

Northern Sound Programme 2026

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE GONE THROUGH THE 'PRE-APPLICATION GENERAL FAQs' ON THE HOMEPAGE INFORMATION FIRST, AS THIS COVERS GUIDANCE AND ELIGIBILITY RELEVANT TO ALL PROGRAMMES.

What is Northern Sound?

Northern Sound is the flagship international showcase initiative of the **Northern Music Export Office (NMEO)**.

Each year, NMEO curates and hosts dedicated showcase stages at the world's leading music industry conferences and showcase events, such as Reeperbahn and SxSW. Northern Sound provides export ready artists with up to **£10,000**, alongside comprehensive wraparound support:

- Direct exposure to international booking agents, festival programmers, label executives, publishers, and global media.
- Targeted B2B networking, trade mission integration.
- On-the-Ground Support **from the** NMEO team at host events to help navigate the showcase ecosystem.
- Strengthening international market networks and driving cultural and commercial returns back to the North of England.

The NMEO is supported by the **Tees Valley Combined Authority**, the **North East Mayoral Combined Authority**, the **West Yorkshire Combined Authority**, in partnership with **The Great North Creative**.

How is Northern Sound Different to the International Artist Programme?

Essentially both programmes will support artists on international stages focused on an industry audience. However, whereas Northern Sound is specifically a series of Open Calls for artists to play on the NMEO stage at specific events – The International Artist Programme is open for applications all year for artists to apply and put a case forward to either play at a relevant, global industry event, or tour outside of the UK.

Who Can Apply to Northern Sound?

Applications can be submitted directly by artists/music creators or by an authorised business representative acting on their behalf (e.g., manager, independent record label, publisher, booking agent, or PR representative). See the **Read This Before Applying** guidance for more information about general eligibility.

Are Artists from Liverpool City Region Currently Eligible?

At this time, these programmes are exclusively available to artists from the Tees Valley, West Yorkshire and North East Mayoral Strategic and Combined Authority areas.

What Makes a Strong Northern Sound Application?

Panels evaluate applications across **three** core areas:

1. Export Readiness & Traction:

Applicants must demonstrate export readiness with a solid UK foundation that shows they're prepared for international growth. This means evidence of meaningful UK traction: national radio airplay, positive press coverage, a track record of national touring, and strong, demonstrable audience numbers.

What "export ready" typically means in practice:

There is no single measure of export readiness. Assessors will consider the overall strength of your current activity and whether international investment is likely to generate meaningful outcomes at this stage of your development. Evidence could include:

Radio & media presence

- Airplay on national stations (BBC Radio 1, 1Xtra, 2, 6 Music, Capital, Kiss, etc.) rather than only local/community radio
- Playlist adds on major UK playlists (New Music Friday, Radio 1's Future Sounds, etc.)
- Press coverage in recognised outlets (NME, DIY, The Guardian, Clash, Line of Best Fit) – reviews, features, "ones to watch" lists

Live performance track record

- A history of national (not just regional) touring. Multiple UK cities, not just

- a home city residency
- Festival slots, ideally on stages with reasonable capacity or profile (not just the smallest/unpaid slots)
- Evidence of selling tickets independently, not just supporting bigger acts

Audience and streaming data

- Consistent, growing monthly listeners on Spotify/Apple Music (real numbers, not just percentage growth)
- Engaged social following - comments and shares, not just follower counts
- Mailing list or fanbase data showing genuine reach (within GDPR guidelines)

Industry infrastructure already in place

- A team around the artist: manager, booking agent, PR, possibly a label or distributor
- Existing sync placements, brand partnerships, or playlist relationships
- A release history showing consistency (not a one-off single)

Signs of organic international interest

- Streaming data showing pockets of listeners abroad already
- Press or radio pickup outside the UK, even informally
- Requests or enquiries from overseas promoters, media, or playlists and proof that demand exists before the investment is used to chase it.

