Cohort 4: [somersethouse.org.uk/black-business-incubator-2023](https://somersethouse.org.uk/black-business-incubator-2023)

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## **ABOUT SOMERSET HOUSE**

As the home of cultural innovators, Somerset House is a site of origination, with a cultural programme offering alternative perspectives on the biggest issues of our time. We are a place of joy and discovery, where everyone is invited to Step Inside and Think Outside.

From our historic site in the heart of London, we work globally across art, creativity, business, and non-profit, nurturing new talent, methods and technologies. Our resident community of creative enterprises, arts organisations, artists and makers, makes us a centre of ideas, with most of our programme home-grown.

We sit at the meeting point of artistic and social innovation, bringing worlds and minds together to create surprising and often magical results. Our spirit of constant curiosity and counter perspective is integral to our history and key to our future.

## **ABOUT MENTOR BLACK BUSINESS**

Mentor Black Business [DOES] partners with leading companies to provide mentoring to over 1000 Black entrepreneurs across the UK. Mentor Black Business is a part of DOES family of brands, supporting corporate clients to do more for Black and minority communities.

## **ABOUT MORGAN STANLEY**

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