2. Music Quality:

- Industry experts evaluate the quality and international potential of the music. You must supply direct streaming links to recent material and, ideally, a high-quality live video showing your live stage performance.

3. The Business Case:

- Showcases: A structured plan of pre-booked or targeted meetings with international industry executives e.g., overseas booking agents, publishers and labels.
- Touring: Clear audience development targets, promoter engagement, and promotional strategy in each market. Tell us why you are going where you are going.
- Outcomes: Clear and quantifiably measurable milestones e.g., securing territory representation, sync placement, or future festival bookings.

The investment is meant to amplify existing momentum, not create momentum from nothing. So the strongest applications frame international

ambitions as a natural next step from UK success, backed by numbers wherever possible (streams, ticket sales, audience size, press reach) rather than just descriptive claims.

How Will Applications Be Assessed?

Assessors will consider:

- Your readiness for the proposed activity.
- The strength of your business case and planning.
- The opportunity being pursued and why it is appropriate at this stage.
- Evidence of preparation and industry engagement.
- The outcomes you expect to achieve.
- Whether the proposed costs represent good public value and are proportionate to the activity.

For more details on the timeframe for assessment, go through the information in the 'Read This Before Applying' document.

What Can Northern Sound Support?

- International Transit: Flights, trains, etc.
- Accommodation: Showcase accommodation for essential performers and core crew.
- Visas & Documentation: Performance visas, petitions, carnet fees, and professional visa legal counsel.
- Freight & Backline: Shipping instruments, live equipment, and promotional materials.
- Per Diems: Reasonable daily subsistence allowances during the travel/showcase window (£25 per day).
- Marketing & Showcase PR: Targeted international PR, showcase promotion, and delegate marketing.
- Insurance: Short-term travel, medical, and instrument insurance for the trip duration.

What Can Northern Sound Not Support?

- Retrospective Expenditure: Costs committed or paid before receiving a formal NMEO Offer Letter. Note that if a situation occurs where you have been forced to book essential travel already prior to applying, get in touch.
- Capital Equipment: Buying instruments, studio gear, or permanent audio/software plugins.
- Physical Merchandise Production: Manufacturing vinyl, CDs, or merchandise runs (shipping existing stock is eligible).

- General Overheads & Salaries: Ongoing band operational costs or general artist living allowances.
- Venue Hire & Production: Standard venue fees or host festival stage costs (managed by host events).
- Non-Essential Personnel: Travel, accommodation, or per diems for non-essential entourage or extra family/companions.

Applying to the SxSW 2027 NMEO Stage

NMEO is partnered with PRS Foundation (PRSF) to support eligible northern artists at SxSW 2027. NMEO will redirect you to PRS Foundation's International Showcase Fund portal for you to complete the relevant application. NMEO will work alongside PRS Foundation so that applications are reviewed through PRS Foundation's established assessment processes, with final decisions made by independent expert assessors.

The window for applications will be rolling but there will be 3 rounds of decision panels until January. There are as follows:

Round 1

Deadline Sep 23rd

Panel Oct 8th

Decision Oct 12th

Round 2

Deadline Nov 27th

Panel Dec 11th

Decision Dec 13th

Round 3

Deadline Jan 6th 2027

Panel Jan 20th 2027

Decision Jan 22nd 2027

Please note that PRS Foundation has specific eligibility criteria such as not supporting those signed to a deal with a major record label and/or publisher, or any major label subsidiary which covers the country you are exporting to. In certain circumstances, the NMEO may be able to support these artists. If you are deemed ineligible by PRS Foundation criteria, please contact them to explain your situation at info@prsfoundation.com

Applying to the CUEW Japan Open Call

If you wish to play at CUEW with Northern Sound, simply select the option on the Northern Sound page and apply using the NMEO application form. The deadline for applications is 6th October 2026.

Please go through the 'Pre Application General FAQ' information for guidance on eligibility, the assessment process, visas, etc